



Nick Maney
age 17

Palm Beach County
Laws of Life Essay Contest

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

on RESPECT

“What I learned from Carl”

MY MIND seems always to return to the day that I met Carl. The city bus, with its mechanical hiss and its slightly dizzy-ing engine-exhaust fumes, stopped at the corner of 31st and Centennial Drive to pick up the daily commuters, a group in which I was included. Boarding the bus, I looked, seemingly in vain, for a place to sit, because I hated standing in the aisle and being subjected to the rocking of the bus. At last, I spotted a place to sit near the back. The occupant of the seat next to the one I was going for was an older man in a grey suit, well-worn dress shoes, and a black hat like I always pictured reporters wearing, but without the little press card. Sliding into the seat next to the man, I began to read the book I'd been carrying, which was Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. The man in the seat next to me introduced himself by asking if I'd read any other books like the one I was currently holding, books from the same era. When I told him I had, he seemed to become interested, and, to tell the truth, so did I.

He introduced himself as Carl. He told me about how he used to play the trumpet back in the fifties in jazz clubs. He asked if I like jazz, and I told him that I didn't really listen to it, that I liked punk music. Waiting for Carl to tell me that I should listen to “real music” I was shocked when he just smiled and nodded. He said, “you remind me of myself when I was your age. I remember how my parents hated jazz, how they couldn't see how I could listen to ‘that awful noise.’ I bet your parents say the same thing, don't they?” Now it was my turn to smile, amused with how right he was.

As the bus ferried us from one side of the city to the other, Carl and I talked about a lot of different things. The more we talked, the more amazed I became at how much the two of us really had in common, despite the age difference. Finally, Carl got off at his stop, and mine was soon after. I haven't seen him since then, but the thought of our connection that day rarely leaves my mind.

Carl really made me think about how much we can learn from each other if we just break through the barriers we've got. I mean, I would have never thought before that day that I could have anything in common with someone so much older than I, just because of age. But Carl taught me that no matter what, we're all just people, and that we should make an extra effort to try and get to know our neighbors and people we see every day, regardless of age, or of race, religion, sex, or anything else. If

we all took the time to attempt to understand each other, I think that the world would be a much better place that we could share together, as humans.

Nick plans to attend college and study advertising. During his free time, he enjoys surfing, reading, and playing with his band.