

# “Reaching your Dreams by Choosing Optimism”

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I remember the exact moment I realized my hope was gone. It sputtered for a moment like a flame, and then fell, heavy and as dull as a brick. Shattered. My head buzzed with radio static, and I felt lost. How could I manage to change the station to one of optimism when everything around me seemed without hope? A country pitted against itself, isolation turned to insanity, hatred to violence. When I screwed my eyes shut, one question remained: *How can hope prevail?* Of course, that was all before I discovered that the power that optimism holds is within me.

It's hard to realize you have a positive voice when it's drowned out by the pessimism around you. In a world that relies on the media to confirm your voice or validity, any individual that doesn't lay in their cookie cutter coffin is pushed forcefully from the spotlight.

Piece by piece, this dawned on me. Kindergarten: I idolized my role models of picture perfect Disney princesses and storybook characters who fostered a parasite of stereotypes to grow in my mind. Fourth grade: a lesson was taught about the founder of our small town in which he was the savior of the native peoples who lived here. In reality, it is a darker history of stolen land and stolen humanity. Fifth grade: I turned my back when a classmate bullied my companions to tears: I didn't want to understand the situation, and I didn't want to intervene. 8th grade: I was called a slur by a student younger than me, and I didn't say anything. 10th grade: amidst a global pandemic and civil rights movement, I've realized: there's no time for silent pessimism.

Breaking the silence and using my voice to incite positivity was a struggle. Throughout elementary school, I remember being handed a piece of paper and instructed to write about how I would change the world to make it a better place. I would stare at those blank lines in confusion. In what world could I single handedly make life better? I would languidly hand back a paper with some one-sentence action-item scribbled on it, not fully believing myself. Through that cycle of self-doubt, I never realized what power my positivity held. It never occurred to me that I could achieve my dreams through the optimistic sensation that results from using my voice and breaking the silence.

The instant this idea was planted in my head, everything I did became a battle cry. This form of optimism was different than the smile I used to plaster my face with. It had buds of hope that bloomed like the first trees of spring. It grew solutions, innovation and compassion. While a deadly virus loomed outside my door, I was infected with glorious change.

This paradigm shift illuminated a clear path towards positivity. When I finally realized that optimism was the key to set my dreams of a better world in motion, I started to become proactive. One evening, I sat down to scroll through social media. I came across a shockingly harmful post a classmate of mine made. However, I didn't watch in despair and give up. Instead, I reached out to my school to see what could be done. By taking an uncomfortable situation that seemed beyond hope, I was able to visualize a better future growing out of this one horrible moment. Instead of dwelling on the pessimism I felt towards this situation, I worked with my administrator and a student partner, and was able to foster positive thinking that pushed us towards the future. Instead of stifling my dreams with pessimistic apathy, I became proactive and was able to spread my optimism to others as well.

Through the difficult situations I've experienced, I'm able to appreciate the strength I can wield with positivity. Instead of the droning static of pessimism I experienced prior to realizing my worth, I now hold a chorus of solutions and strength. These values are the fortifications that

allow my optimism to grow. The instant I realized my dreams are achievable through the optimism I regard them with, they began to come true.

Optimism is not a grand concept. My form of optimism is, simply, the ability to imagine a better situation than I was in previously. It's the ability to act upon my empathy for others. It's the capacity to have hope set in store for the future. When the flame of hope sputters out and leaves you in silent darkness, there is always a match of positivity ready to be lit. That flame spreads to your peers, your family, and eventually, the world. The metamorphosis of positivity transforming into optimism will create a chain reaction that makes dreams possible.