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Hidden Resilience

Poet Joy Harjo believes that true meaning begins with examining the ordinary things in everyday life. People may not gain valuable insight even from global travel if they do not look closely. This idea reminds me that I can only understand nature when I take time to observe it. When I pay close attention to the natural world around me, I have learned a powerful lesson of resilience.

I first learned this lesson during my first year in Las Cruces, NM. When the COVID-19 lockdown started, my family and I went to the Organ Mountains in search of peace in nature. As we were driving, I saw bright splotches of yellow spread across the distant hills, as if nature had breathed life into the land. When we got closer, the desert revealed its secret, poppy flowers stretching and sprawling across the ground like waves of yellow paint. Their small, delicate petals glowed a vibrant orange against the sand and jagged rocks. They swayed in the warm breeze, fragile yet steady beneath the beaming sun. I was amazed that something so gentle and brilliant could bloom in such a hot, dry, and unforgiving desert. In that moment, nature filled me with awe and taught me that resilience does not always appear as strength or toughness. Sometimes, it shows itself quietly, patiently, and softly.

Years later, I revisited this lesson when my I-Ready test score went down. The number made my stomach sink and left me frustrated and doubtful. To clear my mind, I went for a walk with my mom along a desert trail near my house on that early winter afternoon. The air felt cold as the wind moved past me. I looked down and noticed tiny patches of green pushing through the dry soil. Their little leaves stood in the wind, alive and surviving in the open air. In that moment, I understood that, like those plants, I could make small steps day by day and continue growing even when times were tough.

Moments like these helped me understand what environmental writer Aldo Leopold meant by saying that ignorance begins when we look at an animal or plant and ask only, "What good is it?" It is easy to overlook life in the desert when it is judged only by its usefulness. Leopold's message helped me recognize that life has meaning and an intrinsic value even when it serves no clear purpose. Seen from this way, the desert became more than a landscape. It became a lesson that gives me strength.

Harjo's reminder and Leopold's ideas inspired me to see the world with closer attention and greater appreciation. The desert showed me resilience through a small flower blooming or a fragile plant pushing forward in dry soil. Paying attention and appreciating these hidden signs helped me to learn that it takes time to grow and that resilience will eventually enable me to thrive and flourish.