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America was born out of adversity. Because of this early struggle a sense of perseverance was imprinted upon Americans to forge a distinctly American character comprised of a willingness to work hard through times of crisis. This character allowed America to survive unified through the many conflicts in American history. The "city on a hill" did not exist immediately upon conception; and it will never exist unless the American citizen demonstrates tenacity in both everyday acts and on the national level. "Tenacity" has a meaning that can be traced throughout American history as the guiding force of positive change.

"The Crisis" by Thomas Paine has been quoted in every history class I have ever taken: "These are the times that try men's souls..." Paine's words evoke the unimaginable hardships of the Revolutionary soldier at Valley Forge. One can almost feel the hopelessness of the Patriot cause and taste the sense of futility in a cause that seemed utterly forsaken. Yet I do not believe that this arresting first line reveals the true meaning of his essay. Paine was trying to illustrate the internal drive of the winter soldier and direct readers of his essay to share a sense of heavenly purpose in his cause. "For though the flame of liberty may sometimes cease to shine, the coal can never expire," Paine declares. This encapsulates the civic value of tenacity: through the darkest hours of American history, the light of the citizen's tenacity has shown through. The bright light from the fire of liberty has been doused more than once, but American citizens have never failed to preserve and rekindle the embers. The injustices of slavery, lack of women's suffrage, and segregation have not marred the value of American justice; they have revealed the perseverance of Americans in the face of wrong and revealed that apathy is the greatest sin the citizen can commit.

The value of tenacity has not been restricted to overcoming inequalities. Every day, first- and second-generation immigrants wake up to engage in new ventures and parents sacrifice their own leisure for their children's futures. All human beings have ambition, but only some persevere despite adversity. For the average American, adversity comes in the form of an economic downturn or personal issue. The government set up by the Framers allows Americans the ability to complain freely about any of these hardships, but it is the individual citizen who demonstrates the quality of tenacity in refusing to back down despite inconvenience, hardship, or direct defiance of his wishes.

Alice Paul, a leading women's rights leader in the twentieth century, exhibited this civic virtue. As an anomaly in a time when women were expected to settle down quickly, Alice Paul spent her young adulthood at school, performing extraordinarily well despite cultural condemnation of her efforts. After undergoing retransformation as a radical in England, she took Thomas Jefferson's motto as her own: "Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God." When she came back to America, Paul's incendiary tactics sparked outrage at her lack of "patriotism" during a time of war. Even when those fighting alongside her to achieve women's suffrage abandoned her to support President Wilson's apathetic approach to the issue of women's suffrage, she continued independently. When suffrage was finally granted to women, Paul did not retire from public life, instead penning the Equal Rights Amendment. Her motivation, whether it was personal or to achieve for the greater good, drove her to never quit, never settle for anything less than complete equality of opportunity.

All her life my mother has relentlessly pushed herself to achieve at any cost, whether it be leaving her home country or attending six years of school in a foreign place. She did not pass on this code of persistence to me upon birth; rather, it has been imprinted on me. From all accounts, in the second grade, I was a terrible reader: one of the kids who got taken out of class for tutoring. My mother took matters into her own hands through one-on-one reading sessions after school, despite the fact that English is her second language. In hindsight, I realize that her persistence in tutoring me was invaluable: there is no replacement for hard work. I can personally demonstrate tenacity by holding my local and state legislators responsible for their campaign promise. I can not only recognize social injustices, but be tenacious in my attempt to eradicate them. I can approach every aspect of life with the same single-mindedness my mother has always possessed.