

# RESERVOIRS OF STRENGTH

*Youth2Adult — Y2A — is a series of articles celebrating sailing's role in youth development for Caribbean children.*

Part of the reflective process at year's end is the opportunity to identify our strengths and weaknesses, what brought us joy and what brought us sorrow, what makes us more successful and less so. It is an opportunity to strategize on how to develop more of our aptitudes, have more of the joy, less of the sorrow in the year to come.

This column was sparked this fall while visiting the Rocky Mountain area where I lived for many years. Every time I go on a certain walk, I view a patch of pine-covered mountain that my mother-in-law walked to almost daily throughout her adult life. It is a steep, wooded hike. She died two years ago at 95. Walking and looking at the mountain gives me time to contemplate that she made this daily trek for well over 60 years. I find myself thinking, "She walked this mountain for more years than I've been on the earth." Just viewing this mountainside creates inside me a reservoir of strength. Her memory invigorates me.

I wanted to know what successful folks in the Caribbean find as their reservoir of strength. So, I asked Y2A advocates. One indicates he has a plethora of people who serve as reservoirs from which he draws, another had to build his own reservoir and the third uses concepts and aphorisms as his reservoir of strength.

As a holiday gift this month to the children of the Caribbean and an inspiration to the rest of us, let's hear from three Y2A advocates on the subject of "Reservoirs of Strength".

"To me, pooling or collecting stamina means finding inner strength and the ability to cope in the midst of any situation. It has been gleaned over the years from encouraging people who, by the way they live, have taught me.



"I was born into a family of nine children. We were not rich, in fact far from it. My mother raised us almost all on her own. When I need inspiration, the first person that comes to mind is my mother. She was a hardworking, committed, industrious, quiet but strong woman, the essence of what a mother should be. She sacrificed to make sure we had a roof over our heads, food on the table, clothes on our backs and a toy for Christmas. Extending love to everyone she came into contact with, she helped as many as she could, even when she needed help herself. Her love for family and animals was evident. She had the ability to make so much out of so little and was patient enough to make the best out of what she had. Her children came first. She is not famous but she has made her contributions to nation building by birthing and raising nine law-abiding, hardworking men and women who are contributing positively to the growth and development of society.

"When I am faced with any challenge, my strength to overcome comes from the memories of how she was able to face every challenge and overcome it. I am strengthened to love my wife and children, and to display the same morals and values to everyone with whom I come in contact.

"I am strengthened by my faith in God to which I owe a lot. There have been many times that I had to dip into the reservoir of faith in order to gain strength to help me through some very trying personal times.

"I am strengthened when I remember the bold and courageous step that my family and I took going into ministry by starting a church. When I feel like giving up, I dip into my reservoir and am strengthened by the unwavering support that I received and still receive from my wife and three children, extended family and church family. They are truly the wind beneath my wings.

"Then there is my commitment to youth development through the art of sailing. This can be very challenging and tiresome at times but yet very refreshing, joyful and

rewarding. There were times when I contemplated retirement. It was during those times that I had to dip into my reservoir and remember the smiling faces, the laughter and fun, the joy and pride of the accomplishment watching and being a part of children blossoming into sailors and responsible young men and ladies.

"All of these dynamics make up the reservoirs from which I get inspiration, that inner strength to wake up in the mornings, get out of bed with a smile on my face and with joy in my heart, and do it over and over again."

— Melvin Higgins, Harbour Island, Bahamas

"I was only 24 when I found out I was going to become a father. Young, full of energy but nowhere near the maturity level needed to be an outstanding father figure, my pregnant girlfriend and I soon realized how different we and our families were. Our eyes were suddenly opened to these differences. I could have taken the easy route and simply walked away because she reassured me that my first-born was going to be completely taken care of. I didn't doubt her whatsoever. But, I decided that this event was to be used as a catalyst in my life. Even though circumstances were not ideal, I pushed myself to make my main focus being there for my first-born and being a father figure in his life. It was a fight that increased my maturity and drive, and helped me break through barriers that were holding me back.



"Not every day was fun filled. I learned to take defeats quietly, analyzed situations deeply so my next move was effective and came to understand my long-term aim instead of instant gratification. Despite being treated unfairly, one should never wish negative upon another, and avoid judging and persecuting.

"As I have recently welcomed my second son from another relationship, I now have a firm grasp on true success. It is not financial security and having material things. It is giving the next generation the chance they deserve no matter what the circumstance.

"These two young men will always be my reservoir of strength."

— Nicholas George, Grenada

"I have a motivational saying I give to myself every time things are looking really low and I think I can't make it: 'If things are that bad and I am at my lowest point then I have to keep pushing because I can then only go up from here. If, in fact, I can go lower then it was not that bad to begin with.' I use this at work on certain projects when things are looking down for the business and when things are not going right in my personal life.

"When competing I also use a few other things to stay motivated or for 'pooling stamina'. When I'm racing boats or bikes and the pain is getting too much, to the point where I want to give up, I think about the less fortunate — the person in a wheelchair who would give anything to be where I am at, the person sick in the hospital looking out the window at me passing by, even the person who is not financially as fortunate as myself to be able to be competing at the level that I am. I use these things plus saying to myself the pain is only temporary and I try like hell to push through.

"These things have helped me to never give up on my goals, and have helped me to get where I am so far."

— Ashley Rhodes, Antigua

Happy holidays and here's to your best year yet — the one just ahead!

*Ellen Birrell attributes her opportunity to cruise the Caribbean aboard S/V Boldly Go to life skills built in childhood. Believing swimming and sailing are essentials for island youth, she supports grass roots and competitive junior sailing and serves as chair of sailing development for Caribbean Sailing Association (<http://caribbean-sailing.com/sailing-development/the-future-of-caribbean-sailing>).*



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