

## "WALK A MILE IN MY SHOES"

JaLissa

First Place winner age 13-14

To walk a mile in my shoes is to live a life of pain, struggle and triumph. The pain started when my ancestors were taken from their homeland Africa and brought to America by force. They were forced into slavery. Forced to work under the harshest of conditions. They had no rights and were treated as animals. They were lynched, beaten, and raped. They fought for their freedom in the civil war. Yet, the question remains were they truly free.

For many years' blacks (Negroes, Coloreds, African American, and whatever else we might have been called) have been judged solely on the color of our skin and not for who we truly are. White's are not our only judges. I believe that we are our harshest judges. In my community you often hear about lighter complexion and straight haired black people being compared to darker complexion and curly thick haired people. It is still believed by some black people that if you are of a lighter complexion then you are superior to the darker complexion.

There are many such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X to name a few who tried to show blacks as a whole that it is okay to be proud of whatever skin we are in. It is still difficult to be a black person today. As black people, we are not always seen as intelligent, hardworking individuals. It is assumed that the majority of us are drug addicted, criminals, and lazy. This is assumed even amongst my peers at school. I cannot begin to count the times I have had to say that crime and drugs are in every community. I often wish the media would be a bit wiser on how they communicate a story. I see it all the time, how they make it sound like every black teen is in a gang, without values, and going nowhere in life. I'm an intelligent teenager who happens to be a black female. I love my complexion as well as my hair and I wouldn't change being me if my life depended on it. I wear my skin color like a super hero's wear their capes. I love music, basketball, dancing, and I LOVE my family!! Yes, I'm definitely going somewhere; I haven't quite made up my mind yet where. However, I still have a little time: I'm only a freshman at the Boston Latin School.

I'm thankful for the people of my past who made it easier for me to feel this way. I don't just mean those people who the majority of the world have heard of. I want to thank the silent hero's like parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles who sacrificed so that my generation could accomplish what was so difficult for them to accomplish. I appreciate the stories that have been passed down from women like my great grandmother who will ninety-five and my great aunt who is eighty-five. I'm proud to attend Boston Latin School knowing that I will walk away from school with a great education as well as future to attend a college of my choice. Many of my ancestors were not allowed this opportunity.

On November 4, 2008 I realized why my family is constantly repeating that I must do better than my best. That each of them has extremely high expectations of me. I have heard all of my life that if I'm at my best then I can accomplish my heart's desires. Barack Obama was elected the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. My great grandmother, my great aunt, my grandparents, my parents, sister, aunts, uncles and cousins all voted for Barack Obama. We watched the results as a family. When it was announced that he was the President-Elect, we all shouted for joy. Our phone didn't stop ringing for almost an hour. Family members from as far away as California, Kansas City and Alabama were calling Boston.

Yes, it was repeated once again "that if you are at your best then you can accomplish your heart's desires". It is my heart's desire to walk proudly in the body that God has blessed me with, my beautiful honey brown complexion, thick hair and all. This is what it's like to walk a mile in my shoes.