**2023-2024 Lions International Peace Essay Grand Prize Winner**

**Yetka Yağiz Demírtas, Age 12**

**“Drawers of My Mind”**

Today I gathered all my courage for a long journey: And opened the drawers of my mind.

I started from the top drawer because the most used things are always at the top. I saw everyday topics there: What to do, study, eat, to brush teeth and many similar things. But these are not the main goals of my discovery. So, I gently closed the first drawer.

It was the second drawer's turn. I said, "let's find it this time". There resided slightly different things. What I keep as memories and symbolic items that left a mark on me. A key that my parents gave me to open the door. However, I never come home alone. Then I realized that it was actually meant to tell me that this is my home and that I am a part of this home. Then I saw the notebook my father gave me on my ninth birthday. On the first page he noted:

"My son, my pride, my dear ... I believe that you will take notes on many pages, like the ones on this notebook, and become a very important scientist. Wish you good luck, I love you. Your father".

As today's twelve years old Yekta Yağiz, I understand that my father gave me a very valuable gift; his trust.

With this understanding, I moved to the third drawer of my mind. This time I opened it with more excitement. And soon realized that it was pitch black. But black doesn't always mean darkness. I looked deeply at the very center of that blackness. I remembered how everyone is constantly telling me that "I can't do it, be careful, it's difficult". Then a glimmer of hope shining in my eyes said ... "Don't be afraid, Yekta! Dare to dream!"

I dared to see through my heart among the "actually blind" who closed their eyes to hope and imagination. I raised my head up to the sky and dreamed. As they said, I couldn't see colors, but I added a thousand colors to the rainbow in my imagination. White is not always bright, and black is not always scary. These are all misconceptions piled up in the drawers of our minds.

I didn't have a fourth drawer. We can't always find a new drawer to start over. But I can fill the empty black drawer with dreams. That's what I'm doing now. What I have done so far and my self-confidence proved that I am on the right track.

As my father's wish, I am on my way to become a scientist. This might be considered a dream for a visually impaired person. But I have the courage to make it happen.

I am a good swimmer and a good runner today. Only because I dreamed that I would succeed. Now it's time to continue to "dare to dream", without letting anyone stop me. My journey is full of hope. And it is ETERNAL.