

HONORABLE MENTION

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Courage has been defined as strength in the face of adversity. In other words, courage is generally considered to be the belief in a better life and the possibility of change, no matter how hopeless, thankless, or lonely this faith seems. Courage can be the burning desire to keep working towards goals, even when feeling lost, stuck, or worthless. I call this the courage to dream.

It is the courage I had to find when I applied to Stanford University last year. I had to believe in my dream, even though my high school's graduates rarely leave the Midwest for college. Through each painstaking essay revision, I had to find the courage to believe that I was not a fool to work so hard for such a far-fetched dream. I believe that it took courage to dream that I could accomplish anything, if only I worked hard enough.

Stanford rejected me. I spent three years of my life working for the grades and scores that would allow me to realize my goal. Nevertheless, my diligence, motivation, and passion resulted in abject failure. This was a crushing, heartbreaking feeling. After all, courage was my belief in a dream, but now my dream was lost. Countless questions began floating through my mind. How could I move on from this wasted effort? What if every other college I applied to rejected me? How could I find something new to fight for?

From this suffocating self-doubt, I realized that though it may take courage to believe in a dream, it takes infinitely more to find a new dream. After failing or falling short, many people fear holding another dream so tightly. No one wants to feel that hopeless emotion again, and many simply give up on pursuing their goals. They surrender their belief in the possibility for change. And who can blame them? I was afraid of finding a new dream after Stanford rejected me.

People often forget that it is not a goal they need to believe in, but themselves. The world is constantly changing due to technological advances, political strife, and social turmoil. Therefore, we must always be ready to build new dreams from the remains of the old. Now I know that my years of work were not wasted. Instead, it is my responsibility to put everything I learned to good use. Even when we lose our dreams, we must rewrite our futures by searching for the courage we need to take each step forward.

It takes courage to dream. We must be brave even when we risk total failure, so that we can hold on to what we truly care about. This is no simple task. It can be terrifying to risk falling short of a goal, failing, or wasting your effort. Nevertheless, people find this courage every day. However, in this fast-paced, interconnected society we must learn to keep fighting even after we've failed. After all, it takes courage to dream, but it takes still more courage to keep dreaming of new possibilities.