

2004 International Essay Contest for Young People

List of Winners

No. of participating countries: 111

No. of entries: 4,012 (Children's category: 2,558 / Youth category: 1,454)

1st Prize

Children's category (1 entrant)

- *I am the Music Maker*
Tomohiro Alexander Nibe
(Age 13, Japan & U.S.A.)

Youth category (1 entrant)

- *With Love*
Hang Su (Age 24, China)

2nd Prize

Children's category (2 entrants)

- *Reaching out to People with My Words and My Heart*
Koyo Okada (Age 11, Switzerland)
- *Making the Most of My Qualities to End Violence against Children.*
S.S. Rishad (Age 12, Bangladesh)

Youth category (2 entrants)

- *Thanks for Listening*
Akira Kuriyama (Age 22, Japan)
- *Living a Non-violent Life in a Culture of Violence*
Barward Johnson (Age 25, Liberia)

3rd Prize

Children's category (5 entrants)

- Ayumi Toge (Age 13, Japan)
- Mg Arkar Mg Mg Aung Kyaw Htet
(Age 13, Myanmar)
- Khine Tharaphe Din (Age 14, Myanmar)
- Gunesh Divya (Age 14, Mauritius)
- Sara Rose Hooker (Age 15, Mozambique)

Youth category (5 entrants)

- Yukinori Miyanaga (Age 17, Japan)
- Ryo Yokoyama (Age 18, Japan)
- Muhammad Donny Eryastha
(Age 19, Indonesia)
- Anna Mazurek (Age 20, Sweden)
- Jim Haske (Age 25, Qatar)

Honorable Mention

Children's category (25 entrants)

- Ami Scherson (Age 7, U.S.A.)
- Kenji S. Casul (Age 12, The Philippines)
- Janika Steiner (Age 12, Germany)
- Natasha Hotung (Age 12, China)

Youth category (25 entrants)

- Ayumi Ito (Age 16, U.K.)
- Santiago G. Vázquez (Age 16, Argentina)
- Charissa Ycazas (Age 16, The Philippines)
- Thomas Igeme (Age 16, Kenya)

- Hannah Green (Age 12, U.S.A.)
- Kenichiro Fukuda (Age 12, Japan)
- Melisa Gisell Perez (Age 12, Argentine)
- Chiang I Chun (Age 13, Taiwan)
- Mahadeo Kevina Shakti (Age 13, Mauritius)
- Amanda Chong Wei-Zhen (Age 14, Singapore)
- Ayanthi Indira Matarage (Age 14, Sri Lanka)
- Ai Kamisono (Age 14, Japan)
- Kullnigg Alfons (Age 14, Germany)
- Mio Saito (Age 14, U.S.A.)
- Yuki Sado (Age 14, Japan)
- Serene Tan Sze Jia (Age 14, Malaysia)
- Javeria Ali (Age 14, Pakistan)
- Mutsumi Hayata (Age 14, Japan)
- Chisato Mizutani (Age 14, Japan)
- Yumi Yamaguchi (Age 14, Japan)
- Shirley Wynn (Age 15, Myanmar)
- Mizuki Sato (Age 15, U.S.A.)
- Sabrina Szeto Hui Ling (Age 15, Singapore)
- Hitomi Nishimaru (Age 15, Japan)
- Laura Giddey (Age 15, New Zealand)
- Evronia Fr. Angelos Fathy Azer (Age 17, Egypt)
- Javeriya Hasan (Age 17, Mauritius)
- Choi Hena (Age 17, Republic of Korea)
- Dace Baidekasne (Age 17, Latvia)
- Kennedy Calvin Craig Pemberton (Age 18, St. Kitts and Nevis)
- Natalie Turner (Age 18, Ireland)
- Verapat Pariyawong (Age 18, Thailand)
- Keisuke Moriya (Age 18, U.K.)
- Archana Asundi (Age 19, Singapore)
- Yap Sui Lin (Age 19, Malaysia)
- Maryam Abdolbari Gozal (Age 20, U.A.E.)
- Rie Yamazaki (Age 20, Japan)
- Remzi Cej (Age 20, Canada)
- Lindsey Michelle Jones (Age 21, U.S.A.)
- Nur Sheena Binti Baharudin (Age 22, Malaysia)
- Emmanuel Annkah (Age 24, Ghana)
- Geraldine Borg (Age 24, Malta)
- Madhuree Joysury (Age 24, Mauritius)
- Mikhail Zenchenkov (Age 24, Russia)
- Fumiko Chiba (Age 25, Japan)
- Rebecca L. Gordon (Age 25, U.S.A.)

Prize for Effort

Children's category (14 entrants)

- Brian Yamato Bates (Age 8, Australia)
- Goh Xing Juan (Age 11, Singapore)
- Tong Yi Lin Eileen (Age 13, Singapore)
- Nanami Kano (Age 13, Romania)
- Chikato Hamano (Age 13, Japan)
- Moeka Miyagi (Age 13, Taiwan)
- Kana Yamada (Age 13, Japan)
- Yee Yinghui (Age 14, Singapore)
- Emily Chan Ka Yan (Age 14, Singapore)
- Haruka Yamashita (Age 14, Japan)
- Koshi Yo (Age 14, Japan)
- Loh Yuh Yiing (Age 14, Singapore)

Youth category (13 entrants)

- Jessica Köhler (Age 16, Germany)
- Mizuho Hirano (Age 16, Canada)
- Dargaye Zareen (Age 17, Mauritius)
- Ramasamy Vinasha (Age 17, Mauritius)
- Povilas Lastauskas (Age 18, Lithuania)
- Aung Ling (Age 20, Myanmar)
- Shashwat Kumar Gupta (Age 20, India)
- Satoshi Kato (Japan, Age 21)
- Reena Devi Dhunny (Age 21, Mauritius)
- Vohid Gafurov (Age 23, Uzbekistan)
- Sargsyan Gayane (Age 24, Armenia)
- Leonardo Plasencia (Age 24, Argentine)

- Hina Akbar (Age 15, Pakistan)
- Ayako Mikami (Age 15, Japan)

- Eduard Muntaner Perich (Age 25, Spain)

Best School Award

No school applicable

2004 International Essay Contest for Young People
[Children's Category – 1st Prize]

I am the Music Maker (Original)

Tomohiro Alexander Nibe
(Age 13, Japan & U.S.A)

My mom says I talk too much, I like to be the center of attention and my voice booms. The very qualities that drive my family crazy are the ones that may help me achieve my dreams. Looking at my reflection, I see a unique person who loves tradition, admires the Classics, and loathes conformity. When I stand on stage, I feel like I'm on the top of the world. The people in the audience smile at me and I believe that I have the ability to make them happy. My dream is to inspire people of the world with music the same way that music has inspired me.



*We are the music makers,
We are the dreamers of dreams ...
We are the movers and shakers
Of the world forever, it seems.
Arthur William Edgar O'Shaughnessy Ode: 'We are the Music Makers'*

When I first heard a performance by Pavarotti, I knew deep down that I wanted to be like him. His voice inspired me: I felt hopeful about the future; I felt excited; I felt motivated to pursue my dreams. Sometimes, by seeing or hearing something or someone so wonderful, we feel that we can do anything. A great work of art or an extraordinary performance can fill us with such awe and be so uplifting that we walk away believing that we too can achieve our potential. I had the privilege to sing on stage as a choirboy with the Hungarian Opera company during their performance of "Tosca." Backstage, the butterflies churned in my stomach but when I saw the audience before me and felt the presence of the opera members about me, I suddenly felt confident. This is where I wanted to be. I think that I can combine my stage presence with my voice and love of music to inspire other people and bring them hope and happiness.

I hadn't considered a career in entertainment seriously until I read the story of Eric Liddell. Eric's family expected him to become a missionary but when he realized that he had the gift of running, he wanted to be a runner. He made the best use of his talent by preaching to the crowds who gathered at his races. My teachers expect that I use my bilingual and bicultural background in a career as a translator. During the past year, I performed in several concerts and musicals that have made me realize that I want to be a singer, perhaps in opera or live theater. These days, most entertainment is so impersonal. I, on the other hand, feel a need to connect with real people. The Internet can connect us but it is void of emotion. By singing or acting on stage, I can share my feelings and I can communicate with people on a more personal level. The theater would be a great forum for my voice and personality.

Theater is not my only option. As everyone tells me, I talk a lot. Maybe, because I'm bilingual, I have twice as much to say! Growing up in Japan with an American mother and Japanese father has allowed me to develop my language skills and given me plenty of chances to practice translating. Talking too much and wanting the center stage can be a real advantage, as I found during the Children's World Water Forum in Osaka. Even though I attended as an observer, within a few hours I found myself translating for some of the meetings. The participants came from 58 different countries and I provided a small bridge between Japan and the rest of the world. Somehow, I ended up on center stage and organized our members into singing a round of "We Are the World," (Michael Jackson and Lionel Ritchie, 1985). At that moment, I felt I had really accomplished something that touched many people in a personal way. I knew that I could use my voice, my music and my ego to bring joy and happiness to others.

Music and theatre are universal forms of communication that unite the people of the world. Rhythms, sounds, lyrics and movement can carry a message across all borders. When there is hardship or heartache, music can comfort and encourage the listener. For me, it provides an escape from my worries. I have found so much inspiration in the musical arts, opera and traditional music. I hope that someday, by combining my stage presence, my voice, my love of music and my bicultural skills, I can inspire the dreamers and bring them hope and happiness. I want to be the one who moves and shakes world with music.

2004 International Essay Contest for Young People
[Youth Category – 1st Prize]

With Love (Original)

Hang Su
(China, Age 24)

I had just come back from Barcelona where I had sit in the street to do portraits for passers-by. Back to work in the orphanage in Macau, I read an advertisement: "Write an essay on making the most of your qualities, and how you can make use of them for the benefits of this world."

By working in this orphanage as a volunteer for two years, I would like to say: I do things with love.



I remember very well the day when I first visited this orphanage: in one big room, a group of kids were dancing cheerfully; on the other side, another group were reading loudly by following a teacher; in the corner, the elder were helping prepare dinner table...I have never seen one picture as harmonized as this before...after knowing that most workers here were volunteers and it needed more helpers, I joined in this warm family right away. I do drawing with kids: I teach them basic techniques, while explaining to them the first important thing for drawing is not techniques but heart. By doing this, they are able to put more zest in their work so as that I receive more lovely masterpieces which really fascinate me, melt me. We run riddle competition: every time I feel like I myself pass through a brainstorming; and when I announce the result, I see there is on that little winner's face an expression of cute rapture: I am sure which appears on my face as well... I mingle with all the kids here. I love them. - If you see such pleasant pictures, will you relate these kids to orphans?

Everyday there are people coming in for adopting children, while there are orphans being sent to us as well. Love decorates the world, while hatred destroys it at the same time. I remind of my recent trip to Barcelona. I was there learning portraits from one of my Spanish friends. I met a lot of talented street artists, and the best one I have ever seen, was a 16-year-old boy,

who, unfortunately became an orphan after the Madrid train bomb explosions not long ago. When he was drawing, I observed a pair of quivering, glittering eyes. Those were with love, obviously. One day, when I was thinking hard where to erase some lines on my work, I heard a soft voice: "It is pretty good...I see you draw it with your heart," it was him, "that is the most important. You have done that." I thanked him and passed him my impression towards his artwork. He smiled and nodded, "art needs love, life needs love..." - If you were in my position, would you match this respectful boy with a result of a terror attack?

The current world shows us a kind of contrast: love versus hatred; peace versus violence. The elements in each side may be extinguished or fortified. If we keep adding good elements in this contest, we can send away more and more bad ones. I want to optimize my positive attributes in this evolution: to transfer love to others. I plant love in every song I sing with children; I transfer love in every stroke I make in portraits. I want to share my love to others then others can share theirs to more and more "others". I believe inner sunshine warms the heart of the owner, and moreover of all that come in contact with it. If I love others, they will love me in return. That is one tiny step of adding good elements, but it is essential. It is like a forward-email: maybe you can only transfer it to friends you know, but never ignore the multiplying power: there are friends behind your friends so as there are enormous efforts for fighting against negative components in the world.

I know that I am not alone. There are so many volunteers and young people, using our hands and love, helping this orphanage or that organization. Pairs of quivering, glittering eyes, here and there. We are together sending and circulating positive elements. Not only in Macau, not only in Barcelona. Universal benevolence beams.

I go out for shopping for the next week with one of my colleagues. We buy that beggar in the park a lunch as usual. On the way back to the orphanage, we already hear the joyful songs ahead of us. High up in the blue, a lark that is soaring towards the gauzy cloud is singing, as if in choir. We are embraced by peace and harmony. That is an up-and-coming panorama of the world: by the power of love, no violence or terror will rock the world, no misfortune or defects will hit the man.

Reaching out to People with My Words and My Heart

(Original in Japanese)

Koyo Okada

(Age 11, Switzerland)

I speak Japanese, English and some simple German. This is something I can be really proud of, but it is not a result of my own effort. I came to Switzerland when I was three, and since then, I have used Japanese at home, English at kindergarten and school, and German when I play with the neighborhood kids. Therefore, I absorbed all the languages naturally and before I knew it, I was speaking them. But the Swiss-German I learnt by ear is pretty much the local dialect, so when I go to Germany and speak heavily accented German with an Asian face, people laugh at me.

I'm learning kendo from German instructors. Some people may think it is strange for a Japanese to learn the spirit of a Japanese martial art from a foreign teacher in a foreign language. But the instructors all follow the etiquette properly and they are really serious about kendo. You can feel that passion. Last month, there was a competition called the Zurich Cup, for which kendoists from all over Europe came together. The speeches at the opening and all the announcements were in three languages: German, French and English. Then it came to me: this is it! When international competitions are held in Japan, I could make myself useful with my language skills. There would be no need to pass the microphone round from person to person. What's more, I would love to teach kendo to children from many different countries.

Also, I am very fond of small children. I have thought about becoming a preschool teacher, where I could teach English and German to Japanese kids.

I have always attended an international school. There, we are taught to recognize our strengths and fully exhibit them. However, I am told that if I tried this in Japan, I would not be very popular. Apparently, it's up to other people to praise you for your good points. If you start boasting about yourself, people would think you were strange. My mother tells me, "It's very important to have confidence in yourself, but human beings are also expected to have some

humility and restraint." I find such Japanese culture difficult to understand and rather complicated, but my German kendo instructors seem to be just as fond of Japanese culture as they are fond of practicing kendo.

Before I grow up to be an adult, I want to learn many more languages and become a person who can understand other cultures. If I can have many different channels within me, I'm sure to be able to help someone or to be of some use.

Finally, I want to go on having the Japanese humility to recognize that it is thanks to my present living environment that I have the opportunity to pursue my goals.

Making the Most of My Qualities to End Violence against Children

(Original)

S.S. Rishad

(Age 12, Bangladesh)

I live in a country where people earn less than one dollar a day, Bangladesh one of the poorest and corrupted countries of the world. Here violence against children is just a social norm and everyday, so many children are being abducted, trafficked, physically abused and even killed. Children of ethnic minorities in the southern side of my country are very ignored by the society. Often they cannot reach their goals because of social ignorance, thus their potential is lost. So I tried to make most of my qualities to end violence against children.

I visited rural areas of Bangladesh with my parents and shared my knowledge about peace in six rural schools consisting mostly of poor abused and tortured children. I gave hope to poor female domestic helpers in my community who lost siblings or parents in violence or trafficking in my country. I talked to them about peace and how they can prevent violence against children. I wrote letters to International Red Cross Society and United Nations Headquarters officials to prevent wars in Iraq and end use of child soldiers. Finally one day I received two e-mails from the United Nations and International Red Cross appreciating my efforts and giving me positive feedbacks about my concerns and that my letters have been presented to the Under Secretary General of UN regarding peace issues. I told my father about the children in Iraq and Afghanistan and with his financial help and my pocket money, I bought 56 packets of dry food, water bottles, candles and card and then I packed all of them and sent it to 56 children in hospitals and in schools in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the card, I wrote the message of peace and invited them to be united for peace too. Soon, I organized a small club with some 16 poor children of my community. I named it "Children's Peace Club." Here I talked about peace with the poor and ignorant children. I talked to them about how important it is to end violence against children. They were all poor and unaware about peace issues and so whatever I told them seemed new and crisp knowledge to get united to end violence against children. Soon, they brought in more 36 children and gradually today, I speak to 106 disadvantaged children and they share their stories with me. I organized a community rally to end violence

and the national media covered it. The next week, I talked to my local member of parliament (which was not so easy to do, but I used my best diplomacy) and then I talked to the State Secretary for police affairs about ending child abuse by policemen. The secretary told my report would be presented to the Minister for action. As a young writer, I used my writing skills and started to write about peace issues and ending child violence in the National Children's Supplementary. I wrote 56 articles to create awareness about peace towards children. I talked to seven-government school's Head Masters to prevent child abuse at their schools and they agreed that they would. In the meantime, I received 28 letters from children of a school in Kabul, Afghanistan and of a hospital in Baghdad, Iraq telling me how happy they were to receive my gift. As the best public speaker of my school, I organized a public speaking contest and settled the topic as "Ending violence against children, where I was privileged to share my ideas with students. I have excellent artistic abilities such as singing and drawing. So I had drawn 59 posters on abolishing violence against children and creating peace. I organized an exhibition of these posters in my house garage. Later I sang a peace song, composed and tuned, all by myself. I spoke at a Rotary Club meeting about peace. Rotary is an international organization working for peace. I visited a local tribal community and since I could not speak their language, I used my posters to convey the message of peace and non violence. They were so happy, that they presented a tribal dance to me. I opened a global chat room in internet and named it "Global Peace Chat." Almost 62 people joined me everyday. Through a Radio program, I spoke to millions of children of my country to end violence against children.

Today I look at my mirror and try to see how much I could change for the benefit of my country, of my world. I am satisfied for what I could but I would only be most satisfied when other people, especially children and world leaders and international organizations will read this writing and hopefully be inspired to end violence against children. May peace bestow on our lovely planet.

Thanks for Listening (Original)

Akira Kuriyama
(Age 22, Japan)

"Thanks for listening, Akira." My friends often tell me this. Maybe listening is one of my best qualities. By listening, I can help others, even if I am only helping to lighten their burden by sharing it with them for a short time. As I get older, I'm finding that listening is more and more important in my studies and in the work I have chosen to do. As a medical student, listening to my patients talk about their symptoms, their pain and their feelings is really important.

I've been a patient myself for 22 years. I have suffered from atopic dermatitis since I was born. As you know, this disease makes your skin red and itchy. Every time I walk in town, I feel the curious eyes of people looking as if to see something strange. Every time I wash my face, I avoid looking in the mirror because there is a red face I don't want to see. Every time I see friends running on the field, I long for the feeling of sweat dripping down my face, too. Why did this happen to me? Why only me among my friends? I've asked myself these questions countless times. But nobody has given me an answer. Eventually I came to hate my fate, wondering how God could continue to let me suffer from this incurable disease.

Through this very personal experience with disease, I've come to realize the depth of sadness and loneliness with which patients must cope. Of course, they hope to be cured from whatever ails them, but what they really all desire is an end to their sorrow and solitude. They neither need nor want empty sympathetic words. All they need is someone who would just listen to and empathize with them. As for me, I was happy to have my mother, who also suffers from this. She would sit beside me, put a hand on my itchy arm and say, "I know how hard it is for you, because I have the same disease." Her empathy was a soothing salve on my skin. My mother's quiet observation and empathy have done more for me than most doctors' superficial observations, delegated testing and quickly written prescriptions for the latest "cure". The patient doesn't only need a physical symptom treated but also an empathy-filled recognition of their emotional reaction to this symptom.

Medicine is a humanitarian profession calling for the caring of both the body and the mind of suffering patients. But nowadays doctors tend to be mostly technique and technically-orientated. I myself see this problem in my medical studies. I've learned techniques like CT and MRI, but NEVER any techniques to recognize and relieve the patients of their mental anguish. CT and MRI can show us inside the structures of the brain but it can't reveal what the patient is thinking.

The Hippocratic Oath from 400 B.C affirms, "Warmth, sympathy and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug." But The 'Hypocritical' Oath from 2004 A.D. would seem to be its inverse: "The surgeon's knife and the chemists' drug outweigh warmth, sympathy and understanding." Many doctors seem to have sworn to this second oath, putting all their trust in science and neglecting ordinary human empathy. The development of medical technology empowers us to detect and cure diseases that we were powerless against only a few decades ago. But modern medicine is not omnipotent; it cannot guarantee us lifelong health. Cancer, AIDS, and other chronic diseases are still with us. Modern medicine cannot completely cure and is sometimes powerless in the face of these diseases. In such cases, when all other avenues of treatment have been exhausted, the only left effective treatment left is "listening and understanding" with empathy, which doctors seem to be ill-equipped to handle. In fact, this is the crux of the argument. They are ill-equipped to deal with it precisely because they cannot depend on "equipment". They haven't been trained to deal with a problem without depending on technology.

As humans we will all experience disease, pain and eventually death. There must be a recognition of this commonality in medical treatment. Over the last few years, I've come to realize that my "listening" is one of the vital skills making up my diagnostic abilities. Gradually, I am finding that I have the ability to listen to and understand the emotion of suffering patients. This is giving me growing confidence in my selection of treatments because I have really listened and understood my patients' needs.

I'd like to give Mother Teresa the last word. "If you have a sick or lonely person at home, be there. Maybe just to hold a hand, maybe just to give a smile, that is the greatest, the most beautiful work."

Thank you for listening.

Living a Non-violent Life in a Culture of Violence

(Original)

Barward Johnson

(Age 25, Liberia)

I live in a country, where for the past twenty-five years (my entire life time) violence has been the norm. Children and youths of my age group have grown up in a culture of violence. The seeds of violence were sown immediately after I was born.

One month after I was born, a violent riot erupted, beginning the circle of violence that has engulfed my country for so long. Almost one year after, on April 12, 1980, the nation witnessed another round of violence. This time it was a bloody coup, which led to the assassination of President William R. Tolbert Jr. Like the riot, the coups help to cultivate the culture violence. The nation went amok again. There were indiscriminate killings, rapes and looting. Five years after that coup, there was another coup. Although this other coup was foiled, it was more violent and bloody than the one preceding it. The nation experienced more deaths and destruction than ever before, but this was not the end of the violence. The worst was yet to come.

Then on December 24, 1989, a brutal civil war broke up. This war, which lasted for fourteen years exposed children and youths to the worst forms of violence our nation, has ever experienced. Young people became both victims and perpetrators of some of the worst atrocities known to the modern human race, by the early 1990's, the entire Liberian society was plagued by violence. Indeed, the civil war provided all the necessary fertilizers needed to cultivate the culture of violence, for violence was now the way of life.

Although there was violence everywhere around me, I still managed to live a non-violent life. I have practiced the value of non-violence since my early childhood and I have continued to uphold such values, for I believe that it is only by cultivating a culture of non-violence and peace that the world will be a better place to live. In living a non-violent life, I give love and respect to my fellow human beings. I am also tolerant of the opinions of others.

Moreover, I reject all forms of violence. I always avoid situations that would result to a violent confrontation with anyone, though my friends mock at me for this. For instance, during the civil war I did not take up arms to fight. The few of us who did not take up arms and decided to go school were targeted, whenever fighting broke up. We were threatened and beaten by our peers who had guns.

In addition to the physical pressure to conform to violence, there were also economic pressures. The guns were the only easy means to survive. Only those who had guns had the economic power; we who never had it turned to beggars.

Despite the psychological and economic pressures that made youths to pick up arms, I remained resolute in my desire to live a non-violent life. I always try to advocate non-violence and peace. I encourage people to reject violence and to respect the life and dignity of every human being. Through my crusade for peace and non-violence, most young people are beginning to realize that it is only by cultivating a culture of peace and non-violence will our nation resurrect from self destruction and backwardness.

Right now, I am engaged in a campaign to rid our country of arms. I am encouraging ex-combatants to disarm to the United Nations peace keepers that have come to help us end our conflict. The campaign is going very well and it will continue until every ex-combatant is disarmed.

To sustain the peace after the disarmament process, I am trying to organize a youth group, named Youth Against Violence. This group will promote the culture of peace and non-violence, and help to rehabilitate young ex-combatants. It will provide the forum for young people including ex-combatants to dialogue issues that will transform us from a culture of war and violence to a culture of peace and non-violence.

It is not only war that I reject, but also all forms of violence everywhere on earth. I just cannot comprehend why in this enlightened age people should still think they could solve their differences by resorting to violence. I believe there is always a non-violent and peaceful solution to any problem. They world would be a better place if we strive to build a culture of peace and non-violence. And if we do not begin now to cultivate this culture of peace and

non-violence, we have stultified all achievements and advancement made thus far, by the human species and sentenced future generations to a bleak and bitter future.

May peace reign everywhere on earth.

My Smile is Everyone's Smile

(Original)

Ayumi Toge

(Age 13, Japan)

"There were so many times when your smile made me feel better." Those were the words of my best friend, when we graduated from elementary school. I was really happy to hear those words. That's because I'm very fond of smiles. Don't you agree smiles are great? For instance, you may not speak the same language, but a smile will bring smiles to other people too.

I received a shock from seeing posters and photos of Afghan children. I'd heard so much about Afghanistan in the news and learnt about the country in my general studies class. There were so many times I thought, "If I lived in Afghanistan, I would never smile!" But the truth is Afghan children have smiles like the shining sun. When I didn't know very much about Afghanistan, I wondered how they could bear to smile. Now I feel ashamed for ever having thought that. Whatever was happening in Afghanistan, it was a natural thing as a human being for people living there to be smiling. I'm sure there's no one in this world who would say it was wrong to smile or who couldn't manage to put a smile on their face. That's why I have great respect for the people of Afghanistan because their faces are lit up with smiles, despite what has been happening to their country.

Robert Capa was a photo-journalist. He told stories of the horrors of the battlefield through his photos. He's said to have loved smiles too. There's a photo of a boy, taken by Capa, in our textbook. The boy has a huge smile on his face. When I saw that picture, my heart skipped with joy too and I thought, "He must be very pleased with something to be wearing such a smile." That's when I discovered the maxim, "When someone smiles, everyone else around them also starts to smile!!" And I applied that to myself and thought, "If I have a smile on my face, that will bring smiles to everyone else's face." And that's when my strong point started: "I love smiling!"

I have a great interest in refugees. That's why I try to make donations to UNICEF as often as I can. It's a bit hard giving up ¥100, but I think to myself as I put it into the collecting box, "This ¥100 coin can save a number of lives and it will bring smiles to that many people's faces."

Nuclear weapons, wars between countries, civil war and so on – there are so many problems in the world that we lose count. Even at this very moment, many people are being hurt and made sad. I feel very cross with anyone who dares to take smiles off the faces of those who have done nothing to deserve such treatment. For someone like that, I want them to realize how wonderful a smile can be. I'm sure everyone has had the experience at one time or another of being cheered up someone's smile and the words, "It will be alright." You must surely have felt a great relief and the burden lift from your heart. That's how important a smile is. I want everyone to understand this.

My dream for the future is "Let the whole world smile." I dream of the day when the whole Earth is full of smiles. These days we hear lots of sad stories, like the news of Japanese being killed in Iraq, and it's certainly not easy. But for that very reason, I want to make it happen. My little campaign is this. I try to have a smile on my face all the time so that people around me all think: "Let's smile!"

I'm truly grateful to my classmate who told me, "Your smile made me feel better." She helped me realize my strength. I've been able to learn a lot from smiles and I've been able to set up my own goal. "Let's smile!" And yes, that smile is beautiful!! That's my strength.

2004 International Essay Contest for Young People
[Children's Category – 3rd Prize]

Making the Most of My Qualities

(Original)

Mg Arkar Mg Mg Aung Kyaw Htet
(Age 13, Myanmar)

It is very easy to be born, live and die for a person. Therefore a person should pass his span of life between birth and death beneficially.

I spend my life as beneficially as I can. I always try to act and think so that people can benefit from my deeds. Not very many people know the value of being human. The quality of a person depends on the effort he makes in achieving a goal. I do my lessons regularly and I spend my leisure time reading books, in order to get general knowledge, instead of wasting time with useless amusements. As I am a teenager, I help my mother with the household chores. The help I give her always pleases her. I speak to people, young or old. I help the elderly whenever I get a chance.

We learn about our environment and its conservation in our lessons. These lessons help us a lot in our understanding of the environment.

I admire Rachel Carson who made the world aware of the idea of environmentalism. She was well-known for her book, "The Sea Around Us" for which she was awarded. In 1962, she wrote "Silent Spring." In it there are many references to the death of thousands of animals and birds caused by "DDI," an insecticide. She painted out that people were in danger because of the deterioration of the environment. That is why she was called the mother of environmentalism.

No doubt it is essential to earn money for our basic needs, food, shelter and clothing. But it is also equally important to preserve our environment, making this world a pleasant place to live in.

As for me, I am quite confident that I am endowed with a good memory and also I have tried to be patient in whatever I do. So to develop these qualities, I learn poems, memorize them

and then recite them from memory. Then to develop my patience, I try to solve cross-word puzzles piece together puzzle pictures until. I get them all fitted. My grandmother's advice has always been invaluable. She teaches us to finish a task once we have started it. This trains me to be committed to whatever I have chosen to do from the outset.

I sincerely hope that if I try enough to improve these qualities, they will, one day, be a big help to my ambition, which is to make our world a better one.

I shall study hard, and after finishing high school, shall go in for environmental studies. Then I shall help make this world "A Heaven on Earth."

My Strongest Desire

(Original)

Khine Tharaphe Din

(Age 14, Myanmar)

There is no one all over the world who does not have a desire in his life. Even a baby has its own desire that is simply to suck its mother's nipple when it feels hungry. Different people have different desires. Some desires are simple. Some desires are very personal. It means that it is beneficial just only to them while some are very beneficial to the society.

Since I was young, I have had a very strong desire to fulfill my parents' needs. The people in my village pay full respect to my parents. Although they are not very rich, they were always ready to help those who need something. Some people approach my parents to ask for help such as money for their children's education at the time of the school enrollment. Majority of the people in my village are not rich enough to save their income for their children education. However, like my parents, they also want their children to become educated.

Therefore, my parents always urge me to become a teacher when I grow up as they want me to teach them. In my mind too, my strongest desire is to teach the young children in my village not only how to read and write but good manners also. Whenever I have a chance to come back to my village during my long holidays, the children in my village come to me and learn what I teach. I usually save my money and buy some story-books and some knowledgeable books for them as my parents. Sometimes, I tell them my experience in town under the thatch-roofed shelter built by my father. It is always filled with the happy voices of children. Some of them like to listen to my stories. Some of them want to listen to poems that I teach them. Some want to learn reading and writing.

In this way I spend most of my holidays by teaching my village children and the attachment among us gets greater and greater. In every society, I believe that the more the people are educated and polite, the more peaceful and developed it gets. Only good natured people can make the world peaceful so I encourage and nurture the good characters of my people. I have made up my mind to keep the most of my qualities better and better to teach my people to

become the good villagers in our global village. I want them to be the peacekeepers of the world. Such kind of idea has been embedded in my mind by my foreseeing parents since I was young.

As I want to be not only a good daughter but also a good and dutiful citizen, I always try my best to polish up myself. To be a good teacher I need to be a good learner. Without being a good follower it is impossible to be a good leader. Only the good leader can lighten his followers to own the brighter future. No one wants to live in poverty. To keep away from the poverty we must study. Since I was young, my wise parents have been training me to own every good character of a respectable person. So my strongest desire is to brighten my people by developing their way of thinking and standard of living.

Making the Most of My Qualities

(Original)

Gunesh Divya
(Age 14, Mauritius)

Each person has his own qualities. In the same way mine are knowledge, kindness and willingness to help others, respect to elders, honesty, optimism and faith in God.

Knowledge is my favorite quality. I think knowledge is a very important attribute for a person. Education at school is a good source of knowledge. Education is also a progressive discovery of one's ignorance. I read many good books to enhance my knowledge. Someone who does not read good books has no advantage over the one who can't read them.

I wish to become a doctor in the future, thus I'll construct a clinic in the society for the benefits of all.

My kindness and my willingness to help others are second favorite quality. I'm always gentle to my friends, thus developing my friendly character. My mother always tells me that I am the best daughter in the world. I feel she is proud of me.

Being kindhearted and always wanting to help others, I am in the benevolent club of the school. My friends and I often go at "SOS village" of the society where mistreated children are welcomed. At "SOS village", there are many houses and in each, there is a woman with about seven children. We help the women looking after those children and we try to bring a smile on the faces of the kids by playing with them or organizing picnics. Once, a little girl hugged me, tears in her eyes and she murmured in my ears, "You've been like a sister to me today. Please come back again..."

I am also a volunteer in a center for the deaf in my village. I always encourage the deaf and one day, I saw some of those girls dancing at party. There was a lady giving them instructions

by making signs with her hands occasionally. They dance so well that everyone applauded loudly. I was so happy for them that I had tears in my eyes.

My kindness led to my next attribute, respect to elders. Elders are more experienced about life than the youngsters like me. Their advices are worthwhile and in return they need to be given respect. My grandmother used to tell me that she loved our family and the respect we grant her.

In the bus, whenever I notice an old person standing, I always offer him my seat. A smile or a "thank you" from that person is enough to make me cheerful for the whole day.

Honesty is an important quality. I am always honest, that is why my friends trust me. I am also sincere to my parents; I never lie to them. Where there is honesty, there is trust. Any relationship, whether it is friendship or love, is based on honesty and trust.

Optimism is my other quality. I think one should always think positively in life or else it causes stress. Stress, which is the major health issue of modern society, can lead to depression and other diseases. It always happens whenever a person thinks he can never solve his problem. Everyone thinks his burden is the heaviest but it is not true. Being an optimist, I always try to find a solution to my problem. Thus, I'm less stressed.

Faith in God is a quality I like very much. I think faith in God brings a greater peace of the mind. God is one being, perceived under different aspects and forms. This concept forms religion. I find quarrels between people of different religions stupid. Why should we quarrel? We are human beings; the only difference is that we picture God differently. Whether it is Shiva, Christ or Allah, it is the same God.

My faith in God is great. Being a Hindu, I pray Shiva everyday. On Saturdays, when I return from my chemistry tuition, I use to go to the church, which is on my way, and pray Christ.

There was a particular event, which had strengthened my faith in God. When I visited the hospital three months before, I befriended a little boy who had leukemia. He needed a compatible bone marrow or else he would die. He told me he wanted to live and be happy like his friends. I prayed to God so that he could get one soon. After a few days, he really got a compatible bone marrow and now he is enjoying life.

On one occasion a friend asked me, "If you were God, what would you have changed in the world?" I replied softly, "I would have brought peace in the world."

I think that each person should use his qualities to help others. We must not be selfish and must think positively.

Walking Away.....
(Original)

Sara Rose Hooker
(Age 15, Mozambique)

I am looking out into the sun kissed sky that spreads around me like a warm comforter. A soft sea breeze passes through my shawl making the pages flutter and leaving me gazing out into the horizon. What are my good qualities? They are so hard to pinpoint and yet they have been with me forever; they define my actions, my beliefs and my morals. My good qualities are the weapons that I am born with; and are the only things that will be with me consistently throughout my life. My good qualities are not physical but are just as good as a fist in times of trouble, and yet, a fist and these magical qualities compare like a sickly tasting medicine and natural honey. They are....

One of them is my independence. Standing on my own two feet is very important to me. For me my independence is my freedom; it gives me the chance to explore; to be my own person and not to hold back ideas or opinions on account of others.

Another good quality that I describe myself with is my determination; it is a quality that I hold close to my heart because it is such an important one. Now, in this day and age with so many people in the "rat race" it is a priceless quality and gives me a head start in life. It reminds me to never give up; it prods me forward and never back. In the last moments before defeat it is determination that keeps me going.

My humor is my secret weapon. It allows me to make light of awkward moments and to not appear hurt even though I'm feeling terrible. It tells a harsh truth without hurting the victim but at the same time makes them realize their mistakes. It makes the bonds between friends stronger and immediately creates a new bond between two strangers. But, most importantly it allows me to look at myself in new light; to laugh at myself with other people and accept willingly my mistakes.

My patience is another good quality. Patience is a quality that comes hand in hand with my determination. I use it to keep me steady when I'm about to burst. It is what keeps me responding to the same questions said over and over. But, most importantly it is what keeps me helping people even though I'm sometimes near to despair.

My ambition is fueled from all my other qualities. It is my drive. It is my power aid, chocolate, petrol or whatever energy bar you care to name. It is what my dreams are made of and what keeps me imagining sitting in a president's chair. With every book I read and every person I meet my ambition is fueled and soars to new levels.

With these qualities I can start walking the path of life. As far as the eye can see there are hills, mountains and valleys to cross. There are sceneries to admire and rivers to swim down. Opportunities and adventures lie ahead, waiting just beyond my touch. However, even with the greatest qualities there will always be ditches in my path. To walk on tarmacked roads I have to believe in myself; develop my good qualities and use them to spread my values, morals and personality to others. To make the most of my qualities I should never stop learning from others; we are the biggest font of information on the planet and more importantly then that by considering people and learning from them I form an irrefutable bond with them. When interacting with people around me I give them a piece of myself and every time I notice other peoples good qualities mine are molded for the better. By spreading my good qualities I am becoming a role model for the people around me, even if it's only a truth said in the place of a lie or volunteering when no one else will.

I will never underestimate how good qualities can change a situation around. Whenever I imagine a peaceful world I have to erase all the scenarios that could have been solved using good qualities but instead were spoiled using bad. By using good qualities there would no longer be a need for problems like war and global disputes, instead it would be possible to interact more peacefully. All that is needed is a few minutes of patience or consideration. This medicine is the perfect antidote to terrorism or war. Every day when I pass by all the things that are wrong in this world I realize that we can personally end some of the struggle against it. With a small show of our good qualities we can make a suffering person happy and inspired.

Good qualities are like chain letters, every time I use a good quality someone is inspired to do the same and so the chain continues. There are more then a billion people on this planet which would make an enormous chain. Even though a chain this size sounds unrealistic it is possible

and no money, food or toys are needed to activate it. All that is needed is to reach inside and pull out YOUR good qualities.

Now it is time to pull on my hiking boots and start walking; the future looms in front and I am sure that I will get through any obstacle with my good qualities!

The Road to International Cooperation through Agriculture (Original)

Yukinori Miyanaga
(Age 17, Japan)

Up till now, mankind has built up the foundations for a stable life by producing food to live on and passing this knowledge down from children to grandchildren through the ages. But in recent years, problems of food shortage have emerged in various parts of the world, and countless numbers of people are dying of starvation this very minute. In the years to come, the most important thing will be to secure food so that people around the world can live without worry.

After graduating from middle school, I decided to go to Harima Agricultural High School. Securing enough food for the world's people has become a very important issue and I have this vision that agriculture as an industry will play an important role in solving this problem.

Ever since I was very small, I have enjoyed working up a sweat and I have found the knack of performing difficult physical tasks without much difficulty. Rather than studying at a desk indoors, I always preferred classes out in the open, where I could use my whole body in the process of learning something. That's why I chose agricultural high school because the emphasis there is on getting experience by actually doing farming tasks and that was what I wanted to learn. Since I started at the school, I've become interested in organic farming where chemical fertilizers are not used, and my special interest is growing crops with the help of mallard ducks, something that the whole school is involved in.

Growing crops with the help of ducks means using no chemical fertilizers whatsoever and relying on the ducks and people's own hands and sweat to grow rice. This is true organic farming. Up till now, I had only known about rice growing where it was taken for granted that fertilizers are used, so I became very interested in the duck method. Besides the hours spent in the paddies at school, I attended the National Duck Forum held in Kobe last year, and I also spent a week of the summer holiday in Kyushu at a farm that used ducks. I wasn't sure how

much I would be able to learn in just one week, but I made good use of my ability to withstand hard labor and spent a truly worthwhile week learning about the method in action on the spot. What's more, I got a firsthand idea of the difficulties faced by farmers, and in that single week, I realized how hard a job it is to produce food to feed the people of this earth.

The thing that impressed me most was how thoroughgoing and comprehensive this farming using ducks was. First of all, you get a crop of rice from the paddies. And then, besides their important role in weeding and eating insects, the ducks are also farmed as poultry. What's more their droppings in the paddies becomes food for loach and carp which, too, become food for humans. In other words, in a very limited space, you can produce rice, poultry and fish all at the same time. In this way, with the minimum of labor and cost, you can gain a fair amount of food. If this farming method with the help of ducks can be spread around the world, it will surely solve the global food problem.

My dreams for the future involve joining JICA, the youth volunteer movement, and going to various parts of the world to teach agricultural technology, and at the same time, I hope to spread this campaign of using ducks for farming. I know it won't be easy to make my thoughts and ideas understood in countries with different cultures and languages. But someone has to do this job, otherwise the food shortage problem will never be solved. That's why I want to take the initiative and go to developing countries to help them improve their farming methods; this is my way of contributing to the world.

As a first step towards achieving my goal, I want to go to the agricultural department of a university and acquire deep knowledge of agriculture. That will be the start to playing a role in bringing peace and coexistence to the whole world, where everyone can live in a safe environment.

My Strengths and Dreams

(Original in Japanese)

Ryo Yokoyama

(Age 18, Japan)

What are my strengths? Well, I'm a very ordinary high school student, but if I had to mention something, then I'd probably say that I can keep my cool in a difficult situation and I have the ability to adapt. I acquired these characteristics abroad, especially during the time I was living in South Africa. Africans are different from the Japanese in that they are a very easy-going people. They tend to take an optimistic view of things and never panic. But as for how they live, some live in unbelievable conditions of poverty, while others live in splendid mansions, and the standard "ordinary" as we know it here in Japan doesn't exist there. At first, it was one surprise after another, but I was able to see that many different types of people were living their lives to the full in various environments. From there, I got to the point where I realized, "Anything goes," and I wasn't going to be shocked that easily and even if something did happen, I would be able to cope without panicking and could adapt to the situation. I learned not to be fussy about things and, instead, faced whatever happened in a natural, relaxed way. That made me realize that the Japanese are impatient people. Now back in Japan, I think I'm much more able to stay calm in various situations than I was in the past. My ability to adapt also came from playing soccer, something I've done since elementary school.

Because of the problems in Iraq, Japanese people are gradually getting to know about the lives of the Iraqi people through the news. But what about Africa? It's known widely that poverty is rife in Africa, but do the Japanese really know to what extent? Would people be able to give concrete answers if asked those questions? Don't people tend to think that the lives of Africans will improve if they donate sums of money? Before I went to Africa, I was also almost totally ignorant of the problem. But after living there for three years, I think I have become more aware of the issues. By experiencing life in a place where the language and customs are totally different, I was able to acquire the ability to stay calm in difficult circumstances and to adapt. These have become my strengths, as well as my assets.

In the future, I would like to make full use of these strengths and contribute to society by finding a job that will enable me to become a bridge between the countries of the world, especially Africa, and Japan. To begin with, I think it's important to inform the people of Japan about what is really happening in Africa. By responding to a variety of needs and situations, I would like to convey the wishes and thoughts of African people to the Japanese. Through my experience of living in South Africa, what I came to realize was that what they needed most was not money but education. Of course money is important, but I would like to tell my fellow Japanese that countless South African children and youth are being deprived of an education. At this point, education is more important than money. Many young people cannot even write; as a result, they can't get work. This environment of economic instability and social uncertainty leads to an increase in HIV/AIDS and a very low life expectancy. It may be hard going, but I am determined to stick with it and tell the people of Japan about the situation in South Africa and look for a solution to those problems. And not just to my fellow Japanese; if I could someday get this message across to people in the other advanced nations, it would make me very happy. Taking advantage of my ability to keep my cool, I want to be able overcome the differences in language and culture and get to the root of the problem. And I'd also like to make use of my ability to cope in a wide range of situations and solve the problems one by one, and make myself useful to society.

This is no longer the time to be thinking merely about the prosperity of Japan. We are in the age of globalization and we should be concerned about the health of the world's natural environment, economy and politics; otherwise there will be no future. Of all these, the most neglected is offering help for the development of Africa, and this is where my dream lies.

Debating, Arena to Best Make Use of My Qualities

(Original)

Muhammad Donny Eryastha

(Age 19, Indonesia)

By the time of writing this essay, I'm acting as deputy chief adjudicator for Indonesian School Debating Championship, a national scale debating competition for high school students to select Indonesian delegates for World School Debating Championship. This is the same competition that I joined for years ago. Ever since, the world of competitive debating has become an arena for me to contribute in the process of building democracy in my country, proliferating the habit of respecting other's opinion among youth, creating society that is less prejudicial and discriminatory, making a peaceful world. This is the arena in which I could best make use of my positive attributes and by the same time it teaches me the merits of debating.

If I were asked what my positive attributes are, the most tangible answer would be my hard work ethos. I truly believe that the outcome that one will get is positively correlated with the effort that one exerts. Aside from that, I must say that I'm an optimistic person. I believe that there's always hope for better future, for I believe that most of the time external factors don't really contribute to the unfortunate events that we experienced. Right now I'm studying at the leading university in Indonesia, but before I got accepted there, by three other universities have turned me down. Before I became the finalist of National Biology Olympiad, I've failed many times in selections for Physics Olympiad. And it took me two times joining national selection before I was selected as one of first Indonesian delegates for World School Debating Championship.

Debate has taught me a lot of positive values. As I'm involved in more in competitive debating as a debater, I learned that it's more than competition of arguing and public speaking. The philosophy of debate is there are always at least two sides of a story. In Indonesia, to have different opinion is taboo. The country has been ruled by New Order regime for 32 years. During that period the press has been oppressed, dissidents have been silenced, and the freedom of speech has been undermined. After the reform in 1998, there has been a period of

chaos and riots. There has been anarchism and conflicts between ethnic groups. The people have been silenced for too long and they channel their euphoria in many ways including using violence. This is the time when competitive debating was introduced in Indonesia. In debate, a team would be designated a position to argue supporting or opposing a motion. The motions range from 'That We Would Impose Democracy' to 'That We Would Recognize Gay Priest'. You cannot simply say that your opinion is the most correct one and other's is wrong just because you believe so or that's what you've been told. You learn to respect other's opinion. You also learn to accept diversities, to resolve disagreement by dialogues and reasoning, not to say that different groups are wrong simply because they are different. These values of respecting other's opinion, to resolve disagreement by reasoning, to diminish prejudice, are the attributes that I learned from debating and what I believe is what is needed in Indonesia.

I believe that the best way to make use of my positive attributes is by using them in the effort of contributing to my surrounding community. I believe that if I work hard in the effort of proliferating debating in Indonesia, I could spread the merits of debating among youth in the country. I've been involved in various activities. As internal director of debating society in my university I coordinate regular practices in which participants can discuss different issues and practice actual debate. Together with my friends at the debating society, I've held debating seminars, training and competition that involved varsity and high school students. I can see that now more young people are accustomed with debating and it is becoming more popular in the country. I believe that more people will learn the positive attributes of debating and the country could become a better place. I believe that this is the best way to make use my positive attributes and by doing that I could also learn more to be a better self.

Inspiration – Spreading Positive Vibrations (Original)

*Anna Mazurek
(Age 20, Sweden)*

The world is full of tragedies. But the greatest tragedy is all the unused potential. Countless are the people who have forsaken their dreams, neglected their talents, denying their own greatness. My heart bleeds seeing such a waste, since I believe that we all are in possession of something beautiful and outstanding. Every one of us. And I believe that it is our human duty, a duty towards ourselves as well as to the world, to make use of the inner resources that has been us given. Sadly, many of us never do, perhaps because of fear- fear to fail.

But fear can also be a motivator, the hand that pushes you forward. My greatest fear is to wake up one day realizing that life has passed me by without me making the best of the gifts I've been given. I've seen enough of wasted potential around me to grow an intense determination not to become another lost little bird who never left the ground, scared to spread it's wings.

Being an incurable idealist, I have just enough of realism to realize that not all goals can be reached. Still, knowing that not everything is possible, I continue believing that nothing is impossible. Foolish? Naive? No, rather practical I would say, cause if you already at the start assume that you will fail, you most surely will, proving yourself right in being wrong. I'll rather be the one who goes reaching out for the stars, in order to at least get to the mountaintops!

No great things can be achieved without struggle though, but believe me- I'm armed. Armed with optimism and good will. These are truly powerful weapons. Being able to see the sun even through the thickest clouds helps me stand even the darkest night, knowing there must be light waiting around the corner. I wouldn't leave home without a huge load of optimism in my pocket, that's for sure! And staying in the safety of the home is rather impossible to me, since curiosity is my engine. A will to learn, to understand, to discover and explore. It makes me run to see what's waiting around each corner, never miss an opportunity to travel distant places in order to enrich myself with new experiences and the knowledge that comes out of

meetings with people raised in other cultures, with different traditions and beliefs; discovering what we all have in common, underneath what differs us apart.

The more goods you collect in your soul, the more you can pass on to others. And isn't that what's life is all about? Sharing the beauty of the world, sharing the beauty that's within us. No one is so poor that he has nothing to give. Material things are not the essential, real riches are not affected by interest rates, has nothing to do with stock holdings, can't be put on a bank account, and they can't be stolen away by a gun-pointing robber! Real riches are the treasures in our hearts. Just like the little prince in Antoine de Saint-Exupery's well known book put it: What's most important is invisible to the eyes!

I believe he was right, and want to make others see it to. Remind them of this eternal truth, too often forgotten in our materialistic world, where selfishness and greed has come to rule.

All members of the human race have an important task in their lives. A question to ask themselves- Who am I, and what should I do with my life? Not the easiest question there! To answer it you must look into your own soul- that's the only place to look for it. Your road is your road, and you're the one who must find a map.

So I did, and after running around in chaos, drifting in oceans of different possibilities, torn between various ambitions I caught a glimpse of my truth, found my road to self- fulfillment. When going through the inventory of my best qualities and talents, and scanning them with both reflection and intuition, the answer appeared by itself as handed from above, or from within, which really is the same since there is some kind of direct line between the human soul and the eternally omniscient spirit of the universe. The voice within encouraged me to grab my tool- a pen that is.

At once I understood the perfection of Gods well-calculated plan, when he equipped me with the exact combination of qualities that makes me. My curiosity, my thirst for knowledge, my idealistic optimism, my will to share of what I know, my search for higher truth combined with a creative vein running all the way out to my fingertips.

Finding so much astonishing inspiration wherever I look, I can't stop the words that flows around my soul, in my mind, and through my hand that puts them on to paper. If I can make just one single person inspired in a positive way by something I have written, inspire someone

to make use of their own gifts for the account of humanity, I would be damned not picking up that pen!

Try it out Yourself
(Original)

Jim Haske
(Age 25, Qatar)

Violence seems inescapable today. Every region appears to be plagued with its own violent dilemma. Whether you are living at the epicenter of violence or thousands of miles away, we are all affected in either a direct or indirect manner. As terrorist threats and national security warnings rise, so do suspicions toward people of the unfamiliar. Young Muslim males are no longer viewed as being possible friends, but as potential enemies. If you have a beard and pray to Allah five times a day, well then you must be a terrorist. As the United States government and media bombard its citizens with negative images of young Muslim men, it is hard for the average individual to not become distrustful. I am hoping that my personal attributes along with my present living situation will help erase some of the skewed images that people have regarding young Muslim males.

When my friends learned that I acquired a job educating learning disabled students in Doha, Qatar there were many questions that they had for me to answer. Some of the questions were simple inquiries related to my job, but others were questions of ignorance related to the culture and region I would be exposed to. "Are you worried about suicide bombers?" "What is it going to be like having tanks and soldiers all over the streets?" "What will it be like to live in a third world country?" I was surprised by the lack of understanding these people had for life in the Middle East, but I also believe that it is easy for one's perceptions to be manipulated by today's media. Chances are you're not going to book your next vacation to the Middle East if you just got done watching the evening news. How can you even leave the country in the first place if you are part of the 80 percent of Americans who don't even have a passport? I truly believe that you cannot develop an accurate outlook on a culture or region unless you experience it first hand.

In college I studied history and archaeology and developed a curiosity for the world. I acquired an appetite for learning about other cultures and decided that I would one day like to take my

own "field trip" around the globe. At this point in time my curiosity and sense of adventure landed me in Caesarea, Israel where I had the opportunity to work on an archaeological dig. Between classes and digging in the sand I found time to explore the area. My excursions up and down the country allowed me to talk to people of various religions, and experience a mixture of cultures that unfortunately do not always get along.

My parents always taught me to be patient, to listen, and to always try and understand. These three qualities were an essential part of carrying on my interactions with those that I came in contact with. Everyone had an opinion and a story to tell. They were happy they could pass on their message to someone with open ears, and I was happy that they were willing to share.

Today I find myself living in Doha, Qatar and these attributes are still essential tools for developing relationships at work and within the community. When teaching teenage Qatari males about history and current events, being able to show patience, interest, and understanding is priceless. These same qualities are useful when communicating with my co-workers and friends whether they are from Iraq, Palestine, Jordan, or Lebanon. Talking to an Egyptian male in the souk on a Friday night is no different than talking to a friend from Ramallah or a friend from the United States for that matter. We are all interested in sports, troubled by politics, and concerned whether our loved ones will be safe tomorrow.

I am grateful that I have the opportunity to live in the Middle East and experience a part of the world that has been labeled "backward" and "evil" by so many. My only hope is that the stories I share with family, friends, and strangers will help create a more positive perception of individuals from the region. Maybe one day they will take the time to get a passport so that they can come and experience what the Middle East has to offer first hand. After all, they have a free place to stay.