

2019 LOVE ALL MEANS ALL ESSAY CONTESTNAME (LAST, FIRST):

WILLIAMS, WHITLEY

AGE: 17

GRADE: 11

COUNTRY OR U.S. STATE: FLORIDA

SECTION ONE

HOW I LIVE BY THE DEEP GOLDEN RULE AND FLOURISH

Being charitable towards others is a spiritual asset—one that can contribute to community building. Some might even maintain that it is impossible to build a sense of belonging and community without some form of charitable practice. Through charity, we create a deeper sense of community with each other. We begin to see ourselves as one global community connected with each other. We begin to understand, and to acknowledge, that we are interdependent in a respectful and supportive way.

As human beings, we have a need to live within supportive environments where we are nurtured and can thrive together, where there is a strong commitment to the well-being of the

community as a whole. We are fundamentally designed to live this way. Being charitable towards one another is not just “a nice thing to do”; it is an imperative for our survival as humans, and for our well-being as a global community. Every year disaster strikes some part of the world and somebody needs help. On numerous occasions my friends and I have stepped in and worked with Clean the World organization to pack thousands of boxes with hygiene kits to send to the neediest people. Although it may just be a toothbrush and toothpaste to them, it is much needed and appreciated.

We all wish to be treated with respect and dignity, and to feel valued and listened to. In the spirit of charity, we would strive to do the same for others. One way to look at this principle is through the “Golden Rule” which states, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. The Golden Rule is reciprocal because of its “give and take” intention. Reciprocity is created when one positive action generates another positive action and the cycle continues. A charitable word inspires a charitable action, which inspires another and yet another. Imagine how communities would come together in neighborhoods where currently the majority are strangers to one another.

There are rewards to being charitable, both for the giver and the receiver. Not only are you being helpful to those in need, you are developing positive character traits and behaviors in yourself. Charitable work allows you to see life from someone else’s perspective, including their struggles and hardships, their triumphs and strengths. It is a privilege to be a witness to another’s life by lending a helping hand. By sharing what gifts you have to offer, volunteers receive a gift of appreciation and joy in your own life.

SECTION TWO

HOW HAVE I HEALED OTHERS BY BEING KIND?

On September 6, 2017, Hurricane Irma ripped through the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI), leaving a devastating mark on the landscape, infrastructure and residents of the United States territory. The Category 5 storm brought 185 mph winds and widespread destruction to St. John and St. Thomas, in particular. Just two weeks later, another Category 5 storm, Hurricane Maria, left further damage and set back relief efforts, especially on St. Croix. As USVI residents faced a crisis of unimaginable proportion, some in the United States questioned the degree to which hurricane recovery was an *American* problem. Polls taken in the aftermath of the hurricanes indicated that barely 50 percent of the population grasped that the Virgin Islands is a United States territory and that its people are United States citizens eligible to vote for the President (if they become residents of the mainland). For many, the Islands are simply a tropical paradise. The diversity of its physical environment is matched only by the diversity of its people.

It remains all too clear that after a century of United States rule, the Virgin Islands remain a foreign land in the American public imagination. There are a number of reasons for this perception, but one is that USVI residents are culturally distinct from the mainland. The formal relationship between the United States and the Virgin Islands has been marked by a pattern of human rights and human wrongs. The harsh challenges facing the USVI during this period of relief and eventual recovery were complex. The ability to effectively communicate during and immediately after a disaster was essential. The USVI government instituted regular operational checks of primary, secondary, and contingency communications systems to ensure their ability to

execute emergency response activities. Alert VI provided Virgin Islanders quick and reliable emergency notifications and public service announcements.

I decided to take immediate action by donating my time and a large portion of my hard-earned summer income to help a territory I never knew and a people I never met. I identified the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (CFVI) as a trusted organization for receiving and distributing my donation to support suffering USVI residents. CFVI responded to the outcry for help with debris removal, mucking and gutting, mold sanitization, and minor repairs on homes and schools across the islands of St. Thomas and St. John. More than a year later, volunteers are still working to bring lasting strength to the islands as recovery efforts continue by rebuilding disaster-resilient schools and repairing homes. My volunteer service with Clean the World centered around the concept that everyone deserves to feel the basic comfort and dignity of cleanliness. I selected a hygiene kit build date and location in conjunction with the USVI swim team. We sent emails, put up flyers and talked about our hygiene kit event at team meetings. The group got excited about helping to assemble the kits, pack them in boxes and then provide the gift of good health to them. It was so good to see, after such a tragic set of circumstances, that the USVI swimmers were grateful for the outpouring of help and hopeful about their future.

Federal and local partners responded to the needs of survivors, helping rebuild stronger and more resilient communities. USVI has pre-staged necessary commodities and generators across the territory, including a three-day supply of food and water. Generators were staged to support critical infrastructure facilities following these severe weather events. Through CFVI Headquarters, additional commodities were delivered to strategically located distribution centers throughout the islands, where more than 5.4 million liters of water, 3.6 million meals, 600

generators, 10,000 blankets, 80,000 tarps and 30,000 rolls of plastic sheeting are stockpiled to serve the neediest.

On the island of St. John, recovery efforts have been in full swing and volunteers have completed three rebuild sites. As CFVI continues to assess damaged homes on the islands, the rebuild teams stay very busy repairing and rebuilding home interiors and roofs. Additionally, cleaning and clearing, sanitation and debris removal continue as the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria still weigh heavily on the communities. I firmly believe my volunteer service and compassionate donation enhanced the overall well-being of all USVI people without exception.

Love All Means All.

I, Whitley Williams, 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.