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CHEAPER TODAY - The average price of gasoline nationwide was \$2.29 a gallon as of Friday 1/27/17. The average price of gasoline nationwide in 1967 (i.e., 50 years ago) was 33 cents. After adjusting for 50 years of inflation, the 33 cent price in 1967 is equivalent to \$2.42 in 2017 dollars (source: AAA, Department of Labor).

SMALL NUMBER, BIG DOLLARS - National health care expenditures in the United States during calendar year 2016 were an estimated \$3.4 trillion. Just 10% of Americans were the source of 65% of that total (source: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Kaiser Family Foundation).

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No matter who you are or where you come from, you have goals in life: things you want to do, the type of person you want to become. It's a common link between all men and women who have ever lived or ever will live. Inside each of us is a restless soul who wants to do more than they have, or be more than they are.

But no matter who you are or where you come from, there will come a time when you encounter obstacles to your goals. There will be times when the odds are stacked against you.

I enjoy reading about the men and women of history who did great things despite the enormous barriers they faced. I find it gives me the inspiration I need to work toward my own goals in life. Here is the story of one of those historic figures who overcame the odds.

Frederick Douglass

During his life, Frederick Douglass became one of the great orators, writers, and statesmen of American history. I use the word "became" for a reason.

As is well-known, Douglass was born a slave in a tiny shack, soon to be separated from a mother he barely had the chance to know.

"I do not recollect ever seeing my mother by the light of day. She would lie down with me, and get me to sleep, but long before I waked she was gone."

By the time he was twelve, Douglass had been sold to a man named Hugh Auld. Auld's wife, Sophia, gave Douglass his first lessons in the alphabet, but eventually decided that slaves should not be educated, even forbidding Douglass to read the newspaper. Undeterred, Douglas taught himself how to read and write in secret.

"Knowledge is the pathway from slavery to freedom."



Overcoming the Odds

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TRADE WAR

COMING? - 16% of US exports are sold to Mexico. 80% of Mexican exports are sold to the United States (source: Commerce Department).

THE FOUR LARGEST -

1 out of every 3 Americans (33%) lives in just 4 US states - California, Texas, Florida and New York. These 4 states were home to 107.5 million citizens at the end of 2016 out of our nation's population of 323.1 million (source: Census Bureau).

AMBITIOUS GOAL -

On Monday 1/23/17 President Trump said that his administration will lead the effort to cut at least 75% of the business regulations imposed by government agencies (source: White House).

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Reading soon awakened Douglass' eyes to the *wrongness* of slavery – and to the fact that he had the same rights as the people who sought to keep him ignorant. He was only a teenager when he tried to escape for the first time. His masters repeatedly beat him, but Douglass' mind was already made up: he was no slave, but a free man. The chains that bound him were not a permanent condition to endure, but a temporary obstacle to overcome. By 1838, when he was only 20 years old, Douglass made his dream a reality when he escaped by jumping aboard a train bound for the North.

"I have often been asked how I felt when first I found myself on free soil. A new world had opened upon me. If life is more than breath, and the 'quick round of blood,' I lived more in one day than in a year of my slave life. It was a time of joyous excitement which words can but tamely describe. Anguish and grief, like darkness and rain, may be depicted; but gladness and joy, like the rainbow, defy the skill of pen or pencil."

But Douglass' goals didn't end with freedom – they had only just begun. No sooner had he settled in the North than he devoted his life to securing the rights and freedoms of others. He toured at home and abroad, giving speeches, writing pamphlets and books, campaigning not only for the rights of slaves but for women and Native Americans as well. Through it all, he contended both with mob violence and doubt as to how an ex-slave could read, speak, and write so well. Yet as he himself said:

"If there is no struggle, there is no progress."

It's impossible to do justice to all of Douglass' accomplishments – or the work he put in to achieve them – in a two-page letter. But as I ponder the things I want to do in my own life, and the difficulties that stand in my way (which are, of course, nothing compared to what Douglass faced) I cannot fail to be moved by his example. I said above that Douglass *became* one of the great statesmen of American history. I use the word "became" because he was born into a world that did not want him to become a great statesman. He was born into a world where culture, society, and even law actively prevented him from being anything other than a slave. In short, the odds were overwhelmingly against him. But he persevered, and persevered ... and *became* what he wanted to become. Or as he put it:

"We may explain success mainly by one word, and that word is 'work.' Work! Work!! Work!!!"

No matter who we are, we all have goals in life. May we always follow Frederick Douglass' example in achieving them.

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