

2022 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

## **My Values Today as Shaped by Experiences**

(Original)

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Once a week, I visit an assisted living home for elderly people. I go there to spend time with the people residing there, create art and to have conversations with them. Most of the people that I meet when I visit the facility are above 80 years of age. The younger ones are “only” above 70.

An assisted living home is a unique environment. For the people that live there, death is close. Sometimes it's still years away, but it's there, lurking in the air and sliding into conversations.

Visiting a place like that on a regular basis, it changes you. It gives you perspective, and makes you think about the way you live your own life. You start to ask yourself questions about the meaning of it all.

When the end gets close, what is left with you? When your body, or worse, your mind, starts betraying you, what is left from you?

In my time spent with the elderly people, I got some answers from my interactions and observations.

I saw that when you reach the last stages of life, the most important things that stay with you are your family and other people around you, and the knowledge and experience you gained. And above all, you have yourself. The person that you are, the one crafted by years of life and the way you chose to live them.

And we all live by our values. They determine our actions and choices, even if it's in subtle ways.

With the perspective that I am lucky to have, there are a few things that I value today above others.

The first one is family, and it doesn't have to be blood related. They are the most important people around me, the ones that love me unconditionally and accept me as I am. They're first ones to hold out a hand when I feel like drowning from the pressure of life.

The second value that is important to me is kindness and respect. We are all different, but fundamentally, we are all the same. It's important to remember that and treat each other, and ourselves, with respect and kindness. But not only us humans, also our surroundings and nature.

The last value of most importance to me is honesty. With honesty, we can have true knowledge and act accordingly, face reality as it is. With honesty, we can build trust.

Those values are the pillars of my ideology. Living by them means to act accordingly in my daily life, in all the small actions that together paint the bigger picture.

Family is built on reciprocal relationships of support and mutual trust. It's our beginning, where we learn the first things about the world. It's where we're shown values before we have the mind to choose for ourselves. A supporting family with reciprocal relationships is important in that way. And it's our choice to keep it mutual and in our turn pass it on to the next generations.

Living with kindness and respect as guidelines, they're manifesting as awareness and attention to all things around me, so I would see the opportunities to act. Like that, I can choose to greet the bus driver or the cleaning worker, or hold the door a moment longer for another person to pass through.

We are social creatures. The way we act around each other affects us. A smile or a good word from someone can lift a person's spirit and change their day for the better. That person, in their turn, may choose to do the same for someone else, and so on.

In little acts of kindness, in showing respect to one another as humans, we can create a circle of positivity. Every one of us has the ability to create. Together, with trust in each other born from honesty, our creations can become big things.

I would like to live in a society like that - where we all help each other to be the best versions of ourselves. Where we feel we can trust one another. Where we choose to hold out a hand in kindness, so we could shape together a future good for all of us.