

Senator Harry Reid
United States Capitol
Washington D.C.

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Dear students,

Thank you for asking me to relate my story.

My path began in Searchlight, Nevada, a small desert town about an hour south of Las Vegas.

Searchlight is a mining town and my dad was a miner. That's hard work and he didn't make much money, but he taught me the importance of taking pride in your job and doing it well.

When I was a boy I would accompany my dad into the mines. Down there under the ground, it didn't matter that our little house had no indoor toilet or hot water, or that my mom bought my clothes from the Sears catalog. The only thing that mattered was how well a man did his job - and my dad was one of the best miners in Nevada.

I attended a two-room elementary school. Neither of my parents finished high school but they were determined that I would. So after eighth grade I went to high school in Henderson, which was about 45 miles away. I would usually hitchhike to Henderson during the week and stay with local families, then return home on weekends.

At first I felt out of place. Today I realize that's normal for a teenager, but at the time I thought I didn't fit in because I came from a small town and my family didn't have much.

Several things happened in high school that changed my life, however.

First I met Mike O'Callaghan. He was a teacher and a great boxer ... in fact, he would have turned professional if he hadn't lost a leg in the Korean War.

Mike O'Callaghan taught me how to box. But more than that, he taught me how to stand up for myself and what I believed.

It's important for young people to have a mentor or a role model – a grownup they can look up to, who is also a friend.

Thanks to Mike, my confidence began to grow. When I was a junior in high school I decided to run for class treasurer ... and I won. This boosted my confidence even more. I often say that it was the most important election of my life.

I also met my future wife, Landra, in high school. She has been my partner and best friend, and my life could not have been the same without her.

I didn't really know what I would do after high school, but a guidance counselor helped point me in the right direction when she suggested that I should be a lawyer.

A group of local businessmen stepped forward and helped me go to college. The lesson of this is that if you have faith and work hard enough, you can find a way to pursue your dreams.

After college I went to law school in Washington D.C. I got a job as a policeman at the U.S. Capitol to support my young family – by this time, Landra and I had two children.

Going to law school and working nights was hard ... but no harder than the work my father had done in the mines. The lessons about hard work that I learned from him served me well during this part of my life.

When I finished law school I wanted to somehow repay the people in Henderson who had helped me to get an education. So I moved back and became the city attorney of Henderson. Two years later I was elected to the Nevada State Assembly, and two years after that

I won an election for lieutenant governor. My running mate was Governor Mike O'Callaghan.

I spent five years as chairman of the Nevada Gaming Commission, which regulates an industry that is so important to my state. I was determined to get rid of the criminal element once and for all. And they tried their best to get rid of me, but I stood my ground.

By 1982, Landra and I had five children ... a daughter and four sons. I decided to run for the U.S. House of Representatives, and was fortunate enough to win. Four years later I ran for the Senate, and once again I was lucky to have the support and help of many great people.

After I was elected to a third Senate term in 1998, my colleagues honored me with a position of trust ... Assistant Democratic Leader. Today I work in the United States Capitol, the same building where I once served as a police officer on the night shift. I always remember that I'm there to help the hard working people of the world – the police, the waitresses, the schoolteachers, the nurses, the factory workers, the maids at the big hotels in Las Vegas ... and the miners.

I feel blessed by the path my life has taken ... not just because of what I've accomplished, but also because of what I've learned.

From my parents I learned the importance of love and hard work.

From Mike O'Callaghan and my other teachers I gained knowledge, confidence and a sense of direction.

And from all the good people who have helped me, I learned the importance of service to others.

Every one of you will face tough times, just as I did. Try to remember that each challenge is an opportunity to learn more about yourself and discover your true character.

I am living proof that America is the greatest country in the world, because everybody has a chance to pursue their dreams. You also have that opportunity. I hope you'll make the most of it by getting

a good education, working hard, and staying focused on your goals.

Sincerely,

Harry Reid