

For my final project, I chose to study perspective and the importance of gratitude because both themes are very prevalent in my life. My exploration began with the realization of what exactly made my views on life change. I studied my personal experiences and how my past has changed my present and will continue to change my outlook on life in the future. The exploration of changing perspectives on both a macro and micro scale led me to further explore my personal beliefs and the science behind gratitude.

No one ever expects it to happen to them. It's always the girl from the other school, or the family from the town over. There are certain scenarios that are so seemingly impossible that don't even make sense to think about. There are certain things that you can't possibly prepare for.

Time does not heal all wounds; some wounds never heal. Time simply allows you to grow and mature and look at that wound differently. In March of 2014, one of the most important people in my life passed away. The day I found out that my father died was and will always be the most shocking and destroying day of my life. To have my mother, such an influential and exceedingly important person in life, tell me that my dad was a completely life changing moment. It was absolutely heart wrenching to receive such news and simultaneously be looking at the face of someone who just lost the love of her life. Nothing can surpass the feeling of immense devastation I felt in that moment.

I arrived at school after spending the night at a friend's house. I saw my mom standing on the front steps with the headmaster. I immediately started to panic as I ran through a mental list of all the things I could be in trouble for. As I timidly stepped out of the car, she told me to grab my things and follow her. We got in the car and I waited for her to speak, anticipating a punishment. Instead, she looked at me with somber eyes and told me that Daddy had died. I was confounded, stunned, and bemused. This was a sick joke, I just knew it. There was no way that my father, such an incredibly influential and strong person in my life, was gone. He was invincible. I stared into her eyes with disbelief as it started to become real. In that moment, I had no control over anything. I had no control over my emotions, and it was clear that I had no control over what was happening around me. I felt useless, clueless and weak.

I think I cried myself dry that day. I used up any tears I had, and that's why it's difficult for me to get emotional today. I believe that I cannot get emotional over most things because nothing will ever compare to the heartbreak I felt in that moment.

We went home to where my mom's best friend was waiting for us with open arms and comfort food. I chose to sleep, hoping that I would wake up and it would just be a dream but the day continued and time went by painstakingly slowly. I don't remember going to sleep that night, though I'm sure I slept alongside my mother and sister. The following day was filled with a mass of visitors who carried heavy hearts and solemn faces. The day passed just like the previous one; arduously slow. Everything blended together into an amalgamation of sadness and confusion. More visitors came to see us and give us their condolences. I became annoyed at those who seemed to be trying to prove their love for my father. *Yes I know you're sad, but I swear I'm sadder.*

As the influx of visitors only increased, I began to realize that I needed the people who were coming through our door every minute. I needed their support because I couldn't go through this alone. I began to accept that people just wanted to help my family get through this tough time.

Some days, I didn't like it when people came. All they did was pass on their sorrow, and it made the perpetually raw moment I felt trapped in all the more grueling and onerous. But other

days, family and loved ones that had been very present in mine and my father's lives visited. With them they brought their stories and memories of my dad. I began to thrive off of these stories, and soon realized how important my own memories of my father were.

We were the perfect duo. Besides the fact that he towered over me with immense strength and was sometimes intimidating, I looked just like him. I had his freckles, his eyelashes, and we shared an easygoing and positive outlook on life. He was never lazy, and often worked himself too hard. We shared the same strong work ethic and willingness to succeed. Not only was my father inspiring, but my parent's marriage was as well. Whether they were deciding where to go to dinner or planning a vacation, their love for each other was evident. Growing up around people who were so in love made me think of the future and how I wanted a relationship as great as the one my parents had. I'm lucky to have grown up with a father who never sat on the sidelines. He was always present and consistently involved. From driving me to soccer practice to shadowing me for the day in school, everything he did was full of enthusiasm. Not only was he always encouraging me to try new things, but he also took immense pride in my successes. I realize now that having such a strong father figure in my life has helped me become the person I am today, and I will continue to possess the values that he instilled in me.

Time does not heal all wounds; some wounds never heal, but time did let me and my family gain a new perspective on life and everything around us. I personally became much more aware of the things I take for granted. I realized that time is limited and I should make the most out of every minute I have with someone. I also realized how great my life is, and how lucky I am to have had such an amazing father. With this newfound realization of gratitude and respect, I began to look at things differently. Instead of having a negative outlook on life and focusing on the idea of inevitable death, I chose to look at life as an opportunity to grow and be happy. My mother's realizations after her husband's death all related to being grateful for what she had and still has, "I am so blessed to have had 30 years with my soul mate who cherishes us to this moment, and that those 30 years were so darn fun. I am so blessed to have the two of you as my foundation, and that I have fortitude beyond what I thought I did." My mother, an astoundingly strong role model, has taught me that it is important to not focus wholly on the rawness of the present, but also to cherish and be grateful for the memories of the past and the time you did have.

Whenever I think about the loss of my father, I immediately revert my thoughts to the amazing memories I have with him. It took a while to get to this point, but I came to realize that if you focus too much on the negatives of the present, it can begin to alter your memories of the past. This is why it is important to show gratitude to try to grow from negativity. If you suffer a loss or tragedy and never allow or encourage yourself to try to move on, your positive memories will be affected.

We all experience events that lend us a new perspective. The events that do so usually involve sudden change, unexpected hardship, or personal loss. Whether these occurrences are positive or negative, fortunate or tragic, we begin to look at life differently. When people gain perspective on life or a new outlook on living, they have the option of making a positive change in their mindset, or to live life negatively. It is this choice that results in one's quality of life. What gives us perspective? What gives us gratitude? I found that while significant events or changes can make our perspective on life change, you can gain perspective when you realize our significance compared to the rest of the universe. When thinking about an individual's role in relation to everything else in space, it is humbling and grounding.

A group of scientists at the University of Hawaii estimated the number of individual grains of sand that cover all of the beaches of the world. This number was then compared to an estimate of the number of stars in the entire universe. While both numbers are inconceivably large, there are multiple stars for every grain of sand. There are at least 100 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy alone. Scientists calculate that there are at least 100 billion other galaxies in the universe. To put even more perspective on how insignificant the size of one human is, the sun makes up 99.8% of our solar system. If the sun were the size of an average front door, the earth would be the size of a nickel. It is because of these facts about our insignificance that often allow people to gain perspective on life and realize the grandeur of our planet from far away.

For more than four decades, astronauts have been telling us the tremendously grand change of perspective they feel when they first see earth from space. This cognitive shift in awareness is known as "The Overview Effect." Astronauts report the phenomenon during spaceflight, often while viewing the Earth from orbit. David Beaver is the co-founder of the Overview Institute, a blog dedicated to information and news on this topic. Beaver explained it as, "[The Overview Effect is] simply the sudden recognition that we live on a planet and all the implications that it brings to life on earth." Space theorist and author Frank White coined the phrase during a cross-country flight in the late 1970's. He looked out the window of the plane, "Looking down at the planet the thought came to me. Anyone living in a space settlement, living on the moon, would always have an overview. They would see things that we know, but we don't experience, which is that the earth is one system, we're all apart of that system, and that there is a certain unity and coherence to it all. I immediately called it the Overview Effect." The Overview Effect has since been used often to describe the feelings of astronauts as they see the earth from space. In 1968, Apollo 8 was the first flight to successfully leave earth's orbit, orbit the moon and return home safely. They were also the first crew to directly see the far side of the moon and the earth as a whole. While the primary goal of the mission was to gain better knowledge of the moon, they soon realized that spaceflight provided numerous sights that were just as absorbing. One Apollo 8 astronaut stated, "When we originally went to the moon, our total focus was on the moon, we weren't thinking about looking back on the earth. But now that we've done it, that may well have been the most important reason we went." Philosopher and author David Loy wrote about the mission and claimed, "I think the focus had been, we're going to the stars, we're going to the other planets, and suddenly we look back at ourselves and it seems to imply a new kind of self-awareness." The general opinion of the astronauts and people viewing the footage on earth was that no one expected the sight to have such an impact on them. Loy claimed "I don't think any of us had any expectations about how it would give us such a different perspective." This idea soon became the primary reason for astronaut's shift in perspective on life on earth. The Overview Effect allows people to appreciate and be humbled by the grandness of their planet and to appreciate the true value of it.

It is crucial to remember that while one person on Earth is nothing at all compared to our visible universe, we as individuals are still important. We each play a role that cannot be matched or copied. While we have the role to keep both ourselves, and our earth happy and healthy, we also play roles in the lives of people around us. Family members, friends, work associates, business partners, cheerful faces, kind strangers; Every role that a human can play is important. These relationships make up our entire lives and collections of memories. While one individual may not affect the greater universe, that same individual may be someone else's entire world.

There are many ways one can gain a new perspective on life. Often times, people are forced to adapt to a sudden change that forces them to view things differently. Other times, people focus on the larger scale and realize the humbleness and beauty of earth. A new perspective often coincides with a new idea or appreciation for what one is grateful for. This newfound gratefulness is important in realizing one's values and priorities in life. Gratitude and perspective go hand in hand. Gratitude may come after one changes their perspective, and perspective may come with the realization of gratitude. It is easy to get caught up in issues that are really only relevant at the moment. To know our role on Earth compared to our size in the universe should ground us and help clarify what issues are truly important. While being humble and realizing the significance of our problems is important, it is also vital to focus on our present and the realization that our small earth is our big everything. With the realization of the importance of everything on this earth comes the idea that you should be grateful for the life that you have and the people you are surrounded by.

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