

2019 Love All Means All Essay Contest

Name (Last, First): **Waldron, Elle**

Age: 17

Grade: Senior

Country or U.S. State: Michigan

Section 1. How and why I flourish when I live by the Deep Golden Rule

Many view the golden rule as a trivial reminder from our youth; an admonition for kindergarten students and echo of a lecture on the playground. They do not realize that the same precedent that guided one in the days of recess altercations and name calling brawls is one that children and adults alike should still emulate. Living by the Golden Rule defies the selfish society we have become and transforms life. This guide has both challenged and changed me for the better. The Deep Golden Rule has empowered me to have strength and warranted inspiration.

Meaning: Finding my Strength

If everyone followed this rule, our society would be completely revolutionized. Yet there is a stipulation that proves doing “unto others as you would have them do unto you” difficult to adhere to----an imperative expectation that the rule apply to everyone without exception. It is easy to find compassion for those who treat you with kindness; finding benevolence for those who treat you poorly or have selfish motives can be exceedingly challenging. Yet that is also why it is so rewarding. I encountered this challenge on my club volleyball team. As a player that trailed behind in skill and ability, my efforts to be part of the team often annoyed my teammates. Sometimes ignored, usually picked last for partners, and bluntly blamed during lost points and difficult matches, I felt hurt or angry at the girls who treated me poorly. Many times I contemplated lashing out and treating them with the same disrespect and discouragement that they treated me with, but I was always hindered from doing so because I never wanted someone else to feel the way they made me feel. This experience may have tormented me in the past, but

it strengthened me in the future. In the fall, playing on my high school team, I was inspired to treat players who struggled with their skills with patience and empathy. The Golden Rule taught me to be strong even when people lack empathy, and to be tenacious and purposeful in my actions. Without finding this meaning and purpose through experience, I would have never been lead to get involved in my community.

Contribution and Purpose: Finding Inspiration

One of the most rewarding aspects of practicing the Golden Rule is the way one learns from others and is inspired to continue to live by the Golden Rule. When you treat others with love, you are often humbled by their reactions and inspired to treat everyone with kindness. I recognized this was while volunteering at God's Kitchen, a nonprofit organization that is a food pantry serving meals to citizens in need. Open to everyone in the community, anyone who needs a hot meal is welcome to come in on a walk in basis. There is a variety of socioeconomic levels, races and ethnicities, ages, and backgrounds that congregate there weekly. It can be easy to judge a person on an unkempt appearance without knowing their story. My revelation came after hearing a man share his story in the lunch line.

The designated lunch period had not yet begun when he walked in. He wore a worn Carhartt coat and white Nike shoes with a bold red and blue stripe. At first sight, I did not think much of him. I ignorantly assumed he was homeless, instantly categorizing him into that group based on his haggard and seemingly neglected appearance. When he walked up to the counter, my dad, who was volunteering with our small school group, introduced himself and struck up a conversation. After exchanging pleasantries, the man launched into a story about his life. Myself and my peers slowly gathered near to listen. In his early life, he was in the military and travelled out of the country. After his return, he enrolled as a student in a well known university where he

studied engineering. Presently, he had been out of work for some time and was struggling financially. I was astounded at the story this man shared and appalled at myself for assuming that he could be so easily categorized because of how he looked and where he ate lunch. This experience inspired me to continue volunteering at places where giving compassion brings out the best in people. The Golden Rule taught me that everyone has a story and everyone should have a chance to share it.

Section 2. What and who inspired me to love all humanity without exception?

It is undeniable that my parents were extremely instrumental in teaching me the values I live by. These values were ingrained in my life and my actions through observing their careers and the apparent compassion in everything they do. Growing up guided by them has strongly influenced the perspectives I have today.

Through my dad's many years at LaGrave Fire Station in downtown Grand Rapids and his commitment in working with Grand Rapids homeless community while on duty, he has taught me what it means to have compassion and recognize that everyone has both a struggle and a story. I am awed every time we walk downtown and he not only knows most of the community by name, but also consistently asks about their life, passions, and goals. In a world that often ignores the cries of people living on the streets, my dad offers humanity. Although some people may seem unappreciative or undeserving, he makes everyone he meets feel like they are important, heard, and loved. He inspires me every day to treat people with kindness and love, especially when it is difficult. It is often the people who are the most challenging to treat with love that need it the most.

This is seen in my mom's career as a nurse navigator where she cares for patients with an aggressive bone and tissue cancer. She is the bridge between the two worlds of doctors and patients. Working with patients that are often scared and angry about their situation, and with employees who sometimes lack patience and empathy, it can be difficult to find compassion for everyone. Yet she forges lifetime relationships with her patients, visiting them in the hospital after surgery, calling them at home to check in, and working at home to make sure her patients are taken care of even when she is not at work. From her I have seen what it means to be truly selfless, and how sometimes the jobs that are most difficult are also most fulfilling.

The Deep Golden Rule is an integral part of who I am, and who I want to be. I am inspired everyday by my experiences, my parents, my peers, and the way compassion brings out the best in them. I know I wouldn't be the same person, and wouldn't have the same opportunity if I didn't live a life of love. The Golden Rule is a way of life. I hope by living my life this way, I can inspire others to do the same.

I, Elle Waldron, the author of this work, grant permission to Love All Means All to use my original entry as described in the competition announcement. I understand that the winning essays will be published on the website. I represent and warrant that I am the sole creator of the work and have full power and authority to grant permission and to make this agreement.