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News Release

For Immediate Release: May 10, 2021

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KCSW announces winners of the 2021 Women's History Essay Contest

LĪHU'E – The Kaua'i Committee on the Status of Women (KCSW) has awarded Julia Kailani Barzilai, Jeslieann Pavao, and Chloe Inouye as the winners of the 2021 Women's History Essay Contest.

Barzilai, a sophomore at Island School, is the first-place winner of the contest. In her essay, she describes women as the backbone of society, and highlights her mom and great-grandmother for their strength and perseverance.

"I wrote this essay as an opportunity to celebrate the women in my life as well as all women around the world," said Barzilai. "I hope the essay contributes to the respect women receive every day."

In celebration of Women's History Month, the committee invited high school students to write a one-page essay about a woman who has inspired them. Winners were selected by members of the KCSW and received a cash prize.

"Julia's essay spoke to the basic core of what the Status of Women are all about. Jeslieann honored the Princess' legacy and Chloe reflected on women's past and present battle for equality," said Chair Regina Carvalho. "We hope you will be as moved and inspired as we were on these young women's thought-provoking insight."

Pavao, a senior attending Kamehameha Schools at Kapālama, placed second in the contest. In her entry, she writes a poem of great appreciation for Bernice Pauahi Bishop, honoring the life she lived, the impacts she has made, and the legacy she leaves behind.

“As a pua of Pauahi, I have explored and studied the admirable heart of Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop and adored her ability to serve our lāhui with dignity and pride,” Pavao said. “I will forever be grateful for the things my princess has provided me with. E ola ‘o Kalani, e Pauahi lani nui!”

Inouye, a freshman at Island School, placed third. Her essay reflects on the past and the fight for women’s rights that still lives on today. She highlights Abigail Adams, one of the first advocates of women’s rights, for her bravery and voice to stand up for women and how she has inspired her to be part of the change.

“My essay was written in honor of all the powerful women throughout history that have inspired us today. Thank you for the opportunity,” she said.

The three winning essays will be posted on the KCSW’s website www.kauai.gov/KCCSW.

The Committee on the Status of Women is part of the County of Kaua’i Boards and Commissions, and the Hawai’i State Commission on the Status of Women, which develops and promotes education, interactive opportunities on issues relating to women and girls, prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls and encouraging health and wellness awareness.

For more information on the Kaua’i Committee on the Status of Women, please visit www.kauai.gov/KCCSW, or contact the Office of Boards and Commissions, Ellen Ching at eching@kauai.gov or Sandra Muragin at smuragin@kauai.gov.



From left to right: Julia Barzilai, Jeslieann Pavao, Chloe Inouye

First Place Essay from Julia Barzilai

The Backbone: Under Strain, Yet Unbreakable

It is time to recognize women not for their historically perceived weakness, but for their undeniable strength. Women require strength to face gender related obstacles in the world: the gender wage gap (exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic), underrepresentation in areas of the workforce, disrespect, objectification, and crippling expectations. Despite this, women are the backbone of society. They always have been. Women who are denied a voice are just as powerful, just as inspirational, as women who break down barriers. History tends to celebrate the trail blazers, the women who visibly change the world, but every woman has a profound impact on the lives of others. Every woman, every person, touches someone else's life by simply living their own.

I come from a family of admirable women. My mom: she is brave, she is hard working, she teaches me how to love life. My maternal great-grandmother was a momentous figure in my mom's life; her name was Bertha "Bluma" Friedman Kohansov. Bertha was elegant and generous, she was clever and she was classy. She immigrated with her family to America as a young girl from "the Old Country" (Halicz, Austria-Hungary), and she was a motivational force in my mom's life, filling the void left by less caring family members. My paternal grandmother, for whom I am named, was a wonder: clever and selfless. She lived in Kovno, Lithuania when the Germans invaded during World War II. She and her brother were sent to live in a Ghetto, and she quickly coordinated her brother's escape from the nightmarish place. The two of them were some of the few who made it out alive. She was then sent to a concentration camp, where she endured indescribable horrors, and she survived. Her relentless perseverance is incredible. I look to the women of my family as role models.

Women who make it into the history books are not the only women who deserve recognition. Many women lead lives of significance by going through the motions of daily life: they are mothers, siblings, friends, daughters, wives, teachers, aunts, and mentors. The common roles which all women play shape the lives of those they support. Every woman can provide guidance and hope to the many people who look up to her. There are women stuck in unhealthy marriages, often at a financial disadvantage, who still find the courage and willpower to carry on. There are women who are overworked, and there are women who are underappreciated. These unsung heroes must be honored because without them the world would be at a standstill; the lives of everyday women are the pillars which hold up the foundation of society. It is time for womens' persistence and effort to be overlooked no longer.

Women provide society with the strength needed to push forward. They are the matriarchs of their families, and they are the support systems of their communities. This essay is a celebration of all women; it is a tribute to women whose voices are suppressed, women who are denied an education, and women who are restricted from making their own choices. This is also a call to action, a desperate reminder to look at an inspirational and impactful woman in your life and say: *thank you*.

Second Place Essay from Jeslieann Pavao

Poem of great appreciation for Bernice Pauahi Bishop

To live with love overflowing for others,
To give unselfishly to those you consider your people, your children, your sisters and brothers.
You, our Princess Pauahi, have paved an amazing way,
For your people to prosper and live extraordinary lives day to day.
We are a reflection of your kindness and love,
a love that is as great as the love from our father above.
Your vision guides us in all that we do,
We aim to live your legacy and stay true to you.
As we walk the halls upon the hill of Kapālama,
We learn daily to aloha, hō'ihi, and mālama.
These are the ways in which you lived your life,
Undoubtedly attracting a fine man who made you his wife.
Mr. Charles Reed Bishop was a perfect choice to be by your side,
For his love for you and your people he could not hide.
While one may consider living for his own needs,
Your husband chose to honor you with bountiful deeds.
Your dreams were big and had no end,
He made sure he fulfilled them and made the outcome grand.
Today we praise you and give you the honor you deserve,
A very special place in our heart for you we will always reserve.
"Mahalo e Pauahiokalani" we shall always utter with pride,
May our voices echo loudly with the coming of each tide.
Hail to you our princess for opening our eyes to see,
That we can achieve anything we want to be.
May you continue to hold our hand and lead the way,
With each step forward we will "I Mua" and never go astray.

Third Place Essay from Chloe Inouye

The Past Reflects Our Future

History. That is the thing that the world always revolves around. But what are one of the biggest problems we still face today? Well, that would be Women's rights. We did not have the right to vote until 1920, which is awfully recent. Thousands, even millions, of women have tried to change the world attempting to obtain equal rights beside men. Over time, that did happen. One of those women was Abigail Adams. She was the "First Lady" of the White House but most importantly, she was an inspiration for fighting for women's equal rights and her bravery that she stood with. She has inspired me personally because she gives me the courage to stand up for myself and gives me a voice to defend and express my thoughts and curiosities.

The most famous work of Abigail Adams, "Remember The Ladies," illustrates why men should not always be in control of everything and the cause and effect if men had universal power over women. "Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could" Abigail writes. "If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation." Riots and speeches, held by women, took place in various locations throughout the world to make a change in this biased inequality. Our government did not bother acknowledging this movement for quite a long time. Why can't women have that same power? What would be the difference if a woman had the ability to rule what men could not? Things that men say are trying to make women weak when they clearly are not. Some men mention how much stronger they are and why it is better for them to be working instead of women. Hence, why is it so wrong for women to do the same? Women should have been given the chance to have equal rights, just like men, thousands of years ago. The world has been built off men, but now it is the women's turn to take a stand and adjoin them.

Today, there is still prejudice against women. In school, work, and many other daily activities women do are silenced by the power and choices of men. For example, in school many teachers will consistently call on boys to do the "heavy lifting" if they need help, almost never calling the girls for that kind of work. Why is it fair for boys only doing the "heavy lifting"? Can't the girls do the same? Another case is if a woman is trying to find a job and there is a man who is also applying for the same position. Most of the time, companies choose the more experienced candidate. However, at other times, businesses automatically choose men over women. They think that women are less adequate for the job than men. That is one of the most inaccurate pieces of evidence that men hold against women. This is why it is harder for women to get jobs. Inequality against men and women have been very diverse for a long time. It is time to stop reliving the past and create a future where men and women have equal chances in life with no excuses that would block their path to success.

How does this relate to me? Well, when I grow older to become an adult, I want my freedom of speech and to never be silenced. Many women before me went through trial and error to make the world what it is today. I want to be a part of this change. I want to see the world evolve into a more equal and peaceful place where everyone can be heard, especially the women. I do not want to be part of a group of people doing nothing about this problem. I want to be a part of the group that alternates the worlds perspectives on women and our rights. We should all be heard fairly, not discriminated against by our gender or anything else. It is better to not make our same mistakes again, so let us create a new world with equality and peace.

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