

PERSEVERANCE: THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Eddie Brack, 8th Grade

Everyday begins with a new struggle, whether it is a crisis at home, or the work of overcoming fear of failure at school. Some people are the victims of bullying; others have to deal with peer pressure. Sometimes you have to be courageous, other times you must be able to love. I believe every being on earth faces problems and every one of them lives by different laws of life to solve them. The key to success in my life is perseverance. My purpose is to continue to reach my goals, despite difficulties that I may face.

I live in an urban community, one that has many drawbacks, there is a huge amount of drug activity and gang violence. The people in my community have greatly influenced me to strive harder because I don't want to end up like some of them. The people that persevere in life are some of the many that influence my decisions. My great grandmother was a person who struggled to make sure her family would be successful. Born in 1902, she was a maid who worked extremely hard just to make ends meet. She walked miles to get to work because she didn't have money for transportation; after working in someone's kitchen all day, she came home to take in laundry. Her driving desire to make life better for her children and theirs motivated her to persevere in a time when being black meant you were considered less than nothing.

My cousin was a product of a drug addicted mother; she left him in the hospital because her need for drugs overpowered her need to be a parent. He was adopted by my aunt and has faced many health problems as well as learning disabilities. His parents stood by his side through the many surgeries he needed to correct the problems resulting from his mother's drug use. The man he knows as his father died, and his mother is very sickly. The many tragedies he has suffered have caused him to realize that he must persevere to rise above his birth. His parents have made many sacrifices in order to give him the opportunity to have a better life.

My motivation to persevere drives me to show my family that I can and will be successful. I want to set a precedent of high achievement so my family doesn't end up with nothing. My family may fuss at me, but they do this only because they want and expect the best of me. I always hear people say that as black males we will end up in jail, on the street corner or dead. Society already expects less from me, so I feel as if I have to give more, to break away from being in any of those categories. Maybe I can influence my peers to keep their heads up when life gets hard.

Models of perseverance are all around us. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks are a few of the people that made it possible for me to write this essay. These people led by example and they persevered through adversity. They also never wavered in their commitment to bring about positive change. I think living my life by the laws of perseverance will determine how well my future turns out.

MY BROTHER TAUGHT ME ABOUT RESPECT

Annastasia Johnson, 8th Grade

What is respect? What is responsibility? What do these ideas mean to you? To my brother, these ideas are his Laws of Life. He teaches them to me every day. To me, respect is treating someone the way you want to be treated. Responsibility is taking care of what needs to be done. I respect my elders, my family, especially my brother. My responsibilities involve doing well in school, and being a respectful accountable daughter and sister. My brother sets the pace.

I remember an argument I had with my mother. Teachers called my house and told her that I was misbehaving and talking too much with my friends. I thought my teachers were picking on me; that's what my friends always said. My mother yelled at me; I yelled back. That's when my brother stepped in. He calmed my mother down and said he would talk to me. "All your friends are trying to do is bring you down," he said. "You don't need that, you're smarter than that; you should be a leader, not a follower." He went on to say that he had many friends in school, but only a few had graduated with him. I began to understand his point.

When my brother was growing up, he didn't have any Laws of Life, and he didn't have anyone guiding him the way he guides me. He taught me the values of life, what to do, how to do it, when, where, and more. He teaches me everything I need to know to succeed. He always looks out for me and tells me the do's and don'ts, like "Don't talk in class," "Do all your work," and "Be your own person." I know these words may sound trite, but when he says them, I listen. I guess it's because he's so close to me in age that he still feels the sting of his own mistakes.

My brother teaches me respect like no one else. He always said to me, "Whenever you talk to somebody, look them straight in the eye so they know you're listening and being respectful." Every time I talk to somebody nowadays, I do this because I want him or her to know that I'm listening respectfully, that what he or she is saying is important.

My brother always stresses the importance of responsibility. As I watch him attend college, achieve good grades and maintain his part-time job, I wonder how he manages it all. A normal week for him goes like this: Monday, he works all day; Tuesday, he goes to classes all day; Wednesday he works, Thursday he attends classes; Friday, Saturday, and Sunday he works. That's responsibility; that's my brother. I know I'll be following in his footsteps when I attend college and have to manage my time. And, I know he'll be only a phone call away when things get demanding.

My brother has taught and is continuing to teach me many things. I admire him for his sense of respect and responsibility. Like he always says, "Everyone deserves respect, and you should always be responsible." He models my Laws of Life, for he follows them himself.

APPRECIATION: THROUGH HER EYES

Anonymous, 8th Grade

Tanya sat and watched as her Grandma Cicely a knitted her a brand new winter sweater. She sat in her favorite rocking chair by the window. Tanya enjoyed those times with her grandmother. Her mother would take her to her grandmother's house to spend a day or two. Grandma Cicely would bake cookies and do what grandmothers usually do. She would make cherry flavored Kool-Aid and fried chicken. The house always smelled of food, love and hospitality. Tanya loved it.

Only July 21, 2004, Cicely Janelle Eleanor Wilson passed away, losing her long battle with breast cancer. Tanya was crushed. After Grandma Cicely's death, Tanya's mom thought it would be best if they moved into her house instead of selling it. As Tanya watched the movers move her things into her grandma's house, the pain inside her grew more and more unbearable. Tanya sat in the kitchen crying. She thought of the time Grandma Cicely told her stories of when she had sat in her spot in the kitchen. Her grandmother would tell her about times of when she was growing, up during segregation in the South. She told her about sitting and watching Martin Luther King, Jr. deliver his "I Have a Dream" speech.

Tanya's tears flowed just as her grandmother's love flowed in her heart. Tanya's mom, Ada Wilson, sat in the old rocking chair by the window in the living room thinking of her mother. Ada called to her daughter to help her rearrange the living room. As Tanya walked in, she felt a dark feeling come over her. "Mom, what is that chair still doing here?" Tanya exclaimed.

"Tanya, this was your grandmother's favorite chair. I'm not getting rid of this rocking chair," her mother argued.

"Ma, that thing is repulsive. It's..."

"Don't you speak that way of this chair!" Her mother began to become angry at this point. "You know your grandmother loved this chair. Don't you dare say that again!" Her mother stormed off into the den. Tanya sat down in the chair. She began to smile as the memories of her grandmother in that chair began to flow back into her mind. Tanya sat and thought about the *Laws of Life* essay she had to write. She found her inspiration in this incident. She began to write her essay on her grandma's old flowered notepad. It came out this way:

Appreciation is often an action that we miss. Sometimes it takes a great loss, sometimes just a small act for something to be appreciated. For me, appreciation came easy until the passing of my loving grandmother, the honorable Cicely Janelle Eleanor Wilson, better known as Grandma Cicely. That loss in my life opened my eyes to certain things. My grandmother was a soldier in her own time. She has had her trials and tribulations but I know life was worth it for her.

The bore 5 children and had 13 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren. She was so pleased to find out about all of us. I know that she has given up a lot to make sure that her children and their children had what they needed. Sometimes we worked her last nerve and she beat us to the high heavens, but we know she did it out of love. She always did everything out of love.

When she died a few months ago, I knew my life wouldn't be the same without her. She was the rock of the Wilson family. She always made sure we were right and there was no tension between any of us. She did anything for us. If we wanted or needed anything, she would be the one to get it or give it to us. She never said no to anyone. She was the neighborhood mom.

Lately, I've been a bit edgy and it showed today. My mom was sitting Grandma Cicely's rocking chair. Oh, how she loved that chair! When I saw my mother sitting in the chair, a sudden dark feeling came over me. I snapped at her. I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't control myself. I sat down in the chair and thought about what my grandmother would say to me if she saw me do that. I knew she wouldn't approve. She would beat my butt all up and down that living room. That was when I found my law of life.

I learned I should appreciate not the finer things in life, but the things with inner value and things you would usually overlook. Sometimes we do this because we have no appreciation for those things. When we learn to appreciate them, they earn value in our eyes and become more a part of our life. How can something with no money-value be the most valuable treasure in your life? That's easy. We learn to appreciate such things. After that incident, I knew that my grandmother would be there to reach me through her spirit. She would be my guide as she had for my fourteen years of life already. She would keep me going the right way, help me to learn how to be appreciative of what I have, what I've learned and what is in store for me in the future. I will realize that those things will become valuable because they were appreciated.

FORGIVENESS OVERPOWERS HATE

Anonymous, 11th Grade

Most people live their lives based on hate that they have for others. They believe that the only way to survive is to hold up a wall of hate, not letting anyone in but themselves. A lot of people think that their law of life is hate. That is all they have ever learned. Personally, my law of life is "Forgiveness." I think the only way to survive is to forgive. It is the key to happiness.

Many people took the time to learn how to forgive. I took the time to observe how they felt before they forgave someone and how they felt afterwards. My mother showed me that being a bigger person is being able to forgive. Throughout my mother's life she never practiced hatred. She showed love for anyone she thought needed it. She always told me "If you see someone who feels nothing but hate, pray for them. And hope that one day some kind of happiness comes into their lives." She thought that to hate someone

is only to hate yourself. So I'm trying to change my ways, so I can be at a better place, and be able to put myself in better surroundings.

All my life I practiced nothing but hate. I had hate for everyone that I thought hated me, and for anyone who hated themselves. I had to learn the hard way that hate brings nothing but misery. I stayed to myself until I couldn't take it anymore. I decided to forgive anyone who had done any wrong doing to me, hoping to find myself in the process. Later on in life, I forgave every wrong thing that anyone had done to me. In return, I asked God to give me happiness. And to my surprise he did just that!

In order to forgive, you have to learn how to understand what other people are going through. The easiest thing to do is to hate someone or something. The hardest thing to do is learning to forgive someone. To me, forgiveness is not just saying "I forgive you." It means understanding what the person did and why they did it. And how can you take their weakness and try to help them make themselves stronger?

I realized that hate only disowns someone for their own faults. Everyone is human. How could I honestly disown someone for their weakness, when I myself have my own faults? To blame someone for a mistake is not human and, in my eyes, everyone is the same. You can never think that you are better than anyone else. Forgiveness is will power and love. It is a communication with someone on a higher level even though they show weakness. Forgiveness is helping someone in their time of need.

I chose to forgive rather than the hate. I no longer look down upon anyone. Being able to help people take their hate and help them become a stronger person is what makes me happy. It makes them a stronger person, and in the process makes me a stronger person also. Being able to forgive is the greatest gift in the world. So, you understand why "Forgiveness" is my Law of Life. Remember it's easier to forgive, than to learn how to hate.