

Pages for All Ages:

Plan and Follow Through

Some words and phrases to know before you read

- plan, organize
- farmhand
- plow the row
- vote
- governments
- industries
- association
- poverty
- laws
- livelier
- lEngland, America
- in public
- leaflets
- tortured
- orderly
- Capitol, White House
- accomplishment
- Amendment, Constitution

Alice Paul knew how to make a plan. She knew how to stick to a plan until the work was done. “Failure is impossible,” is something she liked to say. She learned to look at life this way on the Quaker farm where she grew up.

Alice was born to William and Tacie Paul in 1881. She was the oldest of four children. Her parents believed in living simply and living close to nature, even though Alice’s father was a wealthy banker. The family lived on a farm called Paulsdale, and the children all had jobs to do. They helped the maids with housework inside, and they helped the farmhands with chores outside.

Alice’s mother was a college graduate, which was unusual for women in that time. She taught her children, “When you put your hand to the plow, you can’t put it down until you reach the end of the row.”

Tacie Paul also taught her children about “suffrage.” This strange word does not mean “suffering.” It means “the right to vote.”

For most of human history, men have been in charge of all the world’s governments, banks, industries, armies – places with lots of money and lots of people. Of course, now and then, some unusual woman became an important leader. But for most of human history, almost all women have had to do what men have told them to do. Quakers were different. They knew it was ridiculous to treat grown women like children.

Alice’s mother was a member of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. In 1881, when Alice was born, women were not allowed to vote. Women like Tacie Paul could see very clearly that this was unfair. They got together to talk about ways to fix this problem. Tacie took little Alice along with her when she went to those meetings.

In school, Alice worked hard at everything. She was an excellent student. She was good at sports and sewing. She went to Swarthmore College, and during her senior year, she took a class about the ways that poverty hurts women. She was such a good student in that class that the teacher helped Alice get her first job after graduation.

Alice’s first job was as a social worker in New York City. In that job, she tried to help poor people figure



out ways to solve their problems. She quickly saw that the people’s problems were far too big for them to solve. She went back to college to try to figure out why. (Alice earned five college degrees in her lifetime: biology, sociology, and three degrees in law.)

Alice became certain that people can't solve their problems alone. She decided that people must solve their problems by working together to change laws. She also became even more certain that women must win the vote.



Because she was such a good student, Alice was invited to study at the Quaker School in Woodbrooke, England. Alice's time in England put her on the path that made her famous.

The suffrage movement in England was livelier than the suffrage movement in America. As a child, Alice had grown up listening to women talking about changing the world while they were drinking tea. As a young woman in England, she saw women standing up in public, loudly demanding change. Alice felt that she had to join them.

She started by joining in two big parades in June, 1908. Tens of thousands of women marched, all dressed in white, many pushing baby carriages. Alice marched under a banner that said, "Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God." She got more involved. She stood on street corners and handed out leaflets and talked to strangers. She snuck into important meetings of important men and shouted that women should get to vote. That got her arrested. She spent a month in jail, where she was tortured.

When she came home to America in 1910, Alice arrived with a plan. She was twenty-five years old. "Failure is impossible," she thought. Women would get the vote. She planned and drew maps and wrote letters and held meetings and helped organize the biggest parade of women that Washington, DC, had ever seen. On March 4, 1913, over eight thousand women lined up, most dressed in white, and started

parading down Pennsylvania Avenue. Half a million people stood on the side to watch. Some of the men started yelling mean things at the marchers, pushing them over, poking them with burning cigars, and other terrible things. The police did nothing to stop the mean men, but the women stayed orderly. They had a good plan to follow, they were strong, and they kept marching from the Capitol building to the White House.

Alice Paul worked for women's rights all the rest of her life. She lived until the age of 92. She met with presidents and congressmen, studied law and politics, marched holding protest signs, stood in silent vigils, and suffering months of torture in jails. Her greatest accomplishment was helping women win the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which became law on August 18, 1920, granting women the right to vote. ❀

- How do you keep going when you feel like quitting? How do you know when it's time to quit?
- What can people do to help friends keep going?
- What are some big problems that will take many, many years to fix?



Photo on page 20: Alice Paul at age sixteen. Top of page 21: Alice Paul stands vigil with two friends; Alice is on the right. Immediately above, women march for suffrage toward the White House, March 4, 1913. All images are in the public domain.