

**Keira Elizabeth Bixler**  
*Green Acres Middle School, Visalia, CA*

*“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet.  
Only through experience of trial and suffering  
can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared,  
ambition inspired, and success achieved.”*  
– *Helen Keller, blind and deaf American author and educator*  
*(1880-1968)*

### **Change for the Better**

Trial and suffering have become the basis for the most influential philosophical theories of today. With each new struggle, we grow and are strengthened by the very things that were once weakening.

With every new trouble we face, the value we place in our lives and the lessons we are taught build our character. This can be compared to putting together a puzzle. After grueling over the intricate patterns for countless hours, the final results will suddenly appear and all the prior effort will not only make sense but be appreciated.

Many influential lives have served as visionaries towards creating a brighter future through gaining wisdom and strength from our adversities. One of these lives was that of Mohandas Gandhi. Gandhi was a lead activist for the people of India during their road to independence. As he and his people suffered, Gandhi was able to see the full picture of a brighter future. He led in several hunger strikes and other peaceful protests that shook the world gently. He taught people how to turn trials into triumphs, no matter the situation. Gandhi was eventually assassinated for his courageous acts. However, his legacy lives on as people learn to understand how their struggles can create a more beautiful, complete masterpiece that they never could have anticipated.

Alexander Hamilton has become another inspiration to mankind. His story is that of an orphan, an immigrant who dreamed of becoming something unforeseen. As he pushed towards the top, his life would have a sudden, dramatic change and all his work would crumble to ruins. However, he continued to rebuild and become a vibrant part of American history by letting his defeats become lessons that only made him stronger. He realized that each adversity he faced became a missing piece in the puzzle of his success.

Another name, less recognized by the public is Eva Khor. Eva and her twin suffered in unimaginable conditions during the Holocaust. They were both experimented on by the Nazi's and Eva's sister later died from the tests that were run. Eva struggled throughout her life to move on from her past and start over. However, as she grew older, she still could not forget the traumatic times she had endured. Eva decided to perform an extraordinary act. She wrote a letter of forgiveness to the Nazis that had tortured her. Many shunned her for her actions. However, she began to realize that she could only find peace when she accepted her past and

how it made her into the person that she had become. The letter was the missing piece in her puzzle.

All three of these extraordinary people and all they have overcome represent the importance of learning from adversities. Each experience these individuals endured became a small piece towards creating the amazing people they became. Without their downfalls, they would not have become successful.

From a young age, I was bullied. My arms were hit until they turned black and blue and I ate my lunch alone in the office. I had even been told that it would have been better if I was never born. Every day after school, I would trek back to my mother's car, and desperately tried to stop the tears from streaming down my face. I was too proud, they could never see me cry. Each time they would tear me down, I became stronger and more aware of other people's battles.

Eventually, I decided to not be the victim. I realized that the only way to recover and to stop this from happening to others was to become a representative. Through my experience, I became a voice for children everywhere. I finally understood I could only grow from this experience by helping others. The courage I gained from my opportunities allowed me to realize that I could be happy elsewhere. This year, I moved schools and have found a new different life where I am respected and have grown in my self-worth. However, I do not regret my past, for it made me the person I am today.

The philosophy of becoming a better person through struggles can be best expressed through the words of those that have truly risen to the top. The eloquent verses of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr portray exactly that, he poetically stated, "Change does not roll on the wheels of inevitability but comes through continuous struggle." His words reason that the road to a brighter future can never be relied upon. One must go through extreme trials in order to reach their final destination. Henry Ward Beecher, another bright, courageous mind contemplated that, "One's best success comes after their greatest disappointments." Beecher had learned that when someone is on the verge of defeat, they are closer to their dreams than ever before. The puzzle pieces have begun to align and are ready to help them become strong, charismatic people. Despite both of these eloquent statements, I believe that Philip Emeagwali put it best when he said, "The hardships that I encountered in the past will help me succeed in the future." This simple phrase proves the point that hardships are lessons and experiences that make us more aware and wise.

If people could understand how their defeats and struggles will help them towards later triumphs, the world would greatly benefit. Everyone would become able to help others overcome the experiences that they have previously endured. So, never forget the value of respecting every puzzle piece, no matter how impossible it may seem.