

A Lasting Inheritance  
SLCC Community Writing Center  
Salt Lake Teens Write Anthology | Mentor Feature  
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As I sat on the stairs, cheeks pressed against the cool rails, my sixteen-year-old self could only hear what my mother was saying. But I wasn't really listening. It was a school night, and my teenage tantrums were hardly a new or moving experience for her. She had much to do. I can't even remember what I was angry about or how the conversation went, but she gave me a gift that night. She still has no idea.

That night before leaving the room, she swooped down to pick up a laundry basket full of dirty clothes. As she stood up, she sighed loudly and then said my name so I could understand how thin her patience had become. She stopped and looked me in the eyes, leaned in a bit and then whispered, "Sometimes you have to do things that you don't want to do."

And with those twelve simple words, there it was. My entire inheritance. Every valuable heirloom and antique—my birthright. That precious piece of advice carried a narrative so rich that at sixteen it was beyond my comprehension. Much like a family jewel, passed from one generation to the next, my wealth had been carefully sealed in a vault of all the maternal experiences that preceded my short life. I had taken it at face value but have held on to it ever since.

I now think of those words almost every day. They propel me into what I want to be, where I want to go, and what I want to do. When the smallest tasks seem daunting, I think about the generations of determined women before me that did many things without reservation, things they had to do because they wanted to move forward. Like how my mother finished college as a single mother with four small children, leaving them with a babysitter at night so she could work a second or third job. Or how my grandmother was employed at a ranch for nearly her entire life, doing what my generation would consider "menial" work. A month's pay could hardly cover necessities. Or how my great grandmother was denied the right to any education and never learned to read or write because she was the oldest child and was expected to help run a household.

What I passed off then as my mother's antiquated counsel was really a life lesson in what it means to not only be a woman in my family, but the world, too. That to live a life of joy means living a life of experiences that sometimes warrant the opposite. My struggles are continually challenged and my will is restored by all of the things that the women in my family didn't want to do, but did anyway, many times over.

I believe that sometimes we must do things that we don't want to do. It has become my mantra. And when my patience for life wears thin, I take a deep breath, say my own name, and whisper, "sometimes you have to do the things that you don't want to do."