Third Place, Rachel Gargan

Inevitability of Setbacks, Impossibility of Failure

 Failure is not typically something that one strives for. No one sets out on a project with the intent of failure. Failure is generally something to be avoided at all costs. However, it is that very fear of failure that keeps dreams from becoming reality. Failure is a part of life and it can’t be avoided. There’s bound to be a point in time where things don’t turn out the way they were expected. Failure is all around us. One might argue that the very existence of setbacks such as these indicate that failure is very much possible and often a probable outcome. However, none of these are true failures. True failures are when one stops trying and allows the fear of failure to prevent them from advancing. True failures are impossible as long as one person is alive to fight for their cause and this can only be achieved by rejecting the fear of failure and uniting together despite this fear.

 When Susan B. Anthony delivered her speech, declaring, “There is just one thing that makes your dream impossible: the fear of failure.” She was delivering a call to action, spurring those around her to heed her words and rebel against the system that barred women from their Constitutional rights as citizens of the United States. Her words, “Failure is impossible,” became the driving force of which the women’s suffrage movement revolved around. It was because of Susan B. Anthony’s leadership that the women’s suffrage movement was as successful as it was. Sadly, Susan B. Anthony died not too long after this speech was given; she never got to see her dream of the 19th Amendment become a reality. Although she never got to see her life’s work, it’s clear that it was her work that was integral to the successful passing of the Amendment not long after. Even her death did not mean failure because it inspired others to continue this goal. Ultimate failure does not end with death, nor does it end with a retreat or a defeat or any other setbacks. As long as one person continues on the goal, then it never truly fails.

There have been plenty of other injustices that have needed change throughout the history of the United States. Slavery, child labor, segregation, and sexism are all examples of oppressive institutions that needed reform. All of these movements have experienced setbacks in one way or another. In 1892, when labor unions were still relatively new, Carnegie steel locked out its workers in an effort to force them to accept a pay cut. When the workers resisted in the Homestead Strike of 1892, the militia was sent to aid the wealthy owners and put down the strike. Other strikes such as the Pullman Strike of 1894 and the Haymarket Affair of 1886 were other protests that ended in defeat. However, these strikes never truly failed, they only suffered through numerous obstacles. The labor union movement was successful because of the worker’s willingness to band together and continue fighting. Although these individual strikers likely did not see triumph in their lifetime, they did not fail. Their dreams of reform would slowly be achieved through the hard work of laborers throughout the nation and would span decades.

We see evidence of the fight to improve the lives of others in this nation even today. The issue of gun control is one of the most pressing ones in the United States. The lack of existence of strong gun control laws make going to school a danger to citizens in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. The fear is present in nearly every school. Fire alarms are watched with wary eyes before abiding by the rules, exits are noted in case of a hasty emergency, and X-rays are implemented in schools. Since the shooting at Columbine in 1999, there have been over 200 school shootings in the United States with over 300 killed and around 485 injured. Ever since then, there have been hundreds of survivors and grieving parents who have dedicated their lives to fighting for gun control in order to ensure that no one else would have to suffer as they did. However, in the years that have followed these mass shootings, laws on gun control remain a controversial debate. While some states have passed tighter gun restrictions, nationally, restrictions on guns have been loosened. These hindrances are disheartening but aren’t failures. Although it seems impossible, failure is impossible as long as someone makes their voice heard and speaks out against the injustices of the world. If all who fight for the protection of their children and friends and all types of people stand up and tirelessly work for their beliefs, there will someday be victory.

Messing up is unavoidable. Anyone who says that they’ve never failed at something in their life is most likely lying. However, with big movements, projects, aspirations, and goals, there is no true failure as long as someone remains to make their voice heard. As long as one sole person fights for their cause, their movement is still alive. Throughout history, there have been triumphs and defeats. That will never change. However, what can change is attitude. One must reject the fear of failure and forge ahead in spite of that fear to further their goal. Once that is achieved, their vision will live on in others, even if it’s just a memory and failure will truly be impossible.

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