

Elizabeth Tilley Howland Scholarship Essay By: Merin Hausmann, 2025

When the Pilgrims boarded the Mayflower in 1620 and set sail toward an uncertain future in the Americas, they carried with them more than supplies and hopes. My family, Edward Fuller and his wife came over with their son Samuel. While Edward and his wife did not survive the trip, it was a sacrifice they made to give their son a better life, which would change my family history. They brought a set of core values that would shape early American identity. There have been almost four centuries that separate their world from mine, yet I find that many of the values they lived by: faith, community, perseverance, and the pursuit of freedom, still hold relevance in my 21st-century life.

One of the most prominent values the Pilgrims embraced was faith. Their journey was motivated by a deep commitment to religious freedom. They risked their lives crossing the Atlantic to escape religious persecution and to worship in a way they believed was true to their convictions. In today's world, religious freedom is a constitutional right in many countries, including the United States, but the essence of spiritual devotion and moral commitment remains crucial. While my personal spirituality may look different than theirs, the idea of holding on to something bigger than myself still guides the choices I make every day. The Pilgrims' example reminds me that faith isn't just about religion; it's about having the courage to live in alignment with your beliefs, even when it's hard. I continue to have a strong foundation in my faith and in everything I do.

Another value the Pilgrims embodied was community. When they landed in Plymouth, they knew they would have to rely on each other to survive. The Mayflower Compact, which they drafted and signed before leaving the ship, was an early form of social contract that emphasized cooperation and mutual responsibility. Like the Pilgrims, I've learned the importance of building and maintaining a supportive community. Working together, sharing burdens, and contributing to a common good are values that transcend time. Whether I'm collaborating on conference planning in my local society for nursing or helping organize a local fundraiser for my own children's school, I can see how these same communal ideals are essential to a functioning and compassionate society. I have a strong bond with my immediate family for which we have a sense of community.

One of the most inspiring aspects of the Pilgrims' journey is their perseverance. The first winter in Plymouth was brutal, many died from illness and exposure. The survivors endured, continued building their settlement, and forged ahead. That level of resilience in the face of hardship resonates with me deeply today. There was a long period of time in my life where I thought childhood kidney disease was going to shorten my life or severely disable it. Perseverance helped get me through the darkest and most trying times of my life.

My goal now is to teach my own children the same resilience as the Pilgrims and now I have endured, to raise them to be strong individuals.

A crucial Pilgrim value that still echoes today is the continued pursuit of freedom. Their quest wasn't just for religious liberty but also for self-governance and the right to shape their own destinies. This legacy has carried through American history and continues to influence how I think about my own rights and responsibilities. In a time when civil liberties, free speech, and social justice are pressing issues, I am reminded that the freedoms I enjoy today were hard-won. Freedom in the 21st century includes the ability to speak out, to protest, to vote, and to advocate for those whose voices are not always heard. This also is important in not just my personal life, but my work life as I advocate for my patients and help them navigate healthcare.

The Pilgrims were not afraid to take risks for what they believed in. Their decision to leave everything familiar behind for the chance of a better life is a lesson in bravery. I must step out of my comfort zone to pursue this advanced degree. In turn, this opportunity will give me a chance to advance my already thriving career. The overall hope is to inspire my children to take risks and work hard for themselves. The Pilgrims' legacy encourages me to be bold when the situation demands it and to trust that growth often comes from risk.

In conclusion, the Pilgrims may have lived in a different era, but their values continue to resonate with me today. Faith, community, perseverance, freedom, and courage are not just historical ideals, they are active principles that guide how I live. Even though the world has changed drastically since 1620, the human desire to live with purpose, connection, and integrity remains as strong as ever. I will continue to have faith in my life pursuits that the ends will justify the means.