

*Student's Name Withheld*

*First Place*

*Junior Division*

## **THE LAWS OF LIFE**

Last year, I went to summer camp with a bunch of my friends, and I learned the most valuable lesson I think I have ever learned. That lesson: BE YOURSELF. It's the single most important rule in life. Being yourself is so important, that I believe if everyone in the world was always themselves, never did anything to prove something to others, and stood up for what they believed in, there would be a lot less teen suicides and people would have a much healthier self-image. It is only when we are completely ourselves that we can be totally comfortable in our surroundings and make the most of life.

I have learned a lot through my experience last summer, and people say that you learn the most from the mistakes you've made. He was tall, with short, dark hair, a little chubby, and he had the cutest dimple in his chin. He was always laughing, and just hearing him would make you want to join in. All the guys admired him and the girls wanted him. Everyone loved him, he was just the kind of guy that everyone wanted to be around. I was so excited when I found that he had a crush on me, I forgot about the most important person in my life: me. All I wanted to do was show him that I was cool, and for him to really like me, to the point that I forgot all about ME. I disregarded MY feelings, and I lived my life according to how I thought he would want me to.

I started going out with him the night I met him. Normally, this would be moving too fast for me, but at that point, I didn't care. I just wanted him to accept me. When he sang a song that he had written about me, it only made matters worse. It gave me an image of who he saw me as, and I felt I needed to keep up that image, else he would think less of me. I was so flattered that someone like him would fall for ME, and I didn't want to lose that feeling. After a while, I realized that I couldn't keep on living totally for someone else, not even being able to be comfortable with

myself, always wondering if I was going to do something wrong. Even three months later, it was hard for me to break up with him, just because I was still hung up on the fact that he might not think that I was the person he wanted me to be.

Everyone has this image, this person in themselves that they strive to be. Sometimes, it may just be to be a better person, but for some people, it could be to be a totally different person with a completely clashing personality. Maybe they got this picture from a movie star, or maybe even someone from school. But what is wrong with our society today, that we have molded a form of the perfect person, and have shown people what they should be like? We're losing the sense of individuality and creativity. Everyone has the right to be their own person, and should not have to change anything about their personality to try to fit in, or to have people accept them. You must always strive to be yourself, because only then will you be truly happy.

Now I am in a great relationship with a great guy and when I look back, I realize that the only difference between these two relationships is that I have respect for *myself*, not just for him now, and he means a lot more to me than just some "Fabio" guy that I want to impress. Since the summer, I have made a vow to myself that I will never live for anybody else, and if I do, it will be because I love them, not because I want them to accept me. My advice to other teens going through similar ordeals: never try to be someone you're not, in an attempt to impress others. You'll only end up regretting it and wishing that you could have showed them who you truly are and not just who you thought they would want you to be. Being yourself truly is the most important law of life. If you're not being true to yourself, what are you living for? Don't live your life hoping to impress people. If people don't accept you for who you are, count it as their loss and who knows, you may find out that they're just trying to impress someone.