The Learning Partnership is a national charitable organization dedicated to building stakeholder partnerships to support, promote and advance publicly funded education in Canada. We do this through five key deliverables – innovative student programs, executive leadership for educators, knowledge mobilization and policy, celebrating leaders and ongoing collaborations across Canada. If you would like to support our programs and initiatives across Canada, please visit thelearningpartnership.ca

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Today’s young people are often criticized for an over-reliance on technology that has left them bereft of imagination, unable to think critically and severely lacking in literacy skills.

Nothing could be further from the truth – as the 14th edition of The Learning Partnership’s Turning Points anthology of award winning essays proves.

This extraordinary publication features essays written by students in Grades 6 through 12 that capture a significant event – a turning point – in their lives. In insightful, thought-provoking and often moving prose, these young people explain how one event changed their lives.

What is truly significant is that the response to this year’s Turning Points program was once again extraordinary. More than 14,000 students in Alberta, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Saskatchewan participated. The 2012-2013 anthology features a selection of these essays.

We at The Learning Partnership thank all the students who participated this year. We are privileged they allowed us a glimpse into their lives. They have all demonstrated strength, maturity and talent and we are confident they will continue on their paths to accomplished adulthoods.

Thank you as well to the many judges, teachers and sponsors whose support and participation continue to make Turning Points possible. We are deeply grateful.

We would also like to thank the talented staff of The Learning Partnership for their hard work and dedication to students across the country.

On behalf of everyone involved, we invite you to open the following pages and spend some time exploring the diverse worlds of Canada’s young people. You will be moved, inspired and entranced.

“A message from the President & CEO and Program Manager

“I have to write the story I want to write. I have to continue telling the story the way I want to tell it.” – J. K. Rowling

Akela Peoples, M. Ed. President and CEO The Learning Partnership

Marni Angus National Program Manager The Learning Partnership

President and CEO The Learning Partnership

Marni Angus National Program Manager, Turning Points The Learning Partnership
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Alberta

“It’s the age-old struggle – the roar of the crowd on one side and the voice of your own conscience on the other.” – Douglas MacArthur

The Learning Partnership is grateful to our Alberta program supporters:

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“Of all the people you will ever know in a lifetime, you are the only person you will never leave or lose. To the questions of life, you are the only answer. To the problems in your life, you are the only solution.”

– anonymous

Anthony Baltoiu
First Place – Grade 6

My parents are first-generation immigrants from Romania. The stories that they have shared with me about their childhood have always intrigued me. When I found out that my parents and I were going to Romania to meet my extended family when I was turning 6 years old, I was very excited.

My first flight to Romania was a long one. We were going to the capital city, Bucharest. My dreary eyes looked out of the airplane window. The scenery was magnificent. I observed forests, plains, farmlands and mountains. Upon landing, my parents and I finally got to a hotel and fell into a much needed sleep.

The next day my parents and I went exploring and I discovered that Romania was gorgeous! There were smells of delicious foods that I could practically taste in the air. I could see marvelous architecture all around me. After discovering the city, we went to visit my paternal grandmother to celebrate my sixth birthday. My paternal grandmother lives in a rural area near a forest and the drive to her house took about 90 minutes from Bucharest.

My grandma had made me a chocolate cake that said “Happy Birthday” on it. Seeing all my relatives there, including my cousins, my grandma, my aunt, my uncle and my great-uncle singing for me, made my heart jump with joy. This is when I had my turning point. I had five other birthdays with plenty of gifts and none of them made me feel so overjoyed. Then I realized that it does not matter what things you have, it matters what memories you keep. I knew that I would never forget this memory. When we left Romania, I did not just notice the scenery: I also noticed the love and memories kept in it.

Anthony is an 11 year old boy in grade 6. He lives with his parents, and he doesn’t have any siblings. Playing the piano and skiing are some important activities in Anthony’s life. He was born in Calgary, Alberta but he has an enormous extended family in Romania. Anthony would like to someday be a scientist or a pianist.
At the South Fish Creek arena, I was waiting for the coaches to say, “Game Time”. Our coach started to announce that our team needs leadership. I was shaking, hoping that I could be an Assistant Captain. When two other of my teammates were chosen, I knew I wouldn’t be selected to be Captain. The dressing room was silent and everyone was nervous. When the coach announced that I would be my team Captain, I almost jumped off the bench with excitement.

My teammates were calm, but I could sense that they were a little down. Soon enough, my new nickname was “Cap”. I stepped onto the clean, cold ice and took my spot on defense. Thoughts were racing through my head, such as: “I must prove myself”. The referee’s whistle pierced the air with its loud scream. The puck dropped and the pressure was on. My heart raced, knowing that I had to play my best.

Over the last month, being Captain of my hockey team has affected my playing style, as well as the way I interact with my teammates and coaches. Now when I play, I always skate as fast as I can and I never give up. However, the most significant change is how I play when we’re losing. When our team starts losing, my teammates have a tendency to start giving up, while I on the other hand, go harder and try to encourage my team. At every game I always shake hands with the opposing teams’ coaches. Sometimes it’s hard to not be negative, but I always catch myself and think positive.

Now I finally understand the true meaning of leadership. Leadership isn’t about being the boss or being first in line; it’s about never giving up and sticking up for your companions. I have learned all those lessons and I will never let them go. This experience has changed me a lot and has shaped the way I think, act and live. To this day I’m still Captain and I will always live by the leadership lessons I have gained.

Steven is a proud Canadian 11 year old who lives in Calgary, Alberta. He enjoys camping and writing. Steven plays Pee Wee hockey and is currently the captain of his team. He is also part of a Scout Troop. Steven likes to make people laugh and he loves to read and play video games. His dream is to become an author who writes murder mysteries.
The People That You Meet

“I’m not popular, but I have nice friends. I’m not rich, but I have what I need. I may not have all the coolest stuff, but I am still grateful for what I have.”

Despair overwhelmed my whole life as I saw the shaggy-looking man sitting on the solid metal depressing bench of downtown Calgary. It was a temperate day. He was raising money to travel across Canada to find meaning to his life. He was abandoned, left alone to survive.

It was roughly 30 minutes after the 100th annual Calgary Stampede Parade. There was a colossal crowd, there were kids complaining that their feet hurt, older people talking about problems at work and shopkeepers trying to sell their merchandise by yelling out the doors. As my sister, my mom and I were walking down the mob-filled streets of downtown Calgary we savoured the delicious smells of food from the food trucks. We admired the astonishing architecture of the buildings on the streets of Calgary. But the thing that caught my eye most was the lonely man sitting on that depressing black bench.

As we walked up to the scruffy man, we noticed he was very down in the dumps. Just as we put a ten dollar bill into his change bucket, he took a puff of smoke from his cigarette, smiled and said two very amazing words “Thank you.” The best feeling was when we bought him ice cream. As we walked back to the bench where he sat we noticed his sign. It said “Got kicked out of my family and got sent onto the streets. Hitchhiked all the way from New Brunswick - don’t let me stop now.” My heart sunk. I wondered why such a well-meaning guy had to live on the streets.

The life lesson that I learned in this was that you should always embrace the family that you have and love them with all your heart. Even through all the hard times you should always love them. And just as he tried to do that, his family didn’t let him. I also realized that you should always be thankful for what you have. The brief connection that I had with that lost stranger helped me realize that and since that day I have been very thankful.

Kolby was born in Calgary, Alberta where he currently lives with his sister and mom. He is 12 years old and is described as an outgoing student. He likes to ride his scooter and play video games outside of school. His dream for the future is to own a restaurant in Nova Scotia.
An Ocean of Change

“Puberty for a girl is like floating down a broadening river into an open sea.” – Granville Stanley Hall

Everyone is different. Everyone is special in their own way. But sometimes you go through something in your life that makes you feel terrible and ashamed of your differences. Sometimes you ask yourself at that moment, why me? It was like that with me.

Everyone matures at a different time. For most girls this happens around grade seven or eight. For me it came in grade two. Ever since then I’ve been taller than all of my friends among other things. For the longest time I let it go and just accepted who I was, but one day in grade four we had to learn about human sexuality. All of my classmates thought it was funny or gross, but I hated that, I couldn’t believe that they could laugh at this. When I discovered what everyone thought about puberty, I realized with a heavy heart that I couldn’t share my feelings with anyone, because I was afraid that everyone would laugh at me.

The secret kept building up in my heart, and only my parents knew about my feelings. As I went through the year, it was more difficult to hide the fact that I was changing faster than the other kids. I often wished I could change everything and look like the other kids. My mom always told me that I am beautiful just the way I am, but I had trouble believing it.

One day in grade five, my secret came out in the open. I told three of my most trusted friends. They told me that I was amazing on the inside and out. They said they’d keep my secret and help me through it. Thankfully, one of my closest friends was also going through the same thing as me. I never felt so understood.

Now that I’m in grade six, I’ve learned that no matter what you look like, or who you are, you are special in your own way. This experience helped me to judge people by their character. We are all special because we are unique and no one can say anything to change that.

Eleven year old Sydney was born and lives in Calgary, Alberta. She constantly strives to do her best in school to increase her chances of receiving a scholarship. Her family and friends play a very important role in her life to help her reach her goals. She loves being creative and outgoing.
Time Heals All Wounds

When I was 10 years old something happened that changed my life forever. I woke up one morning and went about my day. Before I returned home I went to my friend’s house, but when I got home, I saw my dad in the kitchen alone with tears in his eyes. I already knew what was going on. I sat down beside my dad and asked him what was wrong. He answered, “Your mother has left us.”

The next morning I woke up, but my mom still hadn’t returned. My parents had been fighting a lot, so I wasn’t surprised by what happened, but I still felt sad. That afternoon my mom called. She said my siblings and I should pack our bags as she was coming to take us to stay with her in a hotel. I was really excited to see my mom. The hotel was nice, but it just wasn’t the same without my dad. We spent a couple weeks there, but then came Halloween!

My big brother and I spent Halloween with my dad, which was awesome! But once it was over, I had to go back. Eventually my siblings and I moved back into our home with my mom and my dad moved out. I became sad and angry. I was fighting with my family, not listening, getting into fights at school and just generally being a bad kid. Life was looking pretty bad. My mom put me in counseling. At first I hated it, but my counsellor, Lindsay, really helped me learn how to understand and control my feelings. If she could read this, I would say thank you for everything.

I completely started over. I got a new school and new friends, but still I was not doing my best at school or at home. Despite all I’ve been through, I’m trying to get better. I have two really supportive teachers and two really supportive parents. Even though we’re not together, we’ll always be a family. Do you know that saying, “All wounds heal with the passage of time”? I think that’s how it goes.

Jeremiah is a very energetic, outgoing and fun-loving 12 year old boy who was born in Kelowna, lives in Calgary and is of Fijian descent. He has a passion for playing rugby, skateboarding, and dancing. He loves his family and lives with his mom. He wants to become a famous athlete and/or an engineer.
It was dark; I was in my bed late at night. My mom was supposed to be sleeping, but I heard voices talking in the kitchen. I was afraid that someone might have broken into our house. Nevertheless I decided to go look. Downstairs I found a police officer with my mom. She was wearing handcuffs, again. I began to cry uncontrollably; I thought I would never see her again.

The police officer would not look at me; I knew he felt bad. Eventually I realized that the police officer was only giving her a warning. I was still worried that he’d come back. But everything was fine until about six months later.

One evening my mom suddenly called me into the kitchen. A female police officer asked me to come with her. I was dropped off at a strange building. It was late at night, and I was sent to bed. It was hard for me to fall asleep. I didn’t know where I was or where my mom was. I didn’t know what was going to happen. I felt scared.

The next day I was once again being taken somewhere else. My thoughts and feelings were filled with sadness. All I wanted was to see my mom; all I wanted was to go home. I was brought instead to an ordinary looking house. My sister was there; I hadn’t seen her in a while. I felt relieved.

After many sad days, a joyful day finally came. My sister and I were able to visit my grandparents’ house every weekend. Then one day after what felt like million years, my sister and I got to move in with my grandparents. I was so overjoyed that I began to cry. Since we moved in with my grandparents, my mom has been doing a lot better and I think one day we will be able to move in with her. Some people complain about their parents, but through my eyes, living with your mom and dad is something I am so grateful for.

Desiree was born in Calgary, Alberta. She has lived there her whole life. She loves practicing Aikido and she plays the baritone in the school band. Her friends are important to her and she always strives to do her best in school. She would like to become an Aikido sensei.
Josh Lasante-Cook
Honourable Mention – Grade 6
Calgary Board of Education

A Rough Life

"In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity. " – Albert Einstein

I don’t remember much and I’m glad. My mom and dad argued often. My dad had done some scary, bad things. So I spent a lot of time with my Grandma.

When I was three I stayed with my Grandma at her apartment. One night when she had been cooking for my brothers and me, she passed out and the apartment started on fire. I remember sitting on my bed feeling scared then being scooped up in the arms of a fire fighter. Time passed and I was home with my grandma, mom and two brothers. I loved being with my mom and going to school.

Sadly, my grandma got sick and my mom couldn’t keep us. My brothers and I ended up in foster care. I was even split up from my brothers when we went to different foster homes. It was horrible. After moving from foster home, to foster home I started to think that nobody wanted me. Finally, I ended up at a foster home with my brothers. By now my mom had had a little girl she named Maddy and I liked seeing her on my visits. After supper one night, my foster mom told me I was not allowed to see my mom until I was 18 but I could still visit my grandma. I cried so much. That same year my foster mom was diagnosed with cancer. I’ve lived in this home for seven years now.

I started to think, “Why me of all people?” I was feeling bad for myself. I could give up, run away, and do drugs. Just give up on my life. But I’m not going to because I want to have a good life and grow up. Life is hard but I have to focus on the good times and forget about the bad times that happened. I have learned a lot from the experiences in my life but the most important lesson that I learned is to not to give up when it gets hard.

Josh is an outgoing Grade 6 student living in Calgary, Alberta. Josh is an incredible athlete and he excels in school and extra-curricular sports. In his spare time Josh really enjoys skateboarding. Josh is very driven, works hard at school and plans to have a successful future as a lawyer.
Three and a Half Month Miracle

“Don’t judge a book by its cover”

On May 26th, 2001 my mom was just going into labour. I was supposed to be born in August, but I came into this world 3 ½ months early. On that particular day in May, my parents had been both worried and excited, not knowing if I would survive.

Soon after being taken out of my mom’s womb I didn’t make any sounds. The doctors thought that I might not make it. After taking me away and wiping the blood off me, that’s when I finally made some noise. I began crying and whaling. My parents were filled with joy knowing that I was their miracle sent from heaven above.

Growing up in Calgary was always different, more challenging for me than other kids my age because of my size. When I was going into grade 3, I entered a new school. New people surrounded me, and frankly, I was quite frightened! Fortunately I made a new friend that day! I tried to make some more friends, but it wasn’t quite so easy. Almost everyone would ask, “Why are you so small?” or they would say, “I don’t want to be your friend. You’re too small!” Going home with tears starting to well in my eyes, I wanted to run away from it all. My mom would attempt to comfort me by saying “Just remember, good things come in small packages. Like dynamite!”

At different times in my life some people have underestimated me, such as in my karate competitions. I am really close to earning my black belt. In competitions I have fought most people who thought that just because I was small, I’d be easy to beat. But in the end, I think I taught them a lesson when I walked off the mat victorious! But throughout my life I eventually discovered my turning point. Even though I am small, I am mighty. I am capable of doing anything that people taller than I can. Just like my mom says, “If the Lord will lead you to it, He will lead you through it.”

Becca is 11 years old and was born in Calgary, Alberta where she lives with her parents. She enjoys doing the thing she is most passionate about: karate. She attended the Karate World Championships in Montreal 2012. Her dream goal is to become a Karate Sensei at her local dojo.
When I was in grade 2, my mom said she was going to have a baby. I was 7 then. I was very excited. I wondered if it was a boy or girl. But as the weeks passed, I started to wish my mom wasn’t going to have a baby.

My parents were so busy preparing for the baby they couldn’t do anything with me. My dad couldn’t do my ‘Find-it’ book with me because he was going to the store to buy stuff. My mom was too busy talking to people on the phone. I started to wonder if having a new baby around would be such a great thing.

A few months later, my mom went to the doctor to find out what the baby’s gender was. Imagine my surprise when my mom said she was having twins! I was happy and horrified at the same time. I stomped out of my parents’ room and flopped down on my bed. I couldn’t even imagine what it would be like.

Three weeks later, my mom went back to the doctor because the babies’ gender wasn’t clear the first time. We found out they were girls and as their birth approached, my parents became busier than ever.

Finally, my sisters were born! They were so cute! When they saw me, they smiled. I instantly took back all my bad thoughts about them. I found myself regretting my selfishness.

Life is like climbing a tree. Along the way, you might find a twisted branch with sharp thorns. But in the thorns, there might be flowers waiting to grow and break free. My sisters were like that, but once I saw how special they were, I started to care. I made sure they didn’t get in trouble. I learned about caring from this experience and they have had a huge impact on my life.


Rose was born in Beijing, the capital of China. She moved to Canada in 2008, and now lives in Calgary with her cuddly black cat, Toby. Rose enjoys playing the piano and has done so since age 6. Rose has twin little sisters and a very supportive family. She loves hanging out with her friends after school.
Les petites choses me changent

Alex, tu es si chanceuse, ne pleurniche pas! ». Quand quelqu’un me dit ces mots, mes joues deviennent toutes rouges, et je commence à être en colère contre moi-même. Parce que je devrais savoir cela, je devrais toujours me rappeler qu’il y a des enfants qui n’ont pas d’amis, pas de nourriture, pas de familles et beaucoup de choses pires à imaginer. Je me sens comme si c’est ma responsabilité à aider, même si mon façon d’aider est juste de prier. Je suis inspiré, parce que je suis chanceuse comparé aux autres personnes du monde. Je suis en santé, mes parents ne sont pas séparés ni morts, je ne suis pas une victime d’intimidation, et j’ai toujours quelque chose à manger et de beaux vêtements à porter. Mais je ne me souviens pas toujours de ces choses. Seulement des choses qui me font pleurer. Mais quand je me souviens, je change. Je n’ai pas une histoire émouvante qui fait fondre ton coeur. Non, c’est seulement que les petites choses me changent… juste un petit peu chaque fois.

Quand j’aide quelqu’un, je change. Un exemple est quand nous avons dû faire un projet à propos des problèmes dans notre monde. Le problème qui avait attiré notre attention était présenté sur le site-web « Because I am a girl », ça nous montrait que dans d’autres pays, les filles n’ont pas de droits; elles doivent prétendre d’être les garçons pour qu’elles puissent marcher dans la rue sans être tuer et d’autres choses similaires. Mais notre enseignante nous avait dit que le problème devait être local. Alors on a organisé un comité qui nous a aidés d’organiser une collecte de fonds; une vente de pâtisseries pendant un tournoi de volleyball. On a aussi fait une présentation pour l’école pour augmenté la publicité à propos ce problème. J’ai senti si fier et vaillant pendant cette expérience. J’ai senti comme un héro; important et imparable. C’est un sentiment que je sais je dois ressentir à nouveau dans l’avenir.

Quand je ne réussis pas quelque chose, je change. Quand j’ai reçu les nouvelles que j’étais placé dans une equipe de ringuette « B » et pas dans équipe « A », j’ai pleuré pour des heures… Mais, après que j’ai accepté le fait que j’étais sur une équipe « B », ça m’a donné une nouveau détermination de devenir la meilleure. Chaque fois que je ne réussis pas, je me rappelle de la joie que j’ai senti quand j’ai réussi, et comment passionnante j’étais quand j’ai travaillé pour réussir…et je sais que je ne peux pas abandonner.

Chaque fois que quelque chose similaire à mes quelques exemples se passent, je change, juste un petit peu. Et chaque fois que je change, une pièceest ajoutée à mon « casse-tête de vie ». Une journée le casse-tête va être finie, et je vais être une personne incroyable. Je ne vais jamais être parfaite, mais je vais être la meilleure personne que je puisse être.
C'était la fin de la journée, j’ai tout rangé dans mon sac et j’ai couru le plus vite que je pouvais jusqu’au moment où j’ai vu deux dames en train de s’embrasser et se tenir la main. Le fait que j’étais la seule dehors m’a vraiment donné un choc. Ma bouche était grande ouverte, une ruche complète pouvait y rentrer. J’étais DEGOUTÉE! J’étais vraiment contre l’homosexualité. De nulle part mon amie Sophie est venue et s’est exclamée : « Bonjours mamans! » je croyais que c’était une blague donc je riais. J’étais vraiment surpris quand les deux dames ont répondu : « Bonjour ma fille! ». A ce moment j’ai eu un retour en arrière et je me suis rappelée quand nous étions en train de jouer et elle m’a parlé de son éducation. Je suis rentré dans l’autobus je pensais a elle jusqu’à ce que je me couche.

Le lendemain matin, j’étais effraye de l’approcher. Elle avait vu que j’étais confuse au sujet d’hier… je crois qu’elle m’avait vu. Le temps passa et enfin elle m’a expliqué : « Mes parents sont homosexuelles et moi-même je suis bisexuelle. » J’étais si surprise que je ne lui ai pas parlé pour 2 journées complètes. Pendant ce temps-là, elle n’avait vraiment pas d’amis, elle marchait seule et triste. Je me sentais tellement mal pour elle que je suis venue lui parler à la fin de la journée : « Allo, Sophie. Je m’excuse d’avoir réagi très mal, je veux accepter le fait que tu es bisexuelle et je veux redevenir ton amie. » Elle me répondit : « Je change d’école de toute façon mais on peut quand même se contacter par téléphone. » Juste après cela, sa mère est venue la prendre. Depuis ce jour, j’ai appris à ne pas juger et que même si quelqu’un est différent spirituellement et physiquement cela ne veut pas dire qu’elle est un extraterrestre.

Thirteen year old Elysee was born in Quebec. She loves to dance and make hip-hop competitions. Elysee also leads the Poetry & Literature gymnastics. Elysee comes from a large family with three brothers and two sisters. She is a member of the school band and plays drums. She thinks she may become a veterinarian.
Le diagnostic de ma cousine

« Les docteurs on fait des tests et Victoria a du cancer »…

J'avais 12 ans et c’était Juillet en 2012 que j’ai entendu l’information.

L’été de 2012 a changée dans une appelle de téléphone. Ma tante et mon oncle nous avons dit que notre cousine Victoria avait le lymphoma et qu’elle a une bonne chance à survivre. Ils ont aussi dit que c’était bonne qu’ils ont diagnose le cancer à l’âge de 16 car si elle était plus vieux le cancer serait plus difficile a battre. Sa ma fait très triste car elle est la personne que je peux regarder et dire je veux être comme elle.

La première chose qu’elle avait besoin de faire est d’avoir la chirurgie. Le cancer était dans son corps. Elle avait besoin de la chirurgie pour l’enlever. Le jour quelle est allé pour son chirurgie ma famille a prié pour elle pour que tout va bien. Après qu’elle aeu son chirurgie nous était tellement content que tous vas bien!

Les docteurs nous avons dit qu’elle avait besoin de faire la chimiothérapie. La chimiothérapie est un processus long et difficile. Quand elle était à la maison elle était très fatiguée. Sa m’a décourager car elle est ma cousine et je n’aime pas lui regarder malade. Avant de faire la chimiothérapie elle a coupe tous ses chevaux car elle sait qu’elle va le perdre. Le chimiothérapie est allé pas malle bien.

Les docteurs nous avons dit que après le chimiothérapie elle était en plus bonne santé. Ils ont aussi dit pour être sur que tous le cancer est partie et que le cancer ne reviend pas elle a besoin de faire la radiation. La radiation est aussi (comme le chimiothérapie) un processus long et difficile. Elle a fait la radiation et elle a nous dit qu’elle avait des difficultés mais s’était tous pour mon santé alors c’est bien.

Même avec le cancer elle a eu des évènements heureux. Elle est allée aux le concert de Justin Bieber. Elle a même lui rencontrer!

Cette évènement ma aussi frustré car si elle ne va pas surviver sa me fait tellement frustré car le cancer a pris une autre victime. Quand j’ai revenu a l’école je ne pouvais pas concentré. Elle ma aussi fait penser que la vie est limité et tu dois avoir des bonne panser même si quelle que chose mauvais arrive.

Enfin elle a concourré le cancer. Elle repousse ses cheveux. Aussi elle recommencé l’école! ! J’aime ma cousine et elle m’inspire beaucoup. Elle a fait des choses que plutôt des filles de l’âge de16 ne feraient jamais dans leur vie.

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Cabri Boechler
Third Place – Grade 7 (French)
Calgary Catholic School District

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Cabri was born in Victoria, British Columbia and moved to Calgary, Alberta at the age of one. She enjoys dancing and playing her alto saxophone. She is looking forward to graduating junior and senior high school. She speaks both English and French fluently. Cabri’s goals also include owning a dance studio.
Le jour que j’apprécié

Quand j’étais plus jeune, je vivais à Équateur. J’avais une vie merveilleuse, une grosse maison avec une femme de ménage et toute ma famille m’adorait. Ma grand-mère vivait juste à côté de ma maison, alors de temps en temps je sortais de ma maison et allais chez ma grand-mère seul. Après un temps on est allé à Calgary et c’était pas aussi chaud que Équateur, mais on s’est adapté. Chaque trois année, on va à Équateur et visite notre famille pour 3-4 semaines. En 2011, je suis allé à Équateur et tout semblait changé. J’ai observé les choses plus attentivement.

On est allé visiter des différents villages et en passant j’ai remarqué des choses qui ont changé ma façon de voir. Il y avait beaucoup de pauvreté. On a passé par les villages et on voyait des enfants de 4 ans qui faisaient de la vaisselle, qui lavaient les vêtements, et qui coupaient les arbres. Les enfants faisaient des choses que les adultes font ici à Calgary. Des enfants travaillaient pour faire de l’argent comme un parent. À part de tout ça, ils n’avaient pas l’air trop tristes… en fait, ils semblaient heureux. Ils étaient petits mais, ils faisaient tout ce qu’ils avaient à faire, bien, les enfants qui avaient des parents. Ce jour j’ai commencé à voir les choses que j’ai dans ma vie… j’ai apprécié. J’ai apprécié tout ce que mes parents et ma famille me donnent et pour tout ce qu’ils font pour moi. J’ai finalement réalisé que quand mes parents me disent de faire des tâches et je me plains parce que je dis que c’est trop difficile, que je ne fais pas une chose aussi difficile que j’ai pensé. Je me suis senti très triste pour eux, je voulais aider mais je ne pouvais pas. J’ai réfléchi plus dans la vie, et maintenant j’essaie d’être le plus heureux que je peux être.

Je pense encore au jour où je suis allé à ce village. Présentement, je remercie ma famille pour tout qu’elle m’a donné et toujours me rappelle d’une chose… ” Prends rien pour acquis, parce que tu sais jamais si tu vas le recevoir encore”

Valeria was born in Ecuador and came to Canada with her parents when she was young. She is in grade seven and is thirteen years old. She loves to spend her time playing sports such as basketball. Valeria is an honour roll student with very high standards for herself. She has received a silver medal in basketball. Valeria wishes to be a doctor when she grows up to save people lives and help those in need.
Un nouveau début

Mes parents avaient été à la recherche d’une nouvelle maison pour un certain temps. Alors le jour était enfin venu que nous avions trouvé la maison parfaite pour notre famille grandissante. J’avais 10 ans à ce temps et mon nouveau petit frère, Ben, était sur le chemin. Nous n’avions pas assez d’espace dans notre maison où j’avais vécu toute ma vie pour un nouveau frère. Je n’étais pas heureuse de cette annonce, en fait j’ai été terrifiée, ce déménagement signifiait nouvelle école, maison, quartier et un nouveau membre de la famille. C’était trop, à l’extérieur j’étais heureuse, mais quand on regardait à l’intérieur, j’étais en conflit, la joie versus la tristesse. Ma vie était à l’envers, le pire c’était que je n’étais pas sûre au sujet de faire des nouveaux amis.

Une semaine plus tard, nous sommes allés regarder la maison. C’était la première fois que je l’ai vue et soudainement je me sentais très bien avec le déménagement, c’était parfait pour notre famille, j’étais très excitée de me déplacer dans cette nouvelle maison. Mais dans le fond de mon esprit, ma plus grande inquiétude était encore une nouvelle école et des nouveaux amis.

Enfin environ 2 semaines plus tard, après avoir vu la nouvelle maison, nous avons déménagé, il a fallu un certain temps pour mettre tout en place, mais finalement nous avons été tout emménagé le 17 avril. J’ai fini cette année à la même école que le début de l’année. Quand l’année a finalement pris fin, j’ai été horrifiée de dire au revoir à mes amis. Mais si je ne changeais pas d’école, nous aurions besoin de conduire environ 45 minutes chaque matin pour aller à l’école, et mes parents ne voulaient pas le faire, donc j’ai été forcée de changer d’école. Au cours de l’été mes nerfs allaient sur des montagnes russes émotionnelles. Un jour, j’étais heureuse d’aller à la nouvelle école et le suivant j’étais complètement terrifié à ce sujet. Tous les jours je pensais à quel point je m’ennuyais de ma meilleure amie et j’ai essayé de la voir autant que possible pendant l’été.

Le jour est enfin arrivé, j’ai décidé que mes sentiments étaient nerveux, mais l’excitation d’un nouveau départ. Mon premier jour d’école s’est très bien passé et j’ai réalisé que je n’avais rien à m’inquiéter tout ce temps et maintenant j’ai des nouvelles amies qui sont très aimables. En fait, ma meilleure amie de ma vieille école est venue avec moi deux ans plus tard. Je peux honnêtement dire que notre amitié était destinée à être, et c’est pourquoi Dieu nous a gardés ensemble, même si nous étions séparées deux années.

Pour le nouveau bébé, je suis en amour avec lui et c’est quelqu’un qui sera toujours ici pour moi et je l’aime à la lune et retour, et je peux toujours dire que mon petit frère Ben a complètement changé ma vie ... d’une manière positive.

Caileah is a grade 7 student who lives with her parents and her 3 younger brothers. Gymnastics plays a large role in her life; she strives to compete at a national level one day. Caileah also enjoys spending her free time with her friends and loves to cook pastries, especially during holidays. Caileah goes to a French immersion school. She is bilingual, speaking French and English.
La grand-mère est très malade… Elle a le cancer.

J’étais à la maison de l’amie de ma mère, nous restions à sa maison avant d’aller chez ma grand-mère. La journée avant qu’on partait chez mes grands-parents, ma mère m’a appelé dans une chambre pour me dire quelque chose. À ce moment je savais que quelque chose n’allait pas bien. Elle a dit « ta grand mère est très malade… Elle a le cancer. » Mon ventre a fait une culbute, des larmes coulaient sur ma face. Mes yeux étaient rouges et mon front devenait chaud. Je n’aurais pas eu cette réaction, mais mon grand-père avait eu le cancer aussi et maintenant il est mort. Quand ma mère m’a dit que ma grand-mère a le cancer, j’ai pensé à mon grand-père. Il était toujours là pour moi comme il était mon père et le jour qu’on a eu l’appel qu’il était mort, j’étais dévasté. Ce jour a rejoigné dans ma tête, la joie d’avoir eu un coup de téléphone de mon grand-père et les larmes après avoir entendu la nouvelle.

Après que ma mère m’a dit la mauvaise nouvelle, je n’ai pas fait attention à la vraie vie. J’étais toujours fâchée. Je n’étais pas la même qu’avant et après quelques jours, les gens ont commencé à réaliser, j’étais isolée des gens. À l’école j’ai commencé à perdre mes amis. Même mes sœurs ne me voulaient rien faire avec moi. J’étais comme ça pour un long temps. Après quelques mois j’étais tannée d’être seule et j’haïssais avoir cette peine avec moi chaque jour. Je voulais que les autres personnes sentent qu’est-ce que je sentais, alors j’ai commencé à faire des amies avec des filles qui insultaient tout le monde. Avec la peine que j’avais dedans, je n’avais aucun but, mais quand j’ai commencé à être amie avec des filles méchantes, mon but était d’insulter tout le monde. Avant je haïssais ces filles car elles étaient méchantes, mais maintenant mes amis pensaient que j’étais méchante aussi.

L’été, ma famille voulait visiter mes grands-parents au Québec et ça c’est quand j’ai changé. Quand j’ai vu ma grand-mère, je savais que j’ai fait le mauvais choix, d’être quelqu’un je ne suis pas. Après avoir été avec ma grand-mère, mon cœur s’est ouvert. À l’école, j’ai fait des nouveaux amis qui ont pris une chance d’être ami avec moi, même si j’étais méchante.

Le cancer et ma grand-mère a changé ma vie dans des façons différentes. Le cancer m’a rendue méchante, mais ma grand-mère m’a rendue généreuse et m’a rendue quelqu’un que je suis vraiment. J’ai trouvé mon but dans la vie et je l’ai suivi.

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Erica is twelve years old and in grade seven. She was born in Calgary and still lives there with her 2 sisters, her mother and her father. She loves to play her trombone and the piano. She is hoping to learn how to play the tuba next year. Outside of school, she does a lot of gymnastics and swimming. Erica speaks English, French and a bit of Spanish.
La décision

Aujourd’hui, je ne sais pas si je vais être ici, dans cette classe, si la décision déjà a été prise. Tous mes amis aujourd’hui, mes notes, toutes les choses que j’ai accomplies : Disparu! Cette histoire c’est à propos de mon premier jour d’école en immersion française.

Quand ma mère m’a inscrit à l’école, j’avais 4/5 ans, elle m’a inscrit au programme anglais. À cette époque, j’avais fait beaucoup d’amis en maternelle. C’était difficile de faire les nouveaux amis dans ma première année, mais j’ai réussi. J’avais deux meilleurs amis, nous aimions les mêmes choses, nous faisons toutes les choses ensemble.


Le premier jour d’école arrivé. Il faisait comme l’été encore, mais c’est la rentrée de classe. Quand je suis arrivé, mes amis et mes meilleurs amis dans l’autre programme étaient excités pour la première année. J’avais dit que maintenant je suis dans l’autre classe, le français. Mais, au moins qu’il y a la recréation que je peux voir mes autres amis. La cloche sonne. Quand je suis arrivé dans classe, j’ai vu que mon professeur parlait anglais. J’ai eu un moment de soulagement. Ouf! La première chose qu’on fait dans la classe c’est chanter les chansons des alphabets. Il était très étrange parce que je n’avais jamais rencontré les personnes de la classe. Quand ils ont chanté, j’étais perdu. Je ne sais pas chanter ou parler en français. Alors, j’essaie de suivre tout le monde. Je pense que elle a vu que tous les étudiants était perdu aussi, alors elle a écrit les mots sur le tableau. Ma première réaction c’était qu’il sera difficile, mais ce n’était pas trop difficile!

À cette époque, j’ai réussi à avoir de très bonnes notes, et j’ai fait beaucoup d’amis. Qu’est-ce qui ce serait passer si ma mère n’avait pas pris cette décision?

Vic was born in Calgary. He is 13. He speaks English, Vietnamese and French. Vic is still working very hard in class to get the best grades possible. Vic is an excellent badminton player. He likes to write and wants to become a lawyer.
C'était le premier janvier 2012, tout allait bien et tout le monde était content. Il y avait une petite femme avec des chevaux courts et noirs. Cette femme était très gentille. C'était ma tante. Ma tante était toujours souriante, mais ce jour-là elle était triste. Tout le monde sentait que quelque chose allait mal. Une semaine après elle a commencé à se plaindre qu’elle était malade. Après un jour, elle était malade avec paralysie de Bellet le docteur a dit qu’elle devait rester à la maison pour se reposer. Après un mois la maladie a passé et tout allait bien.

Deux semaines après, elle se plaignait que son ventre faisait mal, mais on a pensé que c’était juste un petit mal au ventre, mais la douleur était très grande. Un jour son ventre faisait trop mal, alors elle était allée à l’hôpital. Ce jour-là, le docteur a dit que ma tante avait le cancer. Son époux nous a appelés et ma mère a commencé à pleurer. Toute ma famille a été touchée. Tous les jours ma famille et moi visitions l’hôpital où ma tante était. Quand nous visitions ma tante, elle était sur son lit en train de manger ou de dormir. Je sais que tous les jours elle essayait d’être forte et heureuse pour sa famille. Ses enfants ne savaient pas qu’elle avait le cancer parce qu’elle ne voulait pas que ses enfants s’inquiètent.

Le 19 janvier 2012 ma tante est décédée. Ce jour était le plus difficile de ma vie. Tous les enfants étaient restés chez moi pour attendre des nouvelles de ma tante. Environ 10:00 pm, mon père est venu pour nous amener à l’hôpital avec mes cousins. Quand on est arrivé à l’hôpital, on est allé à la chambre de ma tante. Tous les enfants ont commencé à pleurer en voyant ma tante morte. Ma tante était très importante dans ma vie. Elle était là quand j’étais un bébé. Après une semaine c’était les funérailles de ma tante, tout le monde a pleuré et quelques personnes ont dit un discours.

Ce que j’ai appris de cette expérience est que la vie est très importante et ça m’a changé parce que la vie est très courte pour perdre son temps pour des choses qui ne sont pas importantes pour toi. Vous devez passer la vie avec les personne qui vous rendent content. On devrait passer sa vie avec des gens importants pour nous, passer de bons moments pour avoir de bons souvenirs.

Andrea is 12 years old. She was born in Saudi Arabia. Andrea has both an older sister and older brother. She likes to go for walks with her dog, Tibo. Andrea is an artist, she loves to draw and dress elegantly. Her friends say she is shy but very nice. Andrea wants to be a geologist.
Le moment de changement

Quand j’étais plus jeune, j’étais gâté mais je ne le savais pas. Si je n’aimais pas mes vêtements, mes cheveux ou même ma nourriture, j’étais furieux et découragé. Mais tout ça a changé quand j’ai voyagé en Jamaïque pour les vacances de Pâques. Je suis allé avec 2 autres familles, et une des familles connaissait quelqu’un qui pouvait nous donner une visite privée d’une plantation de café. Je ne voulais vraiment pas aller car je voulais rester près de la plage, mais mes parents m’ont forcé.

C’était un voyage d’auto de presque quatre heures et j’étais fatigué et j’avais chaud. Pour la moitié de la visite on était obligé de passer par un petit village de travailleurs. C’était +32 degrés et on était obligé de passer en voiture sans toit, alors j’ai voulu retourner à l’hôtel dans une chambre avec de l’air frais, mais tout le monde voulait rester, alors j’étais obligé, mais maintenant, je suis reconnaissant pour ça. En passant le village, j’ai vu que les gens qui vivaient là n’avaient presque rien. Les enfants nous ont suivi et ils ont exclamé des remarques comme « bonjour » ou « comment ça va » avec des sourires les plus gros au monde et ils semblaient très heureux. Peut-être parce que c’était leur première fois à voir des personnes qui vivaient hors de leur village ou peut-être, c’était parce qu’ils étaient juste heureux, et pas parce qu’ils avaient des vêtements tout neufs ou le modèle nouveau de jeux de vidéo, ils étaient heureux avec presque rien.

À ce moment-là, j’ai réalisé que je fais des plaintes si je n’ai pas quelque chose à porter même si mon armoire est pleine et je me plains pour des petites choses comme si je n’aime pas mon diner, mais ces personnes ici n’ont presque pas des vêtements ou jeux et ils ne se plaignent pas. Cette expérience a changé mon mode de vie et mes priorités. Maintenant je suis plus reconnaissant et débrouillard pour les choses que j’ai. Cette expérience m’a aussi motivé à aider les personnes sans-abris ou qui sont malades le plus que je peux. Ma théorie est que; il y a des personnes dans ce monde qui n’ont rien et qui sont heureux, alors ça doit être facile pour moi d’être très heureux car j’ai tout ce que j’ai besoin.

Isabelle is a twelve year old grade 7 student living in Calgary, Alberta with her parents and older sister. She plays competitive soccer and she is also an honour roll student. Isabelle has received second place for grade 3 piano in Calgary’s Kiwanis music festival and was her grade 6 class president. She hopes to one day be more involved in charity work or have a profession that helps people.
Life, love and peace are incredibly fragile, yet immensely powerful. The world knows of this acute fragility and has witnessed its destruction plenty of times. Lives shattered, love lost and peace abandoned. I met a man who bore these sentiments; his name was Abdullah Syed, my great grandfather.

We received a distressing phone call from my grandmother, regretfully disclosing that my great-grandfather, Abdullah Syed, was gravely ill and if we were to see him, we must come soon. He yearned to see us, especially since my mother was his favourite grandchild. She remarkably resembled his much beloved deceased wife, who passed on prematurely. The family felt seeing her would give him great comfort and cushion his last moments in this life and give him a glimpse of what was to come.

This was the first time I had visited Wyke, England. I saw his home peeking from behind the sizeable oak trees. Almost instantly we were greeted by his Alsatian, who sniffed us out and deemed us safe. There was a somber mood in the house, as we were guided to his room. It was unbelievable, the shriveled shell of a man, sat in his leather armchair, his old age companion, was the same handsome and strapping man in the black and white photo my mother showed me once. We bent down and hugged and kissed him. He smiled and chuckled, his eyes set on my mother. It is often said the story of a man can be seen through his eyes, and in this case, it was absolutely true. The afternoon of one sided conversation began. He had much to say. He spoke as we listened attentively.

He believed that war was superfluous and futile. He had fought with the Allied forces under the British rule, during World War II. The screams of mutilated soldiers still echoed in his mind. Then four years later, the partition of India occurred. Pakistan was created. Abdullah went from being a wealthy landowner to a refugee. He was part of the largest mass migration in human history. All of a sudden his eyes swelled with tears as he spoke of his great love, his wife, and then lit up as he told us the joyful moments of his life.

Abdullah stressed that in life, the relationships we create and maintain are the most valuable assets that we could possess, and other things are just frivolous. Family bonds must remain strong so that we can deal with all the tumultuous changes that life brings. The afternoon that I spent with my great-grandfather I learned much, as I heard his pearls of wisdom which were a catalyst to my thoughts. I essentially learned the essence of life is to love and live in peace. And in order to live peacefully one must attain inner peace and that is true power.

Twelve-year old Daniyal lives in Calgary with his parents and younger brother. In his spare time, he enjoys playing soccer and watching documentaries. He is an avid traveller and fond of exploring, hoping to visit all seven continents before reaching adulthood. Daniyal is a budding astronomer, and is hoping to pursue a career in science, specifically in becoming an astronaut.
In the Shadow of Death

She was always laughing and running around. Her liveliness was infectious. She energized those around her by being energetic herself. I was glad to be with her from 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM every second Saturday. We bonded quickly. Within months, she was more than a family friend, but like a little sister to me. One evening, our conversation drifted to what we liked about our parents.

"I like the silly faces my mom can make. " I pulled one. She giggled.

"I like how my daddy tucks me into bed every night. I feel safe. "

"Aww! That's sweet. "

"Some nights he has to tuck me in three or four times because I keep getting up. I have trouble staying in bed for a long time. "

"Oh? When you're my age, you'll have trouble staying out of bed for a long time. All you'll want to do is sleep!"

"But sleep is so boring."

"Not if you dream. "

I loved the little talks we shared. If only there had been more of them. The memories could have comforted me as I kept my vigil by her grave. All that crossed my mind as I stood there was that old aforementioned conversation.

He's tucked you in, Fatima. He's laid you in a bed of earth and stone. Here you'll sleep the longest sleep of all. You'll have no trouble staying in this bed. That's good. It's a lovely bed where you'll be at peace. You'll be free to dream any dream you want. We'll end up with you eventually. But why did you have to leave so soon? Why couldn't you have stayed with us until you were seventy instead of seven? Why did I kill you?

Initially, I blamed myself for her death. I thought in 'if onlys. ' If only I'd reminded her that she wasn't to leave her daddy's side in a busy place like downtown. If only I'd nailed into her mind the fact that she was too young to cross the street on her own. If only I'd taught her that when she was old enough, she was to look both ways first. She could've been here today--alive and whole and walking among us--if only I'd been better to her. It was my fault she was dead…or so I told myself.

It was a conversation with my mom that altered my outlook.

"Javairia, the 'if only' mentality is flawed logic. Using it, you could indirectly blame any person on Earth for having caused any other person's death! If you think you killed her, you may as well say we all did. "

My mom's words made it easier for me to heal. I realized that if I could have done a million things differently, Fatima may still have died in that car accident. Blaming myself for what happened brought me unnecessary guilt and heartache. Fatima wouldn't want me to endure that. She'd want me to live as she did: happily.

So I've been trying to. For her.
My dad used to say he couldn’t figure out who I was. I could never tell anyone what I wanted for Christmas or my birthday because every minute I had a new personality or opinion on something. He used to say that I had a chameleon soul; like one of those games when if you move one piece to fit with another piece, it changed the way you saw them.

On the first day of grade one no one would talk to me because I couldn’t fill out those personality quizzes about your favorite animals. People used to make fun of my hair and the fact that I couldn’t pick a story topic because I’d always change my subject to something that a normal person couldn’t connect with.

Years passed but the world was closing in, trapping me in the cracks buried deep in the ground. My knees would go weak and my chest would get so tight I couldn’t breathe. I was drowning, gasping for air trying to restart my soul, but it collapsed under the pressure. I stopped. I stopped eating, communicating; I became as skinny as my soul. I shut down the world so it couldn’t deceive me and trap me back into the nothing. I became hollow, I was a flickering light, with barely a purpose.

People started to notice so they did the only thing they could do, throw me into the sun. And I started to fall in love with the light and the feeling that came with it, the feeling of sweet bitterness that would make my heart hurt in such a good way that I wouldn’t notice the past. I only noticed the fact that I was standing on soft green grass.

But I still didn’t have a fixed personality, no compass pointing north. I started to notice the outside world. I realized that it wasn’t the world that sent the darkness to reach its hands out and smother me. It was me; I did that. I had called the darkness, like a preacher calls on God. I had invited the darkness, and had followed it down into the cracks of the earth because I didn’t know how to handle the fact that my inner indecisiveness was swallowing me whole. So I frantically searched to find things that interested me and made me happy. And I fell in love with the little things, like green grass and mint toothpaste, the moon and the stars.

Now every moment for me is a turning point and I will choose how it affects me. I try to breathe in good moments and spit out the bad ones. I think of myself and my indecisiveness as the ocean, vast and never ending, beautiful and haunting. I am not afraid of the darkness I created; I treat it like an old friend that taught me lessons and gave me reasons to move on. I created the darkness to show me the beauty in the world.

Isobel Atkins is a 13 year old girl who lives with her dad, her stepmom, and her 3 year old sister, Caroline. She enjoys reading, writing, watching scary movies and listening to music. Isobel also sometimes writes poems and she teaches herself the piano and the guitar.
I’ll begin my story here, with a short introduction. Maybe I should acknowledge that my story isn’t just about one specific incident, but an overall experience. It’s hard trying to conjure a single word to describe the value underlined in this recollection, but I’ll try to do it using many words. Have you ever witnessed one of your peers convince someone to modify how they look because they’re “uncool?” I’ll tell you I sure have. There are always certain kids who want everything to be just the way they want it. Some people call them cool, but I call them bullies.

These “cool kids” are surprisingly very popular at schools. It could be the fact that they intimidate others, or that others want to be popular like them. What really perplexes me is why people strive to be like them, and follow them around like sheep. It could just be the nature of human beings to be accepted and noticed, but there are many more ways to do so than by being a bully. The control that the “cool kids” have over their sheep really enrages me.

This past year, I witnessed a truly saddening event. An ordinary student was enjoying his lunch break when the “cool kids” strode up to him. They started to joke about his haircut and how amazing their hair was. The student was frightened and scampered off. The next day he arrived at school with the same haircut as the “cool kids.” I couldn’t believe it. The things people persuade others to do can be shameful.

Matters like this occur every day around the world! And don’t think that this only happens in kids, it can happen to anyone. People change the way they look or what they believe just to fit in and feel accepted. I often wonder why the people who hold power over others think it’s acceptable to manipulate minds, including everything from shoe brand to religion. The answer could reside in the bully’s past; maybe he experienced a similar situation that taught him it was all right to be cruel and nasty. Every person deserves an equal start in life without having to change ideas because society says so.

My essay may be short, but I hope these experiences motivate my readers to consider the impact their actions have on others. My wish for the future is that people around the world follow this message; don’t change your ideas and actions based on what other people tell you, do not pressure others to change either. Maybe now you can conceive a value associated with my experiences. I present the words of Leo Tolstoy to the bullies around the world, “Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”

Logan was born in Ontario and moved to Australia for 4 years when he was 5. He now lives in Calgary with his two older brothers and parents. Logan plays the Alto Saxophone in two of his school’s bands and has a major role in his school’s drama production. He also enjoys playing sports such as basketball, soccer and badminton.
Have you ever had a moment in life that just stuck with you? I most definitely have! I will be the first to admit, my childhood was no walk in the park. Life was tough! If you were to look up “complicated families” mine would be at the top of the list. My parents were divorced. At the time my mom was engaged and had a child with her fiancé, Chris. Her fiancé had a child from his previous marriage, who is the same age as I am! At the age of three I might not have realized it, but looking back, now that I am older a more mature; it hit me! It hit me that you have to cherish who and what you have because in an instant it can change.

I remember that day like it was yesterday. I was downstairs, in my shared room with Chelsea, my mother’s fiancé’s daughter, having a nap, when really sleep was the least of my concerns. There was screaming, crying and lots of crashing. This was average for our home. Chris was always beating up on my mom, when she did something wrong. I thought it was normal, like all the mom’s boyfriends were violent. Being overrun with pure boredom, I woke Chelsea. We sat and argued about the events above. She thought something was seriously wrong. Being the fixer I already was, I assured her that it was normal. Though, this time Chelsea was right.

The noise coming from someone stomping down the stairs interrupted our chatting. We both scurried back into our beds and began to “sleep”. Our door swung open, only to reveal my mother. In her arms, was my sister, Kyra. In a matter of seconds, I was grasping onto my mother’s hand, as we pushed past Chris and out the door. One of the last things I heard was Chelsea’s pleas to take her with us. I really didn’t know why we didn’t…Really I didn’t know much of what was going on. All I knew was what I assumed. I assumed we were never going back there and we had nowhere to go.

We began the very familiar stroll to Heidi’s house. She is my mom’s best friend. One of the last things I remember about that day was being told, this was my new home.

As time passed my mom eventually got welfare and we moved into Calgary Housing. My mom was still in deep depression. To this day, I still do not know what was the cause of it. Was it Chris? I do not think I will ever know and I guess it stays that way for a reason.

Eventually, we made it to where we are today. My mom is remarried. She is happy with life, even though it still has its ups and downs. We have our own roof over our head and we have lots of food in our pantry. If there is one thing I want to accomplish from this, it is that, I don’t want pity. That’s the last thing I want. I want to share what I realized. The only thing that kept us together was each other. To this day, I try my hardest not to take who and what I have for granted because like before, it can all change in an instant.

Thirteen year old Hailey is an aspiring young author. Living primarily with her mom, little sister and stepdad, in Calgary Alberta, she spends most of her time writing and blogging. Her main source of inspiration for writing comes from her idols, One Direction. She is very involved with the community and loves spending time with family and friends. Hailey hopes that one day she can meet her idols and have her writing taken to greater heights.
I vividly remember that glorious night; I couldn’t shut my eyes even for a moment. I was restless to see what the next day was going to bring. Somehow I forced myself to sleep, even though I couldn’t contain the excitement rushing through my body. Tomorrow I would turn 9!

Morning came and I got out of my bed as fast as I could. Clueless, I skipped down the stairs heading straight to my living room. To my surprise, my parents didn’t even throw me a glance. I shook all the negative thoughts, walked over to where my dad was sitting, and flopped right onto the couch. Reluctantly, I found myself watching the news.

My heart was in my mouth, and I was on the verge of crying. “No wonder my parents were in shock,” I thought to myself. Seeing our city’s most precious, historical, and wonderful monument being destroyed by terrorists was horrifying.

It was the most devastating sight a nine year old could ever experience. I could see the ground covered in blood, every explosion affecting thousands of people. I nervously observed the burnt and injured bodies being transferred from stretchers to ambulances. All the while, police and firefighters were trying to rescue people stuck in the building.

During the newscast, I could hear bombs exploding every five minutes. The sound of people crying for help, the sirens of police cars, fire engines, and ambulances just destroyed me. It was all too much, I couldn’t stand it anymore. I gently rested my head on the palms of my hands and mumbled to myself, “I thought this was going to be the best day of my life, but it has turned out to be the opposite.” It is clear looking back that the most anticipated events don’t always turn out the way you want them to.

The terrorist attack lasted for three days. Everyone was terrified, even to step out of the house. The thing that scared me the most was my dad leaving for work every morning. I prayed every day, hoping that nothing would happen to him. Even standing on my balcony, I was petrified. I could see the empty streets, it was dead silent. I observed each and every face on the street. It seemed like people had forgotten to smile. I could see that everyone was deeply affected by the attack. Mentally and physically the city was in a horrible state. I could smell the gun powder in the atmosphere, and see the ruins of the buildings that were standing strong only a few days ago.

After days of watching my city in mourning, I thought to myself:

We are the children of one world,
Then why do we fight?
To prove our might,
Is it so important,
To prove one’s strength?
Killing and injuring one’s own.

My worldview changed the day I turned 9, because at such a tender age I was still trying to explore the world. I could never have imagined a world so harsh to the innocent. I have learned that both good and evil exist.
I recall a similar incident where innocent children lost their lives. DOES ANYONE DESERVE THIS?
Bombs and bullets, grenades and guns,
Bought on hire,
Making this beautiful Earth one big pyre.
To make his creation at sad plight,
No one has this right! – Turning Points Author

Donna a grade 8 student was born in India. She moved to Canada with her parents in the year 2009. She loves music, dance and reading mystery books. The 13 year old is thankful to her teachers and family for supporting her in her writing endeavours and credits them for her success in this competition.
There’s Always Tomorrow

“There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds.” – Laurell K. Hamilton.

My spirit shattered. There I was, curtains drawn shut, door closed, and huddled beneath the sheets. I drew a hand across my forehead, and it came back moist with sweat. Moisture welling at the base of my eyes. I found it strange that I would sweat there, of all places. Only, when it reached my lips, it had a queer salty taste. It was then that I realized, I was sobbing on the inside. It was not the first time that month. Looking back, I realize that it was the first time I learned that, while fake friends take flight, real friends stand and fight.

Imagine living in a country, for 11 years. You have friends, all your family is there, and the house that you’ve lived in for 4 years is your kingdom, and playground. Now. Imagine all your friends, family, and your kingdom ripped away. Being taken from your loving grandparents, in the hope that you would have a better life and a job when you’re older, in a free country where everyone was welcome. That was me. I was ripped away from my country, moved to this supposed free country, where everyone was equal. But even here there are divisions. Here I was, at a new school, where most people knew each other from the grade before, or from other schools. However, as is usual, I started to get to know my table group members. And eventually I was friends with them. Even friends with their friends. But, imagine you trusted one of these people, someone who you thought you could trust, and then have them betray you. Turn everyone you were friends with against you. All but two. One whom you had originally known as an acquaintance and the other, a friend who was with you almost all the time. And they were with me the whole time, through that month of anger, sadness and depression.

With suicide never far from my mind, I had no one to talk to as my parents were stressed with work and the big move, while my brother was no older than 9. Yet everyday I went to school, there were my friends, knowing my moods better than I did. They would always make an effort to work with me, make me laugh, and laugh at my horrendously unfunny jokes. And though they may never realize it, they saved my life. As for those select people who turned on me, do I hate them? No. I don’t. I pity them. For it’s their ignorance that led them to turn on me. It’s the ignorance of making fun of where I come from. I have forgiven them, and continue to. As for my two friends, well, it’s now my job to make sure they never get to where I have been. And if that means working with them, making them laugh, or laughing at their horrendously unfunny jokes, so be it.

D’Artagnan is an avid reader who plays video games when not reading, playing sports, or acting. He has a passion for the arts and is always encouraging younger kids to pursue their dreams. He tries to be a positive force in the community, trying to prevent what happened to him, that may be occurring to others.
Have you ever heard the quote, “When one door closes another opens?” This quote signifies that someone is having a significant change in their life; a turning point. This quote summarizes what I have gone through as I have had many changes in my life from changing schools, moving houses and changing environments.

Coming from the country, Nigeria, on the western coast of Africa, I always thought that everything would remain the same and I would not need to move to a new environment. As a ten year-old, there is a comforting feeling that comes with keeping everything the same; no pressure to learn anything new. But when news came of our family moving across the ocean, the thought of change scared me. What would my new home offer me?

I had never heard of Canada before. This troubled me because in Nigeria, I had at least known my friends, family and even the sports I played. I had to start over, trying to meet new people. How am I going to meet people without knowing their language? I will be the kid with no friends and no one to talk to. I felt worried that I would be alone in a sea of new faces.

My fear of being deserted on an island came true. From the first words that came out my mouth to my peers’ ears, I was an alien to them. Eyes glaring, halting their conversations to see, I walk by; not caring that I was isolated from everyone. I couldn’t do anything right; my soccer ball would be overlooked for their basketball.

It was either sink or swim. If I did not take the first step to talk to them, or ask them to join, they would look at me differently. One gym class, I decided to pick up the basketball instead of the soccer ball. Once I did that, they look at me differently; they opened up to me. Now I was one of them. They explained how to play their game to me. After this, they would start to approach me. My willingness to play their sport was a gateway to have them coming to talk to me. Not only was I in the game, but now I was eating lunch with them, and even got to show them my game; soccer.

Moving to Canada was not as bad as I thought. Moving to Canada opened a portal to change. My fear of change was all in my head. Change was good. I dwelled on the isolation, that I never thought of the positives; new friends, new sports and even new opportunities in a new environment. This transformation has helped me till now form changing schools and moving environment. With my new door opening, I learned that change can be a good thing.

Emmanuel is a thirteen year old grade 8 student from the African nation of Nigeria. When Emmanuel was ten, he began his journey across the Atlantic with his family to start their new life in Canada. An athletic student, Emmanuel enjoys playing hockey and basketball, but his true sports love is soccer. When Emmanuel grows up he wants to become a doctor and travel the world.
Family Matters

"You don’t know what you have, until it’s gone" – Anonymous

On January 18, 2006, my dad was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. He had many doctors’ appointments, tests, chemo and radiation over the next year. In the end, there were three lymph nodes that were still enlarged and in locations that were too difficult to remove.

In October 2009, my dad discovered another lymph node in his neck that was enlarged, and it was diagnosed that the cancer had returned. The only thing they could try now was a stem cell transplant, which we were told was very successful for this kind of cancer and we were given a lot of hope. On April 11, 2010, my dad received his new stem cells. Two months after the transplant, my dad felt really good and was eager to go back to work. One final test showed that the cancer was more widespread throughout his body. On June 5, 2010 he was diagnosed as terminal.

He went to the hospital many times for blood transfusions and chemo treatment to help him with complications from the cancer. We considered taking him to cancer clinics in the U. S., but the doctors said his immune system was compromised and it would be too difficult for him. At this point my dad wasn’t able to walk to the car, let alone across an airport. His physical ability seemed to be degrading twice as fast. When he was at his worst, the hospital and doctors seemed to have completely abandoned us. They wouldn’t even give us an estimate of how much time he may have had left.

I remember waking up on the morning of August, 21, 2010 to see the paramedics surrounding my dad and try to perform CPR on him, I was completely stunned. I didn’t know what to feel. When the paramedics took him to the hospital, I sat and waited for what the outcome of their efforts to save him would be. When I entered the emergency room and saw my mom crying, I knew what had happened. When someone you love passes away, you don’t know what to feel, you lose all sense of your emotions and you can’t even cry at first. I remember never wanting to leave that hospital room, but of course all things must come to an end. No one can ever truly prepare themselves for the loss of a life, though I find solace in the fact that my dad’s passing wasn’t due to a car crash, or something like that. As humans, we can never fully recuperate from something such as a death in the family but we must keep on living our lives lest grief consume us. It’s been almost three years since my dad passed away, and as I grow up I realize how much more my life could be with him in it. Though no matter what happens I will forever remember my dad.

Jayden is a Grade 8 student in Calgary, Alberta and an avid Parkour Free Runner, which he loves to do whenever he can, and recently was thrilled to participate with some UK Parkour athletes in London on the Thames River Walk. Jayden has many friends and enjoys keeping busy with target shooting, hunting, archery, long boarding, swimming and being with people he loves. He lost his dad to recurrent Hodgkin’s Lymphoma when he was 12 yrs old, and misses him, and the things they won’t have the chance to do, everyday.
“If you don’t think cooperation is necessary, watch what happens to a wagon if one wheel comes off.”
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Sarah Zizek
First Place – Grade 9 & 10
Calgary Catholic School District

Unfair

“Don’t get your pleasure from my pain” – Peter, Paul & Mary

Classmates used to think I was a goody two shoes. Many thought I would never harm a fly, and I wouldn’t. Peers assumed I would never allow myself to hand in an assignment in late or to even think of harms such as drugs or alcohol. Teachers would be supportive in class and on school sports teams. I had endless friends throughout the halls and classrooms. I felt I was respected and I belonged in the community of my junior high school. It was all perfect, until one day my reputation changed forever and every heart turned on me.

It was a normal Wednesday in the hectic hallways of my school. During nutrition break, while I was gnawing at a scarlet apple, an old friend approached me out of the blue and asked if she could have a word with me. She tugged me to the end of the chaotic hallway. She whispered cautiously as if she wanted no one to hear a syllable. “If I knew something about you would you want to know?” I hesitated. The desire to know pushed a breathless, “Yes,” out of my mouth.

“In Art class he was showing a bunch of guys a revealing photo on his phone. He told all the guys the photo was of you. I know you would never do anything like that. I tried to stand up for you, but they wouldn’t even dare to listen,” she announced sincerely.

My stomach clenched into five thousand hernias and my heart froze like an icicle ready to fall off Mount Everest. I was so overwhelmed I thought I was going to collapse straight down to the center of the earth. I bolted to the bathroom with many awkward stares filling my peripheral vision. I dove into the first stall, twisted the lock behind me and dropped down onto the toilet seat.

I didn’t know how I felt, but I certainly felt something and it wasn’t a good something at all. Obviously I was angry and utterly disgusted anyone would ever do such a thing. Where do people get these ideas? First of all, I couldn’t fathom following through with such an act, much less making up a story about it. Then a thought rocked me. What would people think of me once the rumor got out? I could already hear the nasty comments coming out of judgmental mouths. I curled my stomach over my knees, tears pouring down my face like a waterfall. After all, the bathroom is the sanctuary of sadness for all teenage girls. I realized I needed to tell someone before the rumor really skyrocketed throughout the grade, even worse, the school! I cleaned up the black mascara tracks that had smeared down my face onto my cheeks and I walked down to the office with the little confidence I had left.

With a bitter taste still tingling on my tongue, I took some initiative and asked for our Vice-Principal. I nervously told her what I had heard, reciting the exact words my classmate had whispered to me. The look on the Vice-Principal’s face was probably the exact mortified look I had on my face when I had found out.
Immediately, she acted on the issue. She didn’t want me to go through the public humiliation of others gossiping about a false statement.

The Principal called him in to the office to interrogate him and ask him why he started that untrue rumor. Unwillingly, he confessed that the photo wasn’t of me and that he found it on the internet. How pathetic of him to do that. I understand he took a well-deserved verbal beating in the office from the Principal and I’m sure another one from his parents later that day, too.

My parents were downright furious and sorry for me. They comforted me until I felt better and did everything in their power to reassure me that everything would be okay. The rumor had leaked, because that evening I got at least twenty hurtful texts accusing me of sending that picture to him. Some people I had never even spoke to were calling me disturbing names that I had never even heard before. That didn’t bother as much as the ten texts I received from somewhat close friends tentatively asking me if I sent the photo. I clearly stated no but only some believed me. It hurt that close friends would suspect that I could even think of something so demeaning. However, that night I got five texts from my closest friends comforting and telling me everything was going to be okay in the long run. They didn’t even have to say, “I know you didn’t do it,” they just knew. I am so thankful for those five loving hearts that shared their compassion with me that night. It truly made a difference.

The gossip lasted about two weeks. I fought through it day by day with the help of my friends standing behind me. He got suspended for three days. He wrote a hand written apology that he read for me two days after he was suspended. It wasn’t the effortless “I’m sorry,” that I had expected. It was an in-depth, heartfelt apology, which I was able to appreciate a while after. Strict consequences were enforced for his actions and I really hope he has learned his lesson.

But as much as he learned, I feel I have learned much more. I have learned crappy things can happen to great people for no reason. Frankly, that’s just life; unfair. I also learned that when everyone walks out, your true friends walk in. I received more good out of this experience than bad. One lesson that spoke to me from this turning point was not to get pleasure from other people’s pain. I learned it on the receiving end as well as on the giving end. The hard part of this experience lasted for a short period of time but the lessons will last a life time.

Fourteen year old Sarah was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta. She plans to continue with all her education and later hopefully become a Language Arts or Science teacher. Dancing plays a large role in Sarah’s life and she hopes to compete as a soloist – eventually. Sarah would like to thank her teachers, friends and family for supporting her through everything.
used to think that there were two types of people: those who would change the world and those that were only capable of watching them. I categorized myself in the latter. Why try my best if it was merely ordinary compared to everyone else? I presumed that if I were to disappear, it would only be a short matter of time before I was forgotten in a crowd full of promising youth that would one day become doctors who find the cure to the impossible, legendary musicians who perform sold-out concerts, and athletes who compete in the Olympics. It was only after discovering a passion for the performing arts that my outlook had taken a different turn.

In the beginning, acting never really interested me. When it came to the fine arts, I suppose I was more of an artist. Choosing drama as my elective in grade seven was due to being told that it could increase my confidence because of its extroverted and lively conduct. After only a few months of settling into the junior high school environment, it easily became one of my favourite classes. I thoroughly enjoyed being introduced to the different aspects of drama, and I was motivated to improve after each performance, no matter how utterly nervous I was beforehand. Furthermore, my teacher was remarkably enthusiastic, patient and warm-hearted; this made it all the more wonderful.

Once Christmas holidays passed, my drama teacher mentioned the auditions that were going to take place for the spring production of Alice in Wonderland. I was intrigued by the idea, but I allowed my insecurities and self-consciousness get the best of me. Doubts of whether or not I was talented enough to be a part of this production crept into my mind. Although the possibility of being chosen was present, I was afraid that my social awkwardness would ruin the experience for me. Questions such as, “What if I am not able to fit in with everyone else?” worried me. On the other hand, I knew that I would regret it terribly if I did not audition.

While having a conversation with one of my closest friends, I found out that she had been dealing with the same conflict. Together we auditioned and supported each other. When I heard that the cast list was finally up, butterflies inside my stomach had begun flying frantically, trying to avoid the knots blocking their paths. Hesitantly, my eyes examined the single sheet of white paper.

As I read my name printed in black ink, it felt like the knots had disappeared and the butterflies along with them.

The Duchess was indeed an entertaining character to portray. Many of my fondest memories occurred during the countless hours of rehearsal for this play. From spending Friday afternoons rehearsing scenes with sets that we helped build together, to playing a game of tag in a gymnasium filled with darkness after eating four greasy slices of pizza, to perfecting a one woman act of a crying baby pig being yelled at by his human mother using the tune from The Addams Family. Somewhere along these lines, I felt as though I really belonged.

The months flew by quickly, and before I knew it, opening night had arrived. Before each performance I was incredibly nervous, yet whenever I approached the stage, all of my worries suddenly vanished. For five nights, I was the Duchess. After the final curtain call, I realized that I was going to miss the play and the people who were involved immensely. At the same time though, I was filled with overwhelming happiness as I grasped how much I had accomplished and grown throughout this experience. More importantly, it was then that I understood the love and appreciation I had for the Performing Arts.
Finding a passion for something led me to understand that to be satisfied with myself was never about wanting to be the best, but rather giving my best effort for what I love to do. Now, I think that there are two types of people: Those who believe that there are two types of people and those who have lived to learn otherwise.

Born and raised in Calgary, Alberta, Alyssa has a love for theatrical arts. The subject of much good natured teasing by her classmates, she’s a great sport and a great athlete. She’s also a natural leader. Alyssa is active in the volunteer community with Youth Central. She lives with her mom, dad and older brother.
Nostalgic

"Do not dwell in the past; do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment."
– Buddha

Nostalgic [nos-tal-gic] /adjective/ of, having to do with, producing or characterized by a yearning for something in the past. From its dictionary definition, being nostalgic doesn’t seem so bad. But out of the book and in real life, nostalgia is addictive. You want to relive all those moments again, but you can’t. Ever since I had memories worth returning to, I had a longing to return to those moments. I was a victim of the happiness of my past. I was, nostalgic.

People told me I was too young to suffer nostalgia, but I didn’t listen. Anything could trigger an episode of homesickness to a younger, more carefree, me. I told myself - why grow up, when you could grow young again? A pair of tiny skates in my basement would reveal memories of skating around the Olympic oval with my grandparents, tightly gripping onto one of those red bar-walkers. A sloppy childhood painting could conjure memories of messy hands and smiling faces. I spent hours pouring over what I would do if I could go back.

But that all changed one day. No, the memories didn’t change; I did. Ironically, I cannot remember the exact year or month. All I can say is that it occurred during summer, a few years ago, at my grandparents’ cabin in Invermere, BC. Our family had gone to that cabin for a week every year since I could recall. It was a memory hotspot; it was there that I learned to ride a bike, there that I caught my first fish, went bowling, swam, played, had fun. I would lie in the second floor bedroom of that wooden cabin and look up at the unpainted ceiling, the timbers ridden with knots. I was surrounded by the very walls that I remembered from my childhood, but place wasn’t the problem. Time was.

One of those days, a couple years ago, I wanted to go to the lake with my brother, perhaps in hope of recreating past moments. But for reasons unknown, he preferred to stay in the cabin. I was irritated, and frankly, angry. How could I recreate those memories if the person who rowed, swam, and ran beside me wasn’t there? I decided it was now impossible to relive those moments, but went to the lake anyways. Angrily kicking past the pebbled beach, I half-heartedly swam to the offshore platform from which we used to dive. From the top of the platform, I looked down at the water, glistening and rolling like a field of silver snakes, but it didn’t seem like such a long way down as it did in past years. The water was taunting me, and I was more aware than ever that I would never be able to go back to those moments, or even recreate them. But then I thought, if I can’t recreate them… why try? Why wish for old memories when I can make new ones? I stepped off the board, plunging into the frigid water as a nostalgic person; a person who lived for the past. But as I rose out of the water in a shower of rising bubbles, I was a new person. I didn’t need the past.

Now I tell myself, why grow young again when you can grow up? People told me I was too young to suffer nostalgia, and I listened. Life is short, and if you spend all the time on rewind, you will never finish the movie. I still think about the past sometimes, but I no longer waste time wishing to go back, rather I am thankful for those memories. Life is for living, not wishing to live again. Now, nostalgic has a different definition to me. Nostalgic, is something I used to be.

Brian is a dedicated grade 9 student attending school in Calgary, Alberta. He enjoys writing and drawing, and is looking forward to moving on to high school. Brian would like to graciously acknowledge his teacher for encouraging him throughout the writing of his essay.
He Helped Me

People view me as a loud and cheerful child; one who is confidently brave. But hidden beneath my smile is a hurting truth. When I was younger, I would come home sad, not because of pressure in school about assignments and projects, but because of how people treated me. Ever since I was a kid, I’ve felt like I was the second choice. I never had a real best friend; I never really had friends to hang out with. I’m the kind of girl you go to if you need your work done. I was what you call a “dork”. I was hated or it’s just what I thought, locking myself up in my room only to finally release my tears. Then I started to hurt myself. I thought that if people saw my cuts, they would care, but no one noticed them. Then I remembered, no one talks to me unless they need something. Cutting became the hobby of choice. I would go to my room to find a sharp blade, sit in my bath tub and slash my wrist with pressure, and watch my own blood flow out of my flesh, like a small waterfall. This was my escape.

Soon, cutting was not enough. I started to hurt others too, physically. I would go to my karate class just to release my anger on people and being a black belt made it easy. My ‘sensei’ would always tell me that I was best in his class but I didn’t have to send someone to the hospital. This was only part of my anger issues.

It didn’t take much to set me off; a small argument with my mom about not doing my chores could result in flying objects and a hole in the wall. My family became worried about my anger issues and soon found out I was hurting myself. They told someone about it. They registered me in a clinic where they helped me get through ‘it’ without killing myself. I didn’t go to my school for about two weeks. When I got back, everything was still the same, I was ignored. I was still my old self.

Then I met Dylan. I remembered the time we met two years ago. I was rushing to go home from the clinic and the sun was beginning to set. We accidentally bumped into each other, and I fell. Of course he helped me up, and introduced himself and looked at me straight in the eye. I spaced out. He had gorgeous eyes that looked like two pools of chocolate. I introduced myself while stuttering, how could I not? That was my first encounter with a boy so close to me. It seemed like forever, before I finally managed to say my name properly. “You don’t know your own name?” he lightly chuckled and asked jokingly. Since then we became friends, always hanging out. He would always call me at night checking on me to see if I’m alright not knowing that I was cutting myself.

One day, we were hanging out at his house and it was a hot summer day forcing me to wear a simple black short sleeve tee and jersey shorts. There he saw scars everywhere, different lengths and deepness from wrist to my upper arm and even my thigh. He simply asked, “Is that why you’re wearing a sweater all the time?” I just nodded; I didn’t know what to say. He was so disappointed in me. But he still helped me through my problems and would say things like, “You are my only best friend, I can’t lose you.” After this, his goal was to find a way to make me so busy that I didn’t have time to rest. He introduced me to some of his friends, forcing me to have more good friends. Before I knew it, I became happy, full of life and learned that you don’t need to harm yourself to let the pain out. Dylan helped me open up so that I could just talk about my problems to someone. Most of all, I learned to trust because, HE helped me.

Jamila was born in the Philippines where she spent the first 10 years of her life before moving to Canada with her parents and three older siblings. Aside from her passion for writing stories, Jamila enjoys writing songs and playing in a band. Among other interests, Jamila is a trained martial artist and dreams of being a veterinarian when she grows up.
Marbles of My Mind

Throughout my life, I have been called many things. I’ve been called intelligent, bright, and capable as determined by my grades, teachers, and accomplishments as well as pretty, funny, and talented as told by relatives, peers, and mentors. For so long, these words were like little marbles I collected in the back of my brain for safekeeping that I’d fall back onto when I felt sad. However, my bank of marbles broke when at the beginning of grade eight, some boys called me fat, ugly, and a waste of space. I know you’re always told that words will never hurt you, but honestly they did. Suddenly, my bank of marbles broke and shattered and everything that I’d heard up until that moment meant nothing.

When my marbles were lost, I became my own enemy and began raging war with myself in the prison of my mind. Hearing those words was like a freefall into a cold lake—the initial feeling not really sinking in until I’d hit the water. I rapidly began my descent into darkness when I realized that all those marbles of words had all been lies said out of pity. I began to constantly beat myself up for everything I did wrong and criticized myself by comparing myself with others. This moment sent me on a two year struggle with myself.

Suddenly, I felt alone. I couldn’t go to my family, who were busy since my mom had recently started chemotherapy. I couldn’t go to my friends, whom I’d recently been drifting from and had problems of their own. I didn’t feel like I could say that I had problems when so many others would say that I live a great life. I felt like if I did ask for advice, they would just say that my problems didn’t exist. Eventually, I decided to cut myself. Like a broken record, my mind replayed the message that I was a waste of space and that my existence was unnecessary.

After that I’d go through constant swings of up and down moods. For periods of time, I’d feel “up”. I’d start to feel happier, better, and climb the mountain to happiness. They’d even last for a while and I’d start to feel like I used to. Then, all of a sudden, I’d feel “down”, my previous “up” mood completely erased by a mental punch to my self esteem and soul. I was constantly building sandcastles only to find the tide wiping any progress made away.

For me, my epiphany came only recently, but has greatly impacted me since. About a week before this moment happened, I’d phased into a really bad “down” mood. I felt terrible about myself and couldn’t stop being negative. Everything was pointless and going through the day was like trying to walk through a brick wall. One day, my English teacher said that she wanted to talk. She wanted to tell me her thoughts about me. She told me that I didn’t see myself the way that she did because she saw a bright, intelligent, and capable young woman in me. At first, like all the rest, the words didn’t sound any different from the lies I had been hearing, but when it sunk in that someone who hadn’t known me for very long, saw through my façade, and still thought there was a person of worth underneath it all, I felt better in a way.
I’m not saying that this moment has magically healed my mental health, but I do know that this moment has inspired me. It has inspired me to try believing again and have a little bit more faith in myself. I want to feel happy and great about myself from now on. I know that there will be times when I might get sad again, but I promise that I’ll know what to do. Since that epiphany, I have begun collecting those marbles of words again. It’s a slow process, but I promise that I’m going to accept them and know in my heart that every single word is true.

Monica has had a love of reading her whole life. She was born and raised in Calgary, where she lives with her parents and older sister. Besides reading, she enjoys listening to music, watching movies and writing. Monica dreams of travelling the world and becoming someone great.
Imagine being told by your parents that you’re moving to a mysterious place called Canada. When I moved to Canada in 2005, as would be expected for most children, I was oblivious. Needless to say the struggle my family went through was unknown to me, but many lessons were realized as I got older. When my parents told me I was moving, I didn’t understand that the word “moving” meant leaving your childhood behind and creating a new one, half-way across the world to have your family survive off of others’ acts of kindness, big and small.

Being eight years old, I thought it was all a grand adventure with my family. In all fairness, upon arriving in Canada, I was in a truly new world full of white, both people and precipitation. I hadn’t had many toys, but the ones I had were enough to keep me entranced to not notice my parents losing weight and fast. When my dad would come home late during winter nights after taking the transit from downtown, I would wake up just to hug him. When I would hug him, his ribs would poke me, but I would just giggle and my dad would hug me tighter. My brother’s and my never ending foolishness with each other kept me from noticing my mom serving us the same dinner every night, fried pork chops and rice.

The portions got smaller, but then on some days they would be bigger. Of course my brother and I didn’t notice that those were the days my mom wouldn’t eat that much at all. My mom, during that time, announced, “Kiera, honey, we’re going on a trip.” I became very excited. Calgary’s weather is far from a picnic especially when taking the transit. I remember it being a cold bus ride passing and heading to unfamiliar places. My mom and I ended up at a bus stop in a place I’ve never been before. During the long, cold walk. My mom jabbered to me, “When we’re there, stick with me, ok?” I found out later, when I was older that we went to the food bank that day. All I saw were people of all sorts and the place had a very hectic ambiance. Men, women, homeless, and even more so newly arrived Filipino families. My mom and I waited for hours and my stomach was close to empty. I was sitting beside a Filipino man of whom I have a very vague memory. I was not sure if he worked there or if he was also waiting in line, but there was one thing I really took notice of, his newly bought bag of McDonald’s. My talkative mom was chatting with him and he probably noticed my envious eyes. The next action he made however caught me by surprise. He handed over his bag of McDonald’s. A man whom I scarcely knew touched my heart with this small act of kindness. Arriving only recently in Canada, I was a child who considered fast food a luxury. Not having it for a long time, this small sacrifice changed my whole understanding of kindness. It taught me that growing up, I have to also make sacrifices for others and be kind, as much as I possibly can. Even if the action is small, the thought can come across big.
When I arrived in Canada, there were a lot of lessons and traits I attained, but that moment of compassion showed me something. How important this one trait is: kindness. Without it, the world would be so much dimmer. One random act of kindness, even though it may not seem a lot, can put a smile on a person’s face.

Kiera Dalton was born in the Philippines and moved to Canada with her parents and older brother at a young age. As a ninth grader, she is incredibly involved within the school community, participating in everything from drama productions to student council to wrestling. When asked what made Kiera a unique member of the school or classroom, the answer was almost universally her warmth, kindness, and positive attitude. Those qualities should continue to serve her well when she pursues her dream to become a doctor.
Sometimes, all we need is a change of scenery.

For me, this time came upon me during the summer of grade seven. I had just been doing whatever it is 13-year-olds without a life do, when the time to get school supplies approached. But then it hit me - I hated my school.

A tidal wave of memories washed over me; memories consisting of fake smiles, raised eyebrows, and turned faces. I acknowledged the torture that had become my everyday school life. The worst part was that the torment hadn’t even been direct; I suffered daily, locked within myself, chained in the shackles that were the high expectations of my peers, struggling to bear the infinite weight of high society.

The torturous memories bombarded me, but at the time, for reasons I can only call self-preservation, I had previously seen them differently. Spotless white hallways, too much money to go around, glares that turned to plastic grins as soon as I turned to see them, and doors that claimed to promise salvation but fell like cardboard props...

I was in an asylum.

I can recall many experiences, but one in particular stands out. It had been a sunny, yet chilly day. I had just been to the mall with my mom and I had purchased the brightest, loudest, silliest tie-dye t-shirt with a giant smiley face right in the middle. Sauntering into science, I had a bounce in my step and a smile on my face, proud of my new threads. Sitting down, I instantly felt eyes on me. In my peripheral vision, I could see fingers pointing and eyes rolling. Suddenly, I didn’t feel so confident anymore. My one friend, Savannah, looked down, embarrassed for me. But I had to hold my head high, as I got out my notes. The class seemed strangely long but astoundingly short at the same time. As soon as it ended, I was swarmed. “Nice shirt!” came snickers from the left. “Where can I find one?” came giggles from the right. I pressed my books against my chest and hurried to gym, where I could change.

So began my mission - objective, find a new school. I got to work, researching day and night, reading websites, calling and emailing and trying, trying, trying. But it was all in vain, because each school could offer a variation of only one answer - no.

Except one. One clear morning, our phone started ringing. I almost missed it, but when I picked up the phone, I was speaking to the secretary of a school called St. Cyril. I barely remembered calling that one, but I almost squealed with glee when they told me that they would probably be able to take me. I bolted upstairs and threw the phone at my mom, who started talking business with the person on the other end. I could not feel my feet - I was floating. Before I knew it, we were touring the school that I would be attending in the fall. All I could think about was that I would never, ever, have to return to that... place... ever again.

September came, and I was off to my first day at my new school. I would love to say that it was perfect right from square one, but if I did, I’d be lying. It wasn’t easy. It took me awhile to find a circle of friends I liked. I wasn’t use to being exposed to this type of environment.
But though it was a struggle, I can say that it was all worth it. Two years later, I am happily settled around people I value and people who value me. I am living proof that money, gossip, and seclusion from the real world are problems that cannot be solved with a couple of smiles and the illusion of perfection. After all, perfection cannot exist without imperfection. Our differences and flaws are what bring us together and make life interesting.

Through the transfer, I was given the opportunity to discover myself and to be who I am. Now, as I am typing this, I can shamelessly say that I am wearing the most hideous, bulky, and sparkly sweater ever.

And it feels great.

Ursula lives with her parents, brother and sister in Calgary, Alberta. She attends grade nine and is excited about attending high school in September, where she will participate in a medley of activities amongst her new friends. She hopes to make new, happy memories. Ursula has taken up hobbies including piano, fashion and networking. She looks to the future with bright eyes and is glad for new beginnings.
Sure

Early summer: the mark of the outside world compelling the human psyche, implanting desires onto the surface of one’s brain to take a step forward and feel the fresh and cool breeze of the outdoors. A new journey, in a metaphorical sense, begins by taking the first step forward. To me and my family, all it meant was planning, packing, and a three-day, stops counted, drive from Montreal to Calgary.

It’s not like some kind of horrible decision I had to bear on my shoulders. In fact, I even seconded it. A new environment was just what my family needed, and I mean that literally. Dad worked at some kind of plastic factory. I never bothered to inquire about it. I knew from his accounts that it had been a strain on him, what with burning materials and smoke affecting his health. He spent the most time at home or out on clinical appointments. In my case, it’s school. One year at a French school, école Cinq-Continents, was a good experience, provided that I had amazing friends and that it was a very basic sixth grade school, but I didn’t think I could bear more French in the future. Naturally, the thought of applying into an English speaking school in Montreal came into mind but, sadly, certain living conditions were not met. It was only Mom who had a good opportunity, but after reading online job articles about Calgary, she had a change of thought and jumped on the bandwagon.

The sun’s rays coloured the early dawn a lovely light marigold. On the ground lay puddles of water, the remaining traces of the spiteful winter’s aftermath. The open trunk revealed the remaining few boxes of clothing, books, china, and figurines, kept for personal safety. Inside the car was a large cooler, containing multiple cans of pop, and coupled with it was a bag with food for a dashing family. Mom, with an optimistic look on her face, asked me if I was ready, to which I replied with a nod. Dad stretched for a while before taking his seat behind the wheel. Once the engine began to rumble, the journey had begun.

Dad got the short end of the straw. While he was busy driving, occasionally bearing the coldness of a canned drink against his cheeks, Mom and I were sleeping cosily. Once we had awoken, he would jokingly complain about our laziness, and then ramble on about the magnificent scenery, detailing rocky formations and small, natural lakes. In our hotel room, he spent most of the time sprawled on the large bed. Mom would always smile, saying that Dad’s also fighting for a nice future. There she went again, all poetic and such, but I didn’t mind it. It was true after all.

Our first stop in Calgary was the quickest hotel we could find. Night had fallen, and the cold drinks were not satisfying for an extended journey. Exhaustion and cramped joints had to be cured.

The morning afterwards, it was me who woke up last. Mom and Dad took advantage of the hotel wi-fi; all I heard was the tapping sounds of fingers pressing against the keys of the keyboard. As soon as they were less distracted, noticing my presence, the first thing I was presented with was a great, big family hug and the cheer, “Welcome to Calgary!” In my opinion, it was more of a true welcoming when we found our new house in Rundle. The carpet flooring was a new experience, and I childishly rolled around it.

A few days of adaptation and job hunting in the Centre for Newcomers, my Mom dropped me the question, after consideration and collaboration with Dad.

“St. Rose of Lima, it’s the closest one here! What a relief! So, what do you think? Has a catch to it, right?”
We were already on a new journey, and this early into the game of life, I was presented with a new route. My answer to possibly the best, most fun-inducing adventure of every teen’s life began with a simple, “Sure…”

Born in the Philippines, Aldwin has lived in the Middle East and various cities in Canada. He is an only child and he has some pet fish (that don’t like him). Aldwin is a very creative person with a great mind for story creation. He’s also an artist (even though he says he isn’t) and a video game aficionado. His classmates know he’s very bright. He also loves money.
In the summer of 2012, my parents decided that it was time for us to move to the land of Canada. I was not a stranger to the country; in fact, I had been there 3 times prior to the big move. The first time was in 1997, I was so young that pictures are what remind me of the trip. The second time was when I was nine years old. It was not the most pleasant trip - I got stung by a bee in Calgary Zoo, which sparked my phobia of bees and wasps. The third time was in the summer of 2009, we mostly went on road trips.

One would have thought: since I've visited the country various times, moving there won't be difficult. That is indeed a misconception. When I told my friends about leaving, that was what they told me. Frankly, I was hurt. It was as if it was an easy transition. I have lived in Hong Kong my whole life, never moved houses, studied with the same group of friends in a Catholic school ever since kindergarten – how could they simply brush off the fact that I would be leaving my life behind? I suppose I was overreacting, but the night after I told my friends, I cried. After a while I don't even know what I was crying about: whether it was for my friends, my school, fear; somehow it all seemed like a jumbled pile of worries.

I was not the only one worrying, though. Ever since the final decision of moving was made, it was a whirlwind of planning, organizing and packing. My father was especially stressed. He had worked in Canada during the 1980s, and had the thought of relocating his family there ever since he moved back to Hong Kong due to my grandmother's death. There was constant arguing between my parents: one likes to take time planning over schedules, the other prefers having things planned already. My father's brothers - my uncles, tried to persuade my father to wait a few years before moving, said that the economy was not in a favourable state, and that my father was still fantasizing about the easy laid back life he had in the 1980s. Needless to say, my father had tried his best to disguise the stress he was carrying. But he couldn't fool me. I noticed how his grey hair started to grow whiter, how he would stay up at night at the computer, and if he slept, he slept with the lights on.

It was around that time when I started giving up. I stopped giving my all to excel in my school work and I avoided after-school activities. All I did was read books and linger on the internet. I was distancing myself from my beloved school, the place where I grew up. When I look back at that time, I see it as self-preparation.

I was not the only girl who was leaving my school. There were around 10 of us, but everyone except me was simply studying abroad. I was the odd one who was immigrating to another place. The others had such a hopeful look on their faces which I desperately wanted to possess. I wondered how they could be so optimistic, so happy. Then one day, I had an epiphany - I realized that they saw the transition as an opportunity to start over.

That was the turning point. A chance to start over! To undo my wrongs, leave behind regrets; it was my chance to really fight for the future that I envisioned myself to have. I also understood why my parents thought it a good idea to move: the constant homework and endless tests were draining the spirit out of me - I needed a change.
A change it was, indeed. After an emotional goodbye with my friends, I moved to Canada. I like Canada, I like the cool, dry weather, I like how I can easily access American television, I like how it could snow in the middle of summer. But I also disliked Canada. I don’t like how I couldn’t just go out of the house and grab a coffee, I don’t like how everything is so vast, and I don’t like the fact that I don’t know anyone.

I would say being alone is one of my greatest fears.

In popular teen magazines, such as Seventeen, there is almost always a section where girls describe their experience in changing schools and meeting new people, and how they would have the perception of everything going down badly only to realize afterwards: hey, starting over isn’t that bad. Meeting new people isn’t that awkward – just walk over and say hello! That part of such magazines always irks me now.

My parents thought that, since I’m from a Catholic school, it would only make sense that I go to one in Canada, so I could adjust more comfortably. It worked - a bit. It worked when we said a prayer before assembly. It worked when I saw a small church at the corner of the second floor. It worked when I saw a huge cross in the entrance. But it didn’t work when I entered the school grounds on the first day and came face to face with people who are all friends with each other already.

Unlike those magazine articles, the first day of a fresh start does not go down easily. Sure, my first day was not like Carrie, but it was awfully lonely. I had no idea what was expected of me, and I had no one to ask the questions that I had. For a week I ate lunch by my locker, trying my best to attempt to ignore looks that my peers would give me. It seemed to me that I had been with the same group of friends for so long, that somehow I had forgotten how to make new friends. I kept holding on to the mentality that people would just approach you if they wanted to know you. It was certainly ridiculous, but I was afraid to put myself out there, to openly present myself to others, to say “Be my friend!”, and I was reluctant to admit to myself that I was sad, desperate and lonely.

But all I needed was to do so.

Therefore, I started smiling, I started initiating conversations and I started working towards my future. It was beyond my comfort zone, but if I wanted a change, I need to change it myself. Because you can’t rely on others to help you, they have their problems to care for as well. It is only selfish to expect so.

It is forever a challenge, and I don’t think I would ever feel at ease, or feel like I completely belong. But I am glad that my parents made that decision. It was because of that decision that I regained purpose, no longer felt like yet another student in the system, but that I could face anything. It was because of that decision that I understood my parents, learned how to empathize and be independent - something that I severely lacked beforehand.

I am slowly getting to know myself, and that is all I ever wanted.

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Venus Fung was born in Hong Kong. Despite being Chinese-Filipino, she speaks English, Cantonese and Mandarin. She moved to Calgary when she was 16 years old. Venus has co-created her high school’s first newspaper. In her spare time she enjoys reading and admires writers like J. K. Rowling, Jane Austen and John Green. She hope to get into media-journalism in the future.
Embracing My Father

Bickering and arguing; that’s how my day would begin on a regular basis. My father, an East Indian man, was raised in Pakistan, who really valued his culture, beliefs and traditions. However, my family was raised in an open-minded multicultural nation known as Canada, and because my views immensely differed from my father’s, we would constantly bicker and argue about the way I dressed, about the people with whom I interacted and my future goals and attributes in life. When my father would begin lecturing me about how things were different when he was a child, I would try to block his voice out of my head and just pretend that he wasn’t talking to me; rather he was talking to the wall. Even when my father would try to reach out to me, his beloved daughter, just to get to know me better and to spend time with me, I would zone him out, taking his presence for granted and never valuing anything he had to say.

On November 12, 2009, my father was diagnosed with a heart attack. When this incident occurred I was sitting in the library with my friends, just gossiping about random drama. I got a call from my mother, her voice was shaking and I could feel the tension and pain in her voice when she uttered the words out of her mouth, “Tuba, you need to make your way to the hospital, your father really needs you.” I knew then that something terrible had happened. My heart was pounding as I made my way to the hospital. I went to the main desk, asked for my father, and before I realized it, I was following a nurse who was guiding me to my father. I finally approached the waiting room and I saw my mother, my sister and my brother sitting on a couch, distressed, and looking down, trying to avoid making eye contact with me. I knew in my heart, this was serious, and without any questions, I quietly sat down by my mother.

After an hour of waiting, a nurse came in and told us that my father was on medication and that this would be the suitable time for my family and me to visit my father and have a few words with him. For the first time in my life, I was nervous to see my father. As we finally approached his room, my mother distanced herself from my siblings and me and claimed that she felt ill and would not visit my father until the operation was over. So it was just the three of us; my older brother, my younger sister and me. We entered my father’s room and saw him lying down on his bed, heavily medicated. My heart was pounding and I carefully placed my steps and approached his bed. My father lay there, his head tilted to the side, tubes of fluid and medication strapped to his arm. My only father, the man who had raised me and cared for me for his entire life laid right in front of me and I couldn’t do anything to reduce his pain; all I could do was watch him suffer.

This was the day I realized how much I truly loved this man, and he wasn’t just my father, he was my role model, my angel guardian and my every means of happiness. During the three days of his recovery I began to pray to a God that I didn’t believe in about a father whom I took for granted. I was anxious to know if my father would recover. God, decided to give me another chance in life, a chance I didn’t deserve. God gave me an opportunity to learn to embrace my father and reach out to him as he had been trying to reach out to me for years. Today, my father stands to be the most important person in my life and I thank God, for blessing me with an opportunity to realize how much his presence means to me and giving me the opportunity to care for my father and nurture him as he continues to grow older by the day.

Tuba was born in Pakistan, and came to Canada with her family when she was nine years old. Tuba is currently in grade twelve and will be attending university in Alberta this fall. She intends to enroll in the Biological Sciences program to become a successful pediatrician. Family plays a crucial role in her life, and she feels that their involvement is the thriving factor that has led to all her accomplishments and success. She credits each one of her family members for her success in this competition.
I’m not really the type to express my life in words. They never come out as well in writing as the thoughts in my head. My life was pretty simple growing up, a house, normal complete family, with, of course, the occasional bickering about the silliest things. A child who always has a smile on my face, not caring about what could happen in the future, was the kind of child I was, according to my aunt. She said I would look my happiest when I was with my grandma. We were best friends, I was closer to her than with my mom (not that there’s anything wrong with my mom). I’d accompany her walks and she would tell me her stories about the old days and how she and her other siblings became orphans at a young age. When I moved to Canada we had to leave her back home in the Philippines. My mom told me that when I first heard the news, the first thing I asked was that if my grandma was coming to Canada, too. When my mom told me that she wasn’t coming, I cried and cried.

Three years after we moved to Canada my grandma died. Her Parkinson’s disease had worsened and her body wouldn’t take the medication anymore. Everyone saw it coming, but I never thought I’d see the day. I was about nine at this time and my mind was just getting introduced to the reality of life and death. I couldn’t believe it when my mom told me after she hung up the phone after receiving the news. I could tell she was trying her best not to let tears escape her eyes, to not let it scare me. My grandma, my best friend, I will never have the chance to ever speak to her ever again and listen to more of her stories, nor spend time with her. My whole family had to go back to the Philippines for the funeral.

During the funeral I was with my cousins on one side, while they were wheeling down the coffin. One by one we all dropped the white roses onto her coffin. At that moment, everything felt like it was going in slow motion and all the memories I had with her all started flowing back in my thoughts. But those thoughts were interrupted by this strong cry coming from the back of the crowd.

Out of all of her siblings, she was the closest to my grandma. My mom’s knees dropped to the ground while all of her siblings were surrounding and hugging her. My mother is the strongest person I know. With so many things that has happened to her, that was the first time I saw her cry, my dad agrees with that, too. As I watched her weep, this thought popped up in my head, “What would I be like when my mom dies!?” I’ve always taken advantage of my mom’s presence, I just expect her to be there, and she has never failed to be there for me. Every day, I am blessed that I can still talk to her, touch her, feel her motherly warmth, hug and kiss her. I know there will be a day that she won’t be by my side anymore, when I can’t hear her voice and physically feel her presence.

I was a nine year old girl being traumatized by my own thought of the reality of death. Every day, I just expect her to be there, but when that one day comes I wouldn’t know what to do with my life. Going back to Canada after all of that was hard. I refused to go to school or let my mom go to work, because I suddenly had this phobia that when she disappears from my sight she will disappear forever. My theory was that if she doesn’t leave my sight “that day” won’t come.
After that time in my life I was never the same, though I did start getting over that theory as I’ve gotten older. But that phase in my life changed how I treated and spent time with my mom. I always try my best to spend as much time with her as I can, respect her more than ever, thank her for everything. Not only did it change my relationship with my mom, but also with God.

As time passed, and as I got older, the more I learned about religion and faith. As cliché as it may sound, I believe that everything does happen for a reason and everything has its timing. Contemplating on the situation expanded my mind about life, which always lead me to faith. God is not just going to take away the people that you love for no reason; they’ve probably done their part in this temporary world we live in, were ready to live without them, etc. Who knows what the other reasons are? Every day I prepare myself for that day, discovering myself through my faith has helped me so much to prepare myself. I have faith in God, that when that day comes I will be ready and will be able to accept it. God will be there by my side every step of the way. If all of this didn’t happen, I don’t think I would be this faithful to God, because without this experience, I wouldn’t have thought about life in this way which wouldn’t have strengthened my relationship with my mom and God, I’d just be less knowledgeable about life, death and why all of this happens. I can’t imagine not going through that. Without that experience my faith in God wouldn’t be as strong as it is now.

Donna is a seventeen year old grade 12 student. She came to Canada with her family when she was five years old. This coming September, she will be attending university to pursue a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration and will be majoring in accounting. Throughout high school she has enjoyed being part of her school’s dance team. Donna has been in the French immersion program since grade 7.
A Mother’s Tear

Everyone has a turning point in their lives, it may be for the positive or negative. Before I got in junior high all I ever cared about was me and having fun. I lived a life where I simply had no problems and just wanted to enjoy every second. Even though I did some things which were wrong, I didn’t care because I was living in the moment. I knew every action would have a consequence but it didn’t stop me from doing what I wanted to do. I guess you don’t really learn from your parents telling you from right or wrong but instead you learn better when you experience it yourself. It doesn't mean that you should go try everything even if it is bad for you; it means that no one is perfect and everyone will make mistakes. It’s just that after making that mistake, you should know better next time and not commit the same mistake.

That’s what’s great about life, you live and learn. Every day is a new day and you can always move on. You live the way you want to live but at some point in time, you will see a change in yourself because you have gone through a turning point. My turning point happened in grade seven when I saw life in a different perspective. During the start of my junior high days I would always disobey my parents and if they ever told me I couldn’t do it, I would still go and do it. Parties were a big thing in junior high; I swear it was impossible to not find a party every weekend. My parents would usually let me go and when they didn’t, I’d usually be fine with it and just move on since it wouldn’t be such a big deal to me. So my friend was having a big party which everyone was talking about, inside my head I knew I couldn’t miss this no matter what. I let my parents know a week before that I was attending this party and they agreed that I could. The days get closer to the party and I ended up getting in trouble at school. The school called my parents and they had a talk with me once I arrived home.

It was nothing new to me; I was used to the phone calls from my teachers. Until this day where my parents got fed up with me and told me I had to change. They gave me rules, a lot of them. They didn’t really have my attention until they told me I couldn’t go out this weekend. I argued with them telling my parents that they already said yes but they still refused. I went to my room all frustrated but I knew they couldn’t stop me from going.

So the day came and I was pretty excited, I already planned that I was going to sneak out for the night and then just come back early in the morning. I got to the party and had a blast, next thing I knew I was passed out in my friend’s bedroom. I was stunned and worried because it was already four in the afternoon and I still wasn’t home. I knew my parents were worried sick and probably looking for me. I checked my phone in case there were any missed calls and there were. In fact, there were over ten missed calls. I hurried back home knowing I’d be in huge trouble, I was ready for the yelling I was about to get.

I went inside my house and in the kitchen was my entire family. Instead of yelling, everyone was sitting in silence. The worse part about it is I saw my mom in tears. Everyone left the room and my mom stayed. I tried to explain but my mom didn’t reply, it didn’t even seem like she was listening. My mom finally opened her mouth and explained to me how she felt. She explained to me how sick she felt because of me. There were so many tears falling from her face and I couldn’t stand it because I was the reason for them. The worst part about this was that my mother blamed herself for my reckless behavior. She thought that it was her fault because she didn’t raise me properly, but she did, I couldn’t ask for a better mother. I was raised the best way possible but I decided to make my own stupid decisions. It wasn’t because of her but at that moment she didn’t believe that. I sat there bawling my eyes out similar to my mom and I told her I would change. This time I didn’t say it just to get things over with; I actually meant it from the bottom of my heart.
At that stage of my life, I knew I had to turn things around and I meant change almost everything about myself. I started behaving in school and doing all my work. I obeyed my parents most of the times and I did them proud. I just became a better person; I saw it and everyone else did too. It all started with me but now, I do things for my family and me. I want to grow up and hear my parents tell me that they’re proud of me. I especially don’t ever want to see another tear from my mother’s eyes. The time I want to see that is when I get her everything she ever wanted, from a house to jewelry. I want to see tears of joy from my mom. When I look back I just think to myself that this was a success story in my eyes. My turning point happened in grade seven when I saw life in a different perspective.

Mauro Reyes Aquino III was born in the Philippines and was raised half his life in Canada. He loves basketball, shoes and spending time with the people he cares about. He is also a natural born leader with the ability to influence a group of people. Mauro has three other siblings, is raised by amazing parents and goes by the nickname ’Maui’ given by his sister.
used to think that losing someone could be the most tragic pain a person could experience. It can change them completely. I used to think there was so much time ahead of me and everyone around me. I used to believe that I would get through life with happy endings like in movies I would watch as a kid. I used to believe that love could tie two people together for the rest of their lives. Loss has come to me in so many forms, from death, my father walking out and giving up on the rest of his family and losing myself. I did not realize at first that I had changed. I did not realize how angry I was all the time. I would wander out trying to find people who could understand without judgment. I developed an anger so deep that would end up hurting the people who I had left and had to keep around. They all continued to care for me because I guess they could see through me and tried to understand what I was going through. What hurt the most was continuously hurting the ones I was so afraid to lose.

Each night my thoughts followed my disappearing shadow. Night after night was a blur. The sharp constant pain gave me fragments of what happened. The silent cries into the dark corners of my room echoed. I was begging for the day to come when I could escape the hellish labyrinth that consumed me. It would continue until the next day when numbness took over, a reaction of the body to keep itself sane and steady. It all felt so simple in daylight, as if all was forgotten. As soon as night fell, suffering began to take over my body, mind and soul once again. The process didn’t end until I was weak and drained. I no longer had peace of mind and was crying out for help I knew I would only push away. It became my biggest fear to lose anyone else. Fear of my own death disappeared as I went through so much pain each night. I wanted to fix myself and not bother anyone I had left. It was my duty to take care of them. But how could I when they were always looking out for me?

By the time I was beginning to get by and everything seemed to be calming down, the most unexpected had occurred. I received a call, from someone who had always helped me get through my crazy nights. The nights when I thought I would go insane I would call him and he was there with me, dismissing my fears and dark thoughts. A true friend was what he was. Except this night it was my turn to be that friend. I was being tested. His father had just had a stroke and was going to pass away. I answered the phone to hear heavy breaths and muffled cries. It was all so sudden and his voice was shaking with confusion. I stayed on the phone until I told him his family needed him at a time like this. This call haunted me the next few nights. The echoes of his cries made me feel sick.

The following nights not much could be done. His father did not make it. Seeing his pain gave me an unsettling familiar feeling. I knew what I had to do. I had to be there for him so that he would not end up like me. I did not want him to lose himself as I did. I did not want him to put himself through the same hell I went through. The first few days all I could do was be there for him and his family. I was not used to being the friend that kept pushing. I realized how this is how everyone who caring about me must have felt. I had difficulty when I was being constantly pushed away. It was the absolute test but this time I had to keep myself together to take care of him.
It was tough understanding. I was looking at life through a whole new perspective and I was used to acting through my anger. That’s when I realized that I couldn’t be selfish and let myself get in the way. I had to be strong and realize that to take care of the ones I loved; I had to take care of myself first.

Kristiana is a grade twelve student that lives in Calgary, Alberta with her mom and younger sister. She plans to take Engineering this fall. Kristiana has been in French immersion since kindergarten until now. She wishes to make a difference in the world one day.
Ever since I was little, I knew that my family’s financial situation wasn’t the best. I knew that my parents had to work very hard to provide for my brother and I, as well as the house bills. At this time, my parents didn’t even have a car so getting around was an adventure for us, although it was a struggle for my parents. As a few months passed by, my parents began to fight more often and frequently throughout the days. It got so bad at one point that everything fell apart. When I think back to my parents, the one memory that comes up immediately was seeing my mother throw things at my father while I was playing with my dolls in front of the TV. They told me to go upstairs but I couldn’t find it in me to move. Finally the arguing died down and my mother took me to my room and tucked me in.

I didn’t realize that when I woke up in the morning my brother, my mom and I were going to the airport to fly out to Toronto. I didn’t know that we were going to be leaving my dad behind. At the airport I kept asking where he was but my mom got aggravated and told me I was too little to know anything. That’s not true, I knew. I saw them fight all the time, I saw them crying too. Sure I didn’t know what the cause of it was, but I knew.

Keep in mind that I was only four years of age at this time. Children at this age shouldn’t be going through this. They should be going out with their friends and playing with their toys, but I didn’t have any friends. Due to the constant moving, I never stayed at a place for more than three months. I guess I could say that I didn’t have a childhood. I had a single mother that worked two jobs just so that she could tell her kids that everything was going to be okay. And because of this, my brother and I had to take care of ourselves for most of the day.

For the next few years, the three of us were moving around constantly because where ever we went, my dad would come find us. Every time he found us, he cried and apologized to my mom and he begged her to come back to him. And every time he saw us, he would ask me to give him a hug before he left but my mom wouldn’t let me. Soon my mom met my step-father. I knew she went on dates with him when she dropped my brother and me off at her friends. I knew that they’d probably get together but I did not expect one thing; to call him my father. It was unfair. I didn’t know this man and this was my first time meeting him. It’s as though my mother had expected me to forget about my biological father for this stranger.

Finally, my mom let us see my father. She even let us stay with him for the weekend. He took us to Niagara Falls for a day and he bought me a teddy bear. The next day, he took us shopping. He bought my brother Beyblades and Yu-Gi-Oh cards. What I remember the most about that day was when my dad put a princess tiara on his head and said “I can be pretty like you now!” I’m not too sure why that stands out to me, but I always get teary eyed when I think of it. I had a blast that weekend with him. But the thing is he didn’t tell me that he wouldn’t be giving us anymore calls or emails after that day. Now I understand why he wanted to take so many pictures with us before he had to drop us home. And even now that I’m sixteen years old, I still wonder where he is. I want to call him and ask him how he’s doing but I can’t. Sometimes I wish I could turn back time and get my parents to talk things out. Because of this, I learned that I should never expect too much from anyone.

Sixteen year old Lisa lives with her parents and older brother, Raymond. She loves taking care of children and is looking into being an elementary school teacher in the near future. Lisa would like to give thanks to her teachers for always believing that she had potential to do better and for pushing her to strive for her goals.
A person experiences a multitude of turning points in their life, big decisions, changes, or outcomes that can just warp the way you view things. I’m only 16 so I have yet to begin the bigger, more serious changes; some may argue with me though and say that a person undergoes their biggest turning points at this age or even younger. We don’t normally get a say on when it happens but I guess it is all a matter of when that tangential curve wants to appear on our life line. At least, this is what I choose to believe, and you can think differently, in fact I encourage you to. Many can debate what qualifies as a “turning point” but for me, it would definitely have to when my sister was born.

August 14th, nine years ago was the day that would change everything. Of course this was the first time that I would have a sibling after seven long years of being an only child so as the young naïve kid that I was; I did not know what to expect nor did I even care but all I know was that I wanted a brother. However, I did not want a brother bad enough to be disappointed if I got a sister instead. I remember it so clearly for some reason, probably one of my only childhood memories that doesn’t seem vague and foggy. With little knowledge of what I should do, I turned to the one place that I had thought to know everything. Television. I would have probably spent hours on hours a day watching television and for some reason that was unclear to me at the time; my juvenile shows would always have that one episode of when the main character gets a new brother or sister. So that’s what I referred to for instructions on preparation for baby arrival. My parents and I would be sitting in the kitchen, at the same old table that we still have today, making a list that I divided into two sides, Boy Names — Girl Names. My parents probably did not take that too seriously but they were willing to consider any names that stuck out to me from the list that I had made myself. This part was a bit cloudy but if my memory serves me right, I never did choose a name from my lists and neither did my parents.

When my mother was further in to her pregnancy and had to spend nights at the hospital, I didn’t show it, but there was excitement in me. I have flashes in my memory of going to the hospital and visiting my mom; having her call me over to lay my head on her womb and listen for the baby’s kicks, but never actually hearing it because it either never kicked or I was dreadfully confused at what that even meant. Also for some reason, I was very delighted by the taste of hospital food, still a mystery to this day. I remember asking my father if I could spend the night at the hospital for company but I was never allowed. Honestly, my intentions were to just stay there longer as it was fascinating to me, a child who has not been there since birth. Now I wasn’t present in the room for the birthing but rather waited outside, thank goodness too though I hear it is a beautiful sight.

There she was, Held comfortably in my mother’s arms as everyone around looked in wonder and warmth. She was placed in my arms very carefully as I was shocked my parents would even trust me with a task like that. I was overcome with happiness but could not quite pinpoint why. The one most memorable moment was when I saw my parents turn towards me and they asked me, “What should we name her?” It caught me off guard but I knew exactly what I wanted to name my new baby sister. From that day on, I put the responsibility upon myself to be the best brother I could and that is what my life would be about.
August 14th, nine years ago I was blessed with a baby sister. A new responsibility that I was more than happy to take on. I never did look back and wish it had been a brother because I am happy as it is. I named her after my biggest female idol and perfect female role model at the time. Hillary. With two L’s though because my parents are weird.

Lawrence is an inquisitive young man living happily in Canada with his parents and awesome little sister. He plans to further his studies in university after graduating high school. Other than occupying himself with advanced electronic interactions, he devotes his extra time to being sociable and expanding his knowledge by reading novels. His goals include becoming a genius billionaire philanthropist, traveling to the moon, and climbing Mount Everest.
When My Tears Flow Again

I was eleven when I had to learn about the pain of losing a loved one. Sure I’ve seen pet fish and pet birds go and at the time I thought I understood what pain meant. I was very wrong. Pain is not something that makes you cry for an hour and then it’s all better. Pain is when you can’t cry, when it’s just too much, that tears aren’t even worth it. I still remember the morning I got the news. It was a particularly gloomy looking Sunday morning following a sleepover with my cousins. I started it the way I would start any other day, load up a video game and melt into my own world. This didn’t last very long. I heard the front door open and slam shut. I knew it was my brother coming home after a gig. I was very wrong. In walk my sleepy eyed cousins who had apparently been woken up and herded into the room. Odd, but I was young so I thought nothing of it. So here is my whole family in a cramped little room. We sit there in sleepy silence waiting for an adult to explain why they had been woken. To our surprise in walk all the adults, my Mom, Grandma, uncles and aunts. At this point I was sure we were about to get scolded for something we had done. We sat in silence for a little while longer. Finally my Mom exhales deeply and I’ll never forget what she said. “Kuya Ziggy won’t be coming home. He had an accident last night …. and he’s dead.” Suddenly my sleepy eyed cousins were wide awake. That day carried on in silence. Nobody cried because nobody believed what just happened. I learned later that this “accident” was a murder committed by 20 or so people. At age eleven I became a human that hates humans.

I immersed myself in video games even more and isolated myself. Nobody was worth my time because everyone was a worthless human being capable of making me feel that pain. I would not let them make me feel that way again. God and religion no longer meant anything to me either. Why should I believe in a god that lets these things happen? This was my first major turning point. Five years carried on like this. I would wake up and put on a fake smile until I was able to get home and sleep again.

Only recently have I begun to notice I was in the midst of another turning point. I met a girl, speaking to her for the first time in the twelve years I’ve known her. I’m beginning to notice the smile I have when I’m with her isn’t a fake one. I’m now genuinely interested in nurturing and repairing the bonds I’ve made and broken.

Is this what being a man is? Being able to be happy once again is something I hope the rest of my family can achieve. I’m not there yet myself. When my tears flow again I can say I am truly happy. I know my Mother still cries for my brother. When she stops crying I’ll have my turn to cry. Until then I’ll have to be strong for her. Is this strength? I really don’t know.

Drew was born and raised in Calgary where he discovered his love for both the city life and nature. He snowboards in the winter time and skateboards in the summer time, taking in all that Calgary can offer. Drew is striving to take medical studies in university where he can further increase his knowledge in his preferred subject; Biology. Drew enjoys playing video games when he finds time in between working, school, and time with his friends and family.
A turning point appears in someone’s life one way or another, it may be an inspiring turning point or something that may have drastically changed your life. The turning point in my life was finding out the many medical problems my dad had and how my mom had to cope with it. This is a turning point in my life because there are many things my dad has done for our family and it’s depressing to know that someone with a strong heart is sick and in pain. Finding out that my dad was diagnosed with these conditions made me regret many things. Without my dad I feel our family wouldn’t be the same as it was before.

The day I found out about my dad’s health problems many things ran through my mind and it had me worrying about my mom the most. Everything was happening to fast, my mom, already stressing became more stressed about the fact that my dad had to have a surgery done on his spine. I saw it in my mom’s emotions, she was hurt. July 6th, the day of my dad’s surgery, questions ran through our mind, “Would he still be able to walk? Will he be the same dad he was before?” These questions constantly ran through our minds as the surgery passed. This is a turning point for me because I had to think about many things: what I would do if something severe happened to my dad, how will my mom react. I feel that my dad having this surgery brought us closer as a family. Our family bonded more even if my dad was stuck in a wheelchair, but knowing that he would be fine after a few weeks was the best feeling I have ever had.

If something tragic did occur to my dad I don’t know how I would’ve taken it. My dad helped support us all, I wouldn’t be able to help my mom support our family like our dad does. Knowing that he’s still capable to walk I know I can still go hiking with my dad and fishing, even if he gets tired really fast I’m still glad I’m able to bond with him. After his surgery my mom has a smile on her face more often than she usually did our whole family is able to bond and joke around with each other and as a family we’re happy going on vacations now and going out for dinner as a family.

There are many things I started to regret when I found out my dad had to have a surgery on his spine. I started to remember all the times I made up excuses because I didn’t want to hang out with my parents. Every opportunity I had to be with my parents, I always turned them down because I wanted to be with friends. Now every time my parents ask to come home and be with them I try my best to spend more of my time with them. I’m happy that I’m closer with my parents now I’ve learned many things I didn’t know about them.

This life changing moment for me had its ups and downs, but this ending on a positive note makes me happy and less stressed. My parents seem happier, my sister and I are bonding more with our parents. Our family has more of a happy environment now rather than all of us being gloomy and doing whatever we like. This life changing moment started from the bottom but we as a family stayed strong and worked through all the bumps in the roads to make us the kind of happy family we are today.

Johnzen Tabot is a grade 11 high school student. Johnzen enjoys playing sports and spending time with family and friends. His future aspirations would include going to university to study medicine. His favourite activities to do outside of school are fishing, camping and being with family.
New Brunswick

“I believe that every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity an obligation; every possession a duty.”

– John D. Rockefeller

Thank you to our generous anonymous donor.
“The ability to accept responsibility is the measure of man.” – Roy L. Smith

Mary Cunningham
Honourable Mention – Grade 6, 7 & 8
Anglophone South School District

Friendship

You know how people say friends are forever? I learned that isn’t always true. Sometimes friends have an expiration date.

In Kindergarten my friends did everything together. Nothing could break us apart. It stayed like that until Grade three, when everything changed. Only four of my best friends were in my class, and the ones in the other class slowly started pushing us out of the circle. My so-called best friend practically ignored me, unless there were no other kids around. One perk that year was when the new kid became my kindred spirit. We dreamed up these crazy ideas on the bus, but were just “bus buddies”. I felt obligated to hang out with my other friends at recess. If only I knew then what was up ahead.

Grade 4 came and I was still with my circle of “friends”. As the school year went on I grew tired of my “best friend’s” attitude. I started hanging out with kids who really listened to me and treated me like a real person. But those times didn’t last. At the end of the year my dear kindred spirit returned to Newfoundland. I beat myself up over spending so much time with people who weren’t really my friends. Bad habits die hard.

In Grade 5 I was with my “best friend” and another friend, but my “best friend” always preferred her to me so I felt like the third wheel. I just hung in there because I felt so alone. The problem intensified when we all went to camp, where my “best friend” was always trying to “up” me. It was bad, but nothing hurt more than the “song incident”. We had this thing going where one person starts singing and everyone else repeats it. I was tired of my “best friend” always starting it so I tried. One person repeated. Then my “best friend” started singing and everyone repeated after her. She turned around and smirked at me. That was the end of the line.

At that moment I knew she had never really been my friend. She was always everyone’s favourite. I tried everything to please her, but nothing worked. To her I was never good enough and you and now I don’t really care anymore. I have real friends now, who really love me for who I am.

If I’ve learned anything in the last eleven years I’ve learned this: be with people who make you feel good, not look good. My friends cheer me up, not put me down. Reflecting on this, I shake my head but I’ve never forgotten one thing: if you never make mistakes then you’ll never learn.

Mary Cunningham is 12 years old. She attends Sir James Dunn Academy in St. Andrews. She lives with her mother, father, sister, and cat named Sheldon. Someday she wants to have her own fashion line, and write a best-selling novel. Her favorite subject is French, and one day Mary plans to be completely bilingual.
Time is one force that we, as humans, cannot stop. One thing that we all must endure is the loss of our grandparents. Sometimes we may be shocked when our loved one’s time is up, but it is going to happen no matter how hard we don’t want to believe it. For me the happiest man, the most fun man, passed just a few months ago.

It was a normal morning when I woke up to my mom crying and at that moment I knew what had happened. Cancer had gotten the best of my grandfather. He was not diagnosed more than a few months prior to this. When I heard mom, I slowly crept down the hollow stairs and asked what had happened. Although I knew, I thought it would be better this way. Then my dad surprised me when he told me that “your grandfather never got the chance to build a car with you or teach you how to run the mill he made.” At that moment I made a promise to God that as long as I live I will not cry, I will not give up, I will make my grandfather proud of me, I will cherish every moment of this life and I will be happy because I know that’s what would make him happy.

The next day at school when my teacher asked why I didn’t get my homework done I said, “I had to get a suit.”

She asked, “Why?”

I quietly replied, “Because my grandfather just died.”

At that moment I wanted to cry but I did not let myself due to the promise I made to God.

Over the next few days I was fine. Until the day I had to say my last goodbyes to the person I looked up to for my whole life. This day was the hardest day not to cry. I didn’t because (if you knew me) I never break my promises. The day felt like a century for this one event to pass, but now I knew, like someone’s life, it would be gone in a flash.

After all this I still won’t admit that he is gone because I know he is here in my heart and he always will be. We all lose the ones we love eventually…it’s the way of life. But it is how we as people take these experiences and try to make better people out of ourselves for our future that makes the difference. I will make my grandfather proud.

Matthew is fourteen years old and attends Fundy Shores School in Dipper Harbour, New Brunswick. He will be attending Saint John High School in September and plans to pursue post-secondary education in Engineering. He would like to follow in his grandfather’s footsteps and design and build antique cars. Matthew has a passion for Science and Mathematics and has represented his school at the District Science Fair, Heritage Fair and Math Olympics. In his free time Matthew enjoys basketball, hunting and dirt biking.
“Make the most of yourself, for that is all there is for you.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Good Die Young

“Life brings tears, smiles, and memories. The tears dry, the smiles fade, but the memories last forever.”
– Author Unknown

I’ve had to do a lot of hard things in my life. The hardest thing I ever had to do was stand in front of her as she lay there, still, peaceful, and cold. Her face was pale with the only bit of colour on her being the light pink blush that was brushed across her skin. There were flowers all around us, all different colours, the smell was overwhelming. Standing there seeing her tiny, once energetic, body and perfect ringlets lying so still absolutely killed me. That was the hardest thing for me. Looking down at her and realizing that would be the last time I would get to see my best friend.

I remember entering a daze, and when I came back to reality I looked behind me to see a line so long, it was winding like a snake along the wall. My eyes caught almost everyone’s in the line, while I tried to bring some form of energy back into my body as I walked to the side and sat down. My hands were hurting from gripping the Kleenex with everything inside me, my face was red and swollen, and all I could feel were the hot tears like lava, rolling down my cheeks.

Two days before this, I went to visit her in the hospital but when I arrived, they wouldn’t let me see Arianna. This is when I realized how sick she was this time. Arianna had Cystic Fibrosis, a sickness she had since birth, and she spent a lot of time in the hospital. When she was home, she lived next door to me and every single day I was there by her as she sat on her machine, and took the pills needed. We grew up together and shared everything from clothes to birthdays. Born on the same day, we always had our parties together.

I remember my first birthday, not long after her death. I didn’t have a party or go out with my friends; I spent my afternoon with my best friend, at the graveyard. Knowing that she wouldn’t be around to celebrate with me anymore was horrible, and now not a birthday passes that I don’t think of her.

School was not the same without her. Although she was a year younger, we spent almost every day together at school. One day, I remember her crying because the kids in her class called her ‘gross’ because of her sickness. I was furious; it’s not right to make fun of anyone, let alone about something they cannot help. I stuck up for her that day by taking her to a teacher, and had the teacher talk to the students about it. That’s one thing about our friendship; we always had each other’s back.

Not long after her passing, my friends and I wanted to do something around the school in her memory. Arianna’s favorite flower was the sunflower; she had one in her hospital room when she passed away. Eventually the flower died, and her grandmother gave me some seeds so I could plant my own. I took the seeds to school and we planted many different sunflowers around the school. Also my friends and I started a day, every Friday you could wear a hat for 25 cents. All the money we raised from those Fridays was donated to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and the Children’s floor at the Fredericton hospital.
My best friend taught me so much. With everything she went through in her life, especially being sick so much and spending a lot of time in the hospital, she always had a smile on her face. She is by far the strongest person I’ve ever had the privilege to know. Every day she woke up happy, even on her machine she was smiling and when she was lying in her hospital bed, she was still smiling. She took every minute as it came at her. Every day, no matter what, she was doing the things she loved, whether it be colouring or listening to her favorite music. People always say to live each day like it could be your last, and that’s exactly what she did.

Marissa DeMone is a grade 10 student attending Central New Brunswick Academy and lives in Boiestown, New Brunswick. Marissa is active and outgoing, and enjoys being with her friends during her free time. Marissa plays many sports and strives to do well in the ones she plays, as she was picked Athlete of the Year in grade 8.
A Secret Obsession

“T"t's seven o’clock already! Wake up!” I was wearing a pretty and fashionable top with matching skinny jeans and I was in perfect shape. I felt like I was dreaming, flying in the sky. Yes, it was just a dream, not a nightmare, but a beautiful dream I could never imagine in a thousand years. Finally, I opened my sleepy eyes. It was just another boring day. Looking back, I remember spending a useful amount of time standing in front of a full length mirror just staring at my body. I sighed in disappointment. I was sick of hearing the word “chubby”. The skinny girls in my school were perfect, looking amazing in any outfit. Compared to them, my stomach wasn’t even flat; and my thighs and arms were too wide. But remember, I wasn’t overweight. I was a healthy girl.

When my diet journey began, I was in the middle of grade 8. I was a disgusting fat looking girl in the Devil’s eye. “Remember the girl from your dream? You should lose weight” the Devil whispered. He tempted me every second, every minute, every hour of every day. From then on, everything in my life dramatically changed. I had entered the Devil’s zone; the imaginary friend who controlled my thoughts.

I became obsessed with food. I learned that teenagers were recommended to consume 2000 calories per day. I ignored that number and decided to go with 1300. When I looked around the kitchen, the Devil was lurking everywhere, especially in places I never expected to find him. Reading the ingredients of my cereal, breads, drinks and just about everything I ate quickly became a habit. Fitness websites were my new best friends where I could check the nutrition facts of everything from my love of chocolate chip cookies to my enemy, celery. I ate an apple instead of a chewy bar, skim milk instead of 2% milk. When the Devil saw the day that I ate fewer than 1000 calorie, he gave me a round of applause.

After 2 months, I had lost more than 10 pounds. Enduring some hunger turned into greater results. My clothes got looser. He suggested I start exercising and reduce my daily calorie intake to 800. Of course, he kept pushing me deeply into his zone. I was in a routine of exercising daily and eating less, but conflict began. My parents became suspicious about my lack of nutrition. I began skipping lunch at school so I could eat when my mom was watching. I began to eat less and less each day. I was happy seeing the fat disappear. The Devil grinned at me and said “Be skinnier; a few more pounds!” As I lost more weights, his voice became louder. Eventually, it was all I could hear.

Now I am stronger than the Devil. I am out of the zone. I vividly remember the day I was called to the guidance office. The counsellor told me that many teachers realized my weight loss. I lied again, bravely telling her, “It’s because I started to work out a little bit. I have no problem”. I felt bad on the way back to my classroom. I took a step back to think. Is this what I really wanted?

Yes, I was so tiny when summer began. I liked it when people called me ‘skeleton’. But actually, the reality was far from this. The scale was pointing to 90lb instead of 120lb. I had to change myself. One day, I looked up “anorexia”, and found symptoms that happened to me including lanugo (soft, downy hair covering the body), intolerance of cold and missed periods. I was anorexic. The Devil made some unbelievable excuses. It made sense at that time, but really, it didn’t. It was time to kick him off or else. It was dangerous, being so far out of my comfort zone, and so far into his.
I ate all the foods that I denied myself and resists for months. But I wasn’t scared anymore. It took me time to gain a little bit of weight every month, but I tried hard. Every time I looked in a mirror, I was even happier. I know it took a lot of time for me to learn that you don’t have to be skinny to look beautiful. I changed my way of thinking, valuing and judging things with a new outlook. I want to tell you; wearing size double zero jeans aren’t going to benefit you 10 years from now. It’s easy to get caught up in any lifestyle change and go overboard. Make healthy choices and take excellent care of yourself without getting obsessive. Use your head. Forget what you’ve heard, read or learned and just think about yourself. You know the truth. I know becoming friends with the Devil was the worst mistake, but leaving him was the best choice of my life. I’m beautiful just the way I am.

Sixteen years old, a grade 10 student, Jenny was born in South Korea and now lives in Fredericton, New Brunswick. She lives with her parents and younger brother. Jenny participates in various clubs and athletics. In Jenny’s spare time, she can be found listening to music, exercising, or reading. In the future, Jenny would like to specialize in Life Science. Jenny would like to thank her close friends and family for their support.
The reflection in the mirror told me a lie. It pulled me in, and convinced me it was true, making each day an almost unbearable struggle. It’s funny how you can think all your problems can be solved with one quick solution, yet this can create a whole new series of problems.

Like many girls who were coming into their teenage years, body image was a very big deal. We all strived for one thing and that was to be pretty. The first year of middle school was a shock for me because all the girls in my grade now seemed so different. There was make-up caked onto their faces, brand name clothing was the entire rave, and if you weren’t under a hundred pounds, you were automatically considered fat. With everyone around me trying to obtain society’s ideal description of “beautiful”, I quickly began to realize my own physical flaws.

Flaws - what did this word mean to me? Bad acne, thin lips, funny nose, boyish looking hair, and fat. It was so much easier to spot the things you felt insecure about than the things you were proud of. Desperate, I decided I needed a change; a new me. Throughout middle school, I proceeded to change myself so that I could fit in with everybody else. Each day when I came to the mirror; it told me I was even more of an outcast than the day before. I still ask myself why this mirror, whom I trusted, always told me I was hideous and pointed out my biggest insecurities. It sounds cliché, but we all secretly want to be noticed and to stand out. For starters, I began covering up my face with too much make-up; it was quite unflattering. I still didn’t feel as amazing as I wanted.

I am almost certain that at least once in a girl’s life she wonders if she is “too fat”. It was my biggest concern in grade 8. The only thing on my mind was decreasing the numbers on the scale which I stood upon at least 3 times a day. At the time I thought I was being healthy. I began an intense daily work-out plan of two hours of cardio, which I later learned was not good for your body.

The scale told me I was losing the weight, and rapidly, but the mirror still told me I was fat. The only way I could feel any joy was when I had dropped a pound. I recall one night feeling very upset. I hadn’t even lost one pound in a week. My response was to eat everything I saw. I would show the mirror I wasn’t afraid of food. After my binge, I felt so guilty and terrible. The words “fat” and “disgusting” were echoing in my head. I went to the bathroom and forced myself to throw up. I can’t say I felt good but I felt better; this became a regular habit for me.

Every single day was an unbearable struggle, filled with guilt and confusion. The mirror and the scale were the two things I wanted to trust the most but they made me feel awful. When I went to school, people made remarks like “Oh Charlotte, you’ve lost so much weight” which made me feel good for a moment but I was still not satisfied. One of my teachers asked about my noticeable weight loss and with concern she inquired if I was doing it the healthy way. I told her what I believed; I was just exercising and eating healthy. Life actually became quite scary.

Then one day I realized that what I was doing wasn’t normal, or healthy. It was the day I realized that I had an eating disorder. I was in class and our teacher had assigned everyone to do a project on a disease; I didn’t know what to choose so the teacher suggested that I should do my research on eating disorders. I began my research for the project and learned that there were many eating disorders. There was one that...
spoke to me: Anorexia Nervosa. I read the symptoms and why someone with this eating disorder might have it. Then it hit me; I was anorexic. Immediately, I shut my computer off and sat there for the remainder of class, disgusted with myself. This time when I got home, I only weighed myself once. “88 LBS,” the scale read. I was about 20-30 pounds underweight. With that I broke down and cried.

Something good can come out of a bad situation. In my case, I became grateful for the support of my friends and family. Probably the best thing you can take from a situation is to be honest with yourself and say, “Yes, I’m not perfect. I don’t look like the girls in the magazines but I’m still me.” The teacher who assigned me the eating disorder project may have saved my life. I feel blessed and thankful for whom I am, and even if I do struggle now and then, I remind myself that it’s okay. No one is perfect, we all have our insecurities and flaws, but that’s what makes us truly beautiful.

Fifteen year old Charlotte is a Grade 10 student who lives in Hartland, New Brunswick with her mother and step-father. She enjoys reading, swimming, and spending time with friends. Charlotte hopes to one day pursue a career in medicine or education. She loves to travel and hopes to see many different countries and learn about new cultures.
Cancer. It is a word recognized by people all over the world. It strikes fear into the young, old, rich and poor alike. Fear of mortality, fear of loss and for some the fear of being alone. But I never thought it would strike my family the way it did. When my little brother was diagnosed with cancer, I thought our family would break. Going through this journey caused us to laugh and cry and I have learned that a family never breaks, it just bends.

When the doctor sat me down in the red velvet chair that was much too big for my tiny seven year-old body, my legs began to tremble. I propped my arms up on the arm rests and let my feet dangle off the end. I gathered my thoughts from each and every direction, trying to focus on the words spilling from the doctor’s mouth. Her words continued to pour. They bubbled like a boiling pot of water until I just could not take it anymore. They boiled over. Her words touched my skin, scalding it, leaving scars that would last a lifetime.

As we stood up from the chairs, the doctor held onto my cold hand and we walked down the dark and empty halls of the hospital. I remember my curiosity forcing my head to turn and look into every room we passed. We continued walking, taking in the smell of hand sanitizer and feeling the cool hospital air brush past my skin like a ghost. She led me to my little brother’s room. My heart dropped to the pit of my stomach as my eyes fixated on the young boy lying helplessly as IV hoses snaked from his wrist. I thought, “This is not my brother!” but it was. He was pale and had bags under what used to be the biggest, bluest eyes you’d ever seen. Those eyes were lost; they had been stolen by an unmerciful thief.

The next three months were especially tough because my parents were staying at the IWK, in Halifax. The thought of my parents at my little brother’s bedside while I lived with my Grandmother took me by surprise. At the time, my sister was only 5 months old and she stayed with my aunt Edna. The only contact I had with my family was over the phone. Mom and I would sometimes talk, but not for very long because of long distance charges. Tears welled in my eyes every time she’d tell me to hug my pillow tight and that she’d be home soon.

During all of this, we were in the process of moving into a new house, which was really hard on not only my Grandmother, but my mom and dad too. It was my nanny that helped us move in. It put a lot of stress on all of us. Throughout my brother’s treatments, he lost his ability to walk and his hair slowly started to disappear. Though he did not know what was going on, he definitely knew he was sick. When my family finally returned home, I could not help but feel blessed to be with them and was so thrilled that the butterflies that had lived in my stomach for those three months had been set free. I could not help but think everything would go back to normal. Unfortunately, there was a long and rutted road ahead for us. My mom had to give my brother a needle each day and he went through multiple surgeries from the time they came home until the day he reclaimed his life from the thief.
With every complication you could ever imagine, and my brother had them all, he stayed strong. It was his courage and amazing attitude that kept me strong too. When you are put into situations such as this it’s hard not to hold onto that spark of hope and optimism that everything will be alright. Thinking back on this now, I realize that no matter the situation, being broken and being bent are two completely different things and for our family one of them was never an option.

Grade 9 student Samantha lives in Fredericton, New Brunswick and loves to play guitar, listen to music and play volleyball. She will be entering Grade 10 in the fall of 2013 and wants to attend medical school after she graduates. She lives with her mom and dad, brother and sister and they are a very tight knit family. Sam loves kids and would one day like to be a pediatrician.
First-day-of-school jitters are normal, right? They happen to everyone. You’re wearing a brand new outfit, which looked wonderful on the rack, but maybe not as nice on. Maybe there was some summer drama that you’ll have to deal with. Perhaps you have a horrific teacher, one that everyone either makes fun of or absolutely dreads. The last was the case for me. Would you like to know the icing on top of the liver-flavored cake? I’ll tell you - his hard-ass, god awful eighth grade teacher just so happened to be my mother.

You should probably know that Mike (my stepfather), as well as my mother, are teachers. Mike is the “chill” gym teacher that everyone adores, and my mom - well, I’ve already mentioned her. She was the teacher everyone despised, which was fantastic for me. I had been dreading the first day of school all summer, certain it was would be awful and just cringe-worth. The day met my expectations, and then some.

To start off, the morning was crazy. My little sisters seemed determined to make it as turbulent as possible. “Mom! Where’s my lunch box?” “Mom, do my hair!” “The dog’s loose and running away!” Things were not going smoothly, which certainly didn’t help my stress levels. In the car, I was only getting more and more anxious. I’d already bitten my nails to the quick, and re-braided my hair countless times.

There was an aura of weirdness in the classroom when people started filing in. Being in French Immersion, I’d been with these people for 8 years. They’d all been to my house at one point or another, so it was odd when “Kasey’s mom” became “Mme. Dionne.” I tried to catch up with some friends about the summer, but we spoke in low voices. When the bell rang, I chose my seat as far to the back as I could manage. I completely avoided eye contact with the front of the room, hoping and praying that a sinkhole would open up under my feet.

The first-day-of-school train was huffing along in its awkward way when things started to de-rail. It all started when my mother booted up the Smartboard, to reveal a picture of me at DramaFest as her screensaver. Eyes squinted and awful stage makeup slathered on my face, to say it was unflattering was an understatement. “Oh, God,” I said aloud, to the amusement of my snickering classmates. “Oops, sorry,” my mother replied without any conviction. It was as if she was intentionally trying to make my life miserable.

After trudging through that first day, things got mildly better; mildly being the key word. There were still times my mother would “accidentally” play an old home video, or tell a humiliating story. For example, I hate it when she calls me “Kaykay” at all, but it’s infinitely worse when she did it during class, several times a day.

Unfortunately, as a result of my mother being such a hard teacher, she didn’t exactly have a fan club. It’s hard to stay friends with people who were always getting put in detention by your own mother. My accomplishments weren’t my own anymore; they were because of my mother. Many of my friends started to drift away. The up side to this was that I found my real friends: the ones who didn’t care who my mother happened to be, the ones who winced along with me when she started teaching us the Sex-Ed.

Mme. Dionne being my mother was certainly a learning experience – and not just school work. I learned that you just have to make the best of the things you can’t change. I also learned who my real friends were - the ones who didn’t care if the person giving them detention and calling their parents was my mother.
Contrary to popular belief, there definitely wasn’t giving me any special treatment; she actually graded me harder than the rest of the class. No one wants their mother to follow them to school; but mine did. In the end, being stuck with this hard-ass, god-awful teacher… Wasn’t as scarring as I thought it’d be… But my future therapist will definitely hear of it.

Kasey Dionne is a 10th grade student from Perth-Andover, New Brunswick. In her free time she dances, reads, and tries to keep her 4 younger siblings out of her hair. In the future, she’d like to either go into Literature, or something in the science field.
I can still see his glistening smile and feel his snug hugs. However, with every wonderful memory of him that resurfaces, with every embrace I reminisce, or laugh I seem to hear, one memory leaves me feeling shattered.

My father and I used to have the kind of relationship that a daughter could only dream of having with her father; I was his princess and he was my number one fan, showering me with unconditional love. The memory that leaves me shattered occurred, within minutes, one day in fifth grade. I’ll never be able to forget the sensation of my heart plummeting to my stomach and then shooting into my throat, leaving me gasping for air. We have heard the expression sticks and stones can break your bones but words can never hurt you, but I found a flaw in that theory as it took merely five words to break me. But, being broken taught me a lesson which ultimately began to mend my damaged pieces.

I recall taking the walk down to the principal’s office, counting each step I took, perspiration beginning to form on my forehead as I got closer and closer to my destination. I can still clearly visualize the expressions that my mother and aunt wore: pity, heartache, dread. I took a deep breath of air as I sat in front of them, the room feeling like a courtroom where I was on trial. That was the moment when they uttered the five words that would lead to the destruction of my world: “your father has passed away!”

I can still taste the wet salt streaming down my cheeks, causing my vision to blur, as it emerged with my lips. I can still hear the sobs and the screams as I cried in disbelief that my dad, my number one fan, was gone. The only notion I could fathom was “Why him?”

Every day it sinks in further. It’s been almost five years since June 9th become something more than just another day of the month, and I’ll admit that it’s still hard waking up some mornings, knowing he won’t be there. I never realized how fearful it is to love what death can touch. But there comes a time in everybody’s life where we learn to appreciate those who mean most to us. Elizabeth exclaimed that “grief is the price you pay for love.” It turns out Elizabeth was correct. Had I been given the gamble, I wouldn’t have chosen to love him less. On the contrary, I would have hugged him tighter, talked to him longer, and laughed with him louder, and, if possible, loved him even more.

The fact of the matter is it doesn’t matter how tough we are. Trauma always leaves a scar. It follows us home, it changes our lives. I’ve learned that it’s not solely the situation that matters, its how one chooses to react. It’s whether or not we choose to let it break us, or if we choose to keep moving forward.

My scars, well earned by guilt, tears, and mistakes, are constant reminders of what my daddy always said: “Be strong, Princess. Everything will be alright.” Daddy’s princess, fighting every day, has turned into Daddy’s warrior, and I will never stop fighting to be his little princess.

Jennifer is a positive and energetic tenth grade student. She is an All-Star Cheerleader, cross fit athlete and cheerleading coach. Jennifer is a part time gymnastics coach who volunteers at the Fredericton Boy’s and Girl’s club during the summer. She plans to become a volunteer worker at the hospital. Jennifer aspires to join the medical field as a pediatrician or pediatrics nurse.
“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” – Maya Angelou

When I was a child, I looked forward to every visit to my Grandparents. There was never a dull moment at their house and my sister and I were always spoiled, especially by my Grandpa. When we went for sleepovers I always enjoyed our ritual of eating delicious butterscotch ripple ice cream and watching Sue Thomas FBI. My favorite memories include my Grandpa pushing me on the swing that he had put up especially for me and singing Beatles songs. He always smelled of wood and old spice deodorant and to this day those scents remind me of him. For the first seven years of my life I only saw my grandpa as a fun, loving, caring and all around amazing person. He was all of those things; however he also had a problem. He kept all of his stress and emotions bottled up inside of him and eventually it got to him. In 2007, he had a mental breakdown causing my life and the life of my family to change dramatically.

At first it wasn’t so bad. He was still mostly like the Grandpa I knew and loved and I didn’t really understand what the big deal was. He was alive and had no visible injuries so he was fine, right? Wrong. Although he was in flawless condition physically, his mental health was a different story. He was never completely the same person. For the first few years life went on as normal although Grandpa was moody and got irritated and angry when slightly provoked. Eventually the episodes got more frequent and he became unpredictable so we didn’t visit as much. He was on a lot of medication and wasn’t supposed to drink alcohol, but he did and it made him even worse. It became so bad that he would sometimes go out on his own in the woods and forget where he was or pass out. My family would have to spend hours searching for him and there were a few times they didn’t think they would find him. Luckily they always retrieved him and returned him home safely.

As time progressed, he was sent to the psychiatric ward in the hospital for treatment. I would go visit him there and we would play cards and eat gross cafeteria food. Everyone always said he was the calmest when he was with my sister or I. He didn’t lose his temper or act any differently than what we were accustomed to although we knew something was wrong. His time in the hospital did not really help him and he continued to get worse. There was however still lots of times when he was completely himself and we created many more wonderful memories.

In 2010, my Grandpa passed away in a four wheeling accident at the age of fifty six. The whole experience opened my eyes to mental illnesses and the fact that they are just as terrible as a physical illness. People do not choose to have a mental illness as people do not choose to have cancer. It just happens sometimes and it is most definitely not their fault.
Though all the memories I have of him are not necessarily happy ones, he taught me something important. Sometimes a person does not have a choice on what cards they are dealt in life and what problems they have to face. My grandpa most certainly did not want to be the way he was when he was sick but he just couldn’t control it. You have to make the best out of what you have been given and I am extremely happy that I had the pleasure of having him as my grandpa. I am thankful for every day we got to spend together and everything he taught me. He changed me for the better. His experience made me a more understanding and open minded person and for that I will be forever grateful.

Kelsey is a grade ten student who lives with her parents, younger sister and Burmese mountain dog. In her spare time she enjoys reading and participating in the Junior Achievement company program. Kelsey loves to travel and has had the opportunity to visit many different places. She plans on visiting many more in the future.
My Addiction

“Life has no elevator; you have to take the steps.” – Anonymous.

My mother stood over me in the hospital bed, her hand clinched tightly to mine. Her head was bowed in silence with tears streaming down her face, begging God to help her daughter get through the withdrawal of pills. Nobody understands how such a young, intelligent girl could get in so deep. Everyone’s questioning “how did she get so messed up?” It’s when you hit rock bottom you realize it’s time to claw your way back up.

A fourteen year old girl, a friend, a family member, a baby sister – destroyed by an addiction. My life was a complete disaster at this point. I had given up on my family; I didn’t want to be around them unless they would give me money to support my habit. Each and every night I had my mother worried sick about me because I’d stay out for days getting so messed up I wouldn’t return home. I could care less what people thought of me. I didn’t care how people looked at me. My main focus was how I was going to get high. I had basically no priorities or very little ones that weren’t set straight. I didn’t attend school regularly, and didn’t show up for a shift at work and got fired that day. At this point, my family was torn with what else to do with me. They had given me all the hope and faith they possibly could, but I took that for granted. They had no other option but to simply give up on me. The combination of lying, stealing, and an addiction led to a breakdown, which also led to being hospitalized for attempting suicide.

On a dark morning, I was laying in the hospital bed when I suddenly heard my phone ring. In shock of it being my older brother whom I hadn’t talked to for almost two years, I had a nervous gut feeling it was something bad. We kept a basic conversation at first until he told me he had some shocking news for me. He proceeded to tell me I was going to be an aunt of a baby boy. As I lay there in shock, I thought to myself, “I need to change.” After having a few days to think about what I had just been told, I promised myself I’d get clean and stay that way for my soon to be nephew. As soon as I was released, I went straight to my brother’s house. His fiancé answered the door, looking like she was ready to pop any minute. I saw my brother in the background and instantly started to cry as I hugged him tightly.

January 20, 2012, came along and I got the call that I was officially an aunt to a healthy baby boy. Arriving at the hospital, it brought back memories of my addiction. Walking into the hospital room was probably one of the best feelings I’ve ever had. Hearing the baby’s laugh and seeing that bright bubbly smile on his face melted my heart. Holding Mason in my arms, I knew I couldn’t go back to my old ways or I wouldn’t live to see my nephew grow up.
Since that day, I’ve been a year and two months clean and still going strong and I’m happier than ever. Having regular visits with Mason makes me realize I’m a new role model he can look up to and not be a disappointment in his life. Hitting rock bottom doesn’t mean it’s over, it simply means there’s nowhere to go but up.

Meghie is a sixteen year old grade 10 student at Leo Hayes High School who lives at home with her parents and older brother. Meghie has a passion for music, taking interest in guitar over the past year. She loves reading and writing in her spare time. Meghie’s future goals are to be working with children or social working in a school. Meghie thanks her teachers and family members for supporting her writing, enabling her to succeed in this competition. She is honored to have her essay recognized.
Appreciation on Four Wheels

I ran down the stairs and out the front door as fast as my little feet could possibly go, without diving head first into the floor. My dad raced behind me trying to keep up. He delightfully yelled “Happy Birthday son!” as I could hear my uncle starting up a little black 50cc four wheeler that was so perfect it looked like it was custom made for me. It was my 6th birthday and there’s nothing I wanted more than a four wheeler. I would dream of going wheeling with my neighbor in the field between our houses. I was your typical present-driven kid. That birthday would change it all.

After two hard weeks of making that wheeler do everything it possibly could until dark every night, it had broken. I remember it like yesterday. It’s no doubt it broke! Now that I look back, I’m surprised that it went as long as it did.

The moment it broke, my heart dropped in fear. I was scared to take it back. Me being six and all, I didn’t know much about machines and I drove this thing like I stole it for repeated hours after school. I left my wheeler in the field because it wouldn’t start.

I walked into my house with me heart beating out of my chest, and I was breaking a sweat, I took my shoes off and walked up the stairs. He was watching T. V on the couch, I stuttered “It, It broke Dad”.

He immediately groaned “ugh”. He was angry. Well maybe it was more of disappointed. He got up and walked past me and down the stairs. He started tying his shoes and snapped stressfully “I’ll go take a look” as is followed behind him. We walked over to it through the field and he bent down on his knees to look at it. He said “You’re leaking gas”.

I replied with attitude “Wow. What a piece of junk” and kicked the tired with disrespect. He looked up and stared me in the eyes like I was a ghost. I said “what?”

It looked as if he was going to cry. His heart was broken. Me being the ungrateful 6 year old that I was, I didn’t care. Worse, I didn’t even notice. I didn’t know any better and I guess you could call me “spoiled”. Now as I look back I have realized the pain he felt at that time, how hard he had worked for that, for me, then I just act like it was nothing and it meant nothing to me. I was so ungrateful. Now that I realize how unthankful I was, I have learned from that moment. I have learned to always respect those who do things for you and always be thankful for what you have. This moment changed me in many ways. It taught me respect. I learned many things that day, but most of all, it taught me to be thankful.
I could never forget that day, that moment. That day I realized how much my parents do for me. I clued in. I actually acknowledged the fact that when my dad was working hard all week, it was for me. Those late nights of him working late, it was all for me. I can’t imagine how he felt when I didn’t even give him a thank you. Ever since then I have been a different person and did my best to not let history repeat itself. In other words, I didn’t let it happen again. Now I am always thankful. I will always appreciate my parents and everything they do for me, and everyone else that does the same. Thanks, Mom. Thanks, Dad.

Colin is a grade 9 student at Leo Hayes High School in Fredericton, New Brunswick. When not in the woods four-wheeling, Colin can be found biking around town. He is a very active teen who is always looking for an adventure. Because he did not consider himself a writer before, this recognition has changed Colin’s views of himself as an academic. He now has that faith in himself that he can do what he sets his mind to. Colin, his family, friends and teachers are all proud of his hard work on this piece.
The Apology

It’s strange how a tedious conversation can become a life-changing confession.

It was a crisp evening in early October of grade eleven. I was out with my mother driving in our new silver Malibu. I went through the motions of driving and conversing with my mother without much thought. As I looked into the rear view mirror, I noticed that the colorful patches on my hat imitated the colors of the autumn leaves. I was a seasoned driver by that time and instinctively stopped when I came to the red octagonal sign. With the same feeling of tiresome routine I answered my mother’s questions about the get-together with friends I would be attending that evening.

Finally she asked a question which caught my attention, “Do you have a crush on Logan?” There was far too much cheer in her voice, and I could almost sense the disingenuous nature of her question.

I clenched the steering wheel and sharply inhaled the new car smell with a feeling of irritation. She had asked that question far too many times. The answer would always be the same. No, I didn’t have a crush on Logan. I didn’t have a crush on any boy, and I never would.

“No Mother! I don’t have a crush on Logan.”

Usually she would have left it at that, but this time she investigated further, “Do you like any boys?”

The question caught me off guard; never having been good at masking emotions, I instantly felt my face burning with embarrassment. I gave her a quick sideways glance before driving forward through the intersection.

The whole situation made me uneasy, so I hastily answered, “Don’t ask questions you don’t want the answer to.” As soon as those words had escaped my mouth, there was no turning back. Anticipating what was coming, I felt the perspiration building on my hands. I gripped the steering wheel as if it could be used to put the situation in reverse and drive backwards in time.

“Of course I want to know! You’re my little girl; I want you to be happy!”

As I braked for the next stop sign, the weight of the situation was sinking in. It was finally happening, the conversation that I had been considering, fretting and planning in my head for months. I had known for years that I was gay; months before this conversation I decided that I wanted to come out to my mother, but I hadn’t known how. I desperately wanted her to know, but I had never been good at conveying my feelings with words. It was all too much to process; I felt a briny liquid flooding my eyes. Finally, I turned to her, and
seeing the anxious look on her face, I burst into tears. I didn’t need words. She knew the answer to her question; she had known for quite a while.

As tears ran down my face she put a comforting hand on my back. With a voice full of concern and affection she said, “Oh Phoebe! It’s okay, I love you no matter what!”

As we sat in the parked car at the stop sign I tried to think of something to say; nothing came but tears. Every time I opened my mouth to speak, my words were lost to the sound of violent sobs. My mother continued to comfort me, telling me she loved me unconditionally. I couldn’t look at her as she tried to hug me.

Suddenly, our awkward embrace was cut short by the sharp shriek of a car horn. I looked behind us to see a beige van, and an unhappy driver. I wasn’t sure how long they had been there, but it was apparent they wanted us to move. I found it oddly amusing that they would never know the importance of my situation, but they were impatient with me anyway.

A sniffling laugh escaped me as I put the car into drive and pulled around the corner into a driveway. I turned off the car. As the motor started to cool, I likewise felt my emotions begin to calm.

“So you like girls and not boys?” My mother inquired.

“Mmmhmm,” I said, as I managed a nod.

She gave me a troubled smile, “How long have you known?”

I wiped my running nose and shifted uncomfortably in my seat before my shaky answer, broken by hiccups, “Ummmm… Probably since grade 7.”

In an awkward yet admirable attempt to understand, my mother asked, “And it’s not just a phase? You know, in middle school some girls go through a phase…”

I cut her off. Trying to fill my voice with as much certainty as possible I answered, “No, I’m very sure it’s not just a phase.”

Her expression twisted, though not in an unpleasant way. I could tell she was thinking, trying to be understanding, “Okay, I just wanted to make sure… So no attraction at all to boys?”

Suddenly, a deep feeling of sadness came over my body.

“No…. I’m sorry,” I managed before the tears returned. Quickly and intensely they fell, and my breathing was jagged...

All at once I was filled with an intense and overwhelming feeling of shame. I didn’t know why I was apologizing. In the past, I had never been ashamed of who I was. At that moment I didn’t know it, but I realize now that those intense feelings were not shame because of who I am, or whom I love. I had those feelings because I felt as though I had disappointed my mother.

With all these emotions stirring inside of me I sat in the driver’s seat, my head bowed, my hands limp in my lap. I let my sadness pour out of me, through my eyes and nose, until my mother grabbed my hand and said the words I so badly needed to hear, the sentence which inspired a vow within me to never again apologize for who I am:

“Phoebe. Don’t be sorry.”
Liz is a grade eleven student at Sir James Dunn Academy in Saint Andrews, New Brunswick. She is the founding member of Students for Pride in Education, a group of students dedicated to creating inclusive schools for LGBTQ students, staff, families and their allies. She comes from a supportive family of six children. Her father is an Anglican Minister, and her mother is a small business owner. In her spare time Liz enjoys camping, hiking, and theater.
It was always an unintentional goal in my life to be seen as someone other than myself. Even distant relatives have fond memories of me at a younger age, running across the field between houses, each time in a different outfit. The very moment I started school, theatrics were a refuge. There was nothing quite as freeing as being on a stage, acting as someone else, speaking someone else's words.

There was no comfort to be found in the alternative, the actual life I led. Try as I might, I did not fit in. I was not the person everyone said I should be, and who I wanted so desperately to be. Whether it was the clothing, the hair, the makeup, the femininity in general, none of it fit. Every time I conformed to the standards it felt like drag, like a caricature of who I should be instead of who I really am. I had some people around me who knew loneliness, but they did not understand what I felt. How could they? Even I didn't understand what I felt.

In the middle of high school, surrounded by people who truly identified with my struggle on that vast, varying landscape that is the internet, I found one simple phrase that would change my life: “Gender is a social construct.” There’s not only male and female, but an infinite number of non-binary genders just waiting to be explored and tried on like shoes until you find the right one. No longer was I “not a boy, so I must be a girl,” I was non-binary. I am non-binary. I slowly came to understand that gender isn’t chosen or dictated by anyone other than yourself.

Even for people who never question their gender, definitions vary without them even noticing. Each woman has her own definition of her gender, just as every man. When asked to explain what makes someone a “man” or “woman,” it becomes abundantly clear that there is no set definition and even those two genders have grey area. Nonetheless, their gender was never a source of discomfort and so they had no reason to question this. To me, my gender was always a source of pain, but I tried to grin and bear it.

I began my own research into being transgender almost immediately, and I was astounded by the variation and sense of belonging I found in the community. There are so many different non-binary identities, many of which I contemplated before reaching my conclusion. I stumbled upon the neutrois identity when I was researching what it means to be agender. “Agender” just wasn’t sitting right, since they have no gender at all. The problem was that I have a gender; it’s just neutral. It took quite some time before I found the word “neutrois”, but almost immediately I knew. Nonetheless, the research and personal contemplation that it took for me to reach that gender was empowering in itself, and I can easily say that I know more about myself now than I did before this inner journey. Being neutrois, quite simply, feels like the perfect fit. It’s who I am, and the simple truth of gender not being an either-or concept seems so straightforward obvious now that I’ve heard it and lived it.
Imagine a world where children are taught this simple fact, in which people are allowed to grow up knowing their gender is their own choice, instead of something forced upon them. I see a world with inhabitants comfortable in their own bodies, free to express themselves in the ways that feel best for them. But we don’t have that world. Our world is full of bigotry and danger, especially for transgender people.

It terrifies me.

It scares me to know that my average life expectancy is 23. It frightens me to know that a disproportionate number of transgender people are murdered, and that 49% of transgender people attempt suicide. It outrages me to know that misinformation leads directly to distrust, and that ignorance leads demonstrably to violence. And knowing this, fearing this, makes me all the more determined to help rather than hide. My gift for public speaking and empathy makes it easy for me to convey my thoughts, and I will use that to amplify not only my own voice but the voices of those seldom regarded.

I know this is the right choice every time someone calls me my chosen name, every time someone uses my proper pronouns, and especially every time someone tells me they’ve learned from me. Every time I’m told this, any doubts I might have had about what path my life is taking fly out the door. Activism has called me. I’ve grown a lot from that small child, dressing up to avoid who they are told they should be, and pretending to be who they aren’t.

Even so, I still love a good game of dress up from time to time.

Charly Kelley is a grade twelve student and aspiring activist from Bath, New Brunswick. They will soon be attending university to take Gender Studies, Journalism, and Theatre Arts in the hopes of becoming a motivational speaker and social worker. A testament to their artistic talents can be seen in the scholarship they won for St. Thomas University at the New Brunswick Drama Festival 2013. They, like many other members of their generation, spend way too much time on the internet in order to maintain their blog. Charly is also passionate about theatre, plays the ukulele at an acceptable level, and speaks both of Canada’s official languages.
Forgetting the Recipe

“Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. Love still stands when all else has fallen.” – Blaise Pascal

For as long as I can remember, besides spider-man, my Grannie Jinty has always been my hero; she has taught me a variety of things from her secret recipes to showing me how to stand on my head. Every time the doorbell rang, I would race down to see her, eager to be the first to hear every last detail of her interesting encounters while abroad in countries whose norms are so alien they sound as if they were plucked from a child’s dream. However, as the years wore on, her stories began to fade like her thick black hair, thinning and turning to grey. Then suddenly, as quick as a flash of lightning, my grannie was taken from me. Her mind in rapid decay, her oldest memories the only ones at her fingertips. The essence of my tiny Scottish hero, once larger than life in my child’s eye, was gone.

Christmas is one of the few scheduled times of the year where loved ones come together, feast on a hot meal, share stories, and ultimately enjoy each other’s company. Although for many, past the menagerie of brightly colored tinsel and the latest sugar cookie recipes, Christmas is generally the day where people only have to worry about how to tackle unwrapped parcels with nimble fingers. Last Christmas, however, was not just fancy bows and candy bark but a rollercoaster of emotions running high. My family and I went to Halifax to spend the holiday with my grandparents because my grannie’s memory was worse than it had ever been. The entire family was there that year: a hodgepodge of laughter, singing games of hide and go seek with the younger cousins, cursing in the kitchen, and the delicious aroma or rosemary-sprinkled lamb filled the air. Everyone enjoyed themselves; however, for my grannie this was an extremely stressful event. Overwhelmed, she ran about their tiny condo like a petite grey rabbet, fussing over silver soup spoons and ancient dessert forks that seemed to have gotten up and walked away on their own. Frantic to have the table and everyone that would eventually sit around it looking perfect, she refused help from anyone who offered it: Nevertheless, after roughly twenty minutes of stewing, both the chaos around her, as well as in her mind, consumed her. Silence, except for little footsteps like mice scattering around the room and giggling from from my youngest cousin Ella swept over us; Grannie broke down and sobbed like a little girl in the dining room - tears streaming down the deep creases of her weathered cheeks and pooling at the bottom of her chin and neck. Coughing and wheezing through through the wet, she wouldn’t let anyone near her except for my grandfather. Before that moment I had never seen my grannie cry: my heart strings were ripped away; I felt all the blood in my body rush to my face and throat. When you are little you almost forget that your hero is human; they almost seem magical. Choking back the hot tears threatening to betray me, I bent to look for the silverware she had once taught me to set the table with when I was small, only to find her shiny tormenters were exactly where she had always put them: in the third drawer in the china cabinet by Mr. Massi, their sculpture from Ethiopia. I stared into his smooth face. His stoic chiseled features reminded me that I had to keep my tears to myself.

From the corner of my eye something amazing was happening. Wiping the tears from her face with his worn painter’s hand, my grandfather gave my grannie a cup of Earl Grey, her favorite puzzle, and a kiss on the cheek. Instantly, the smile she was known for crossed her face, and for her it was as if the events of the past two minutes hadn’t happened. However, if one looked hard enough at my grandfather, it was evident that he was in pieces on the inside, but for the moment his comforting smile was convincing enough.
My grandfather was Mr. Massi: standing guard over my grannie, casting his pain aside to be there for her. I have always been taught to think of the feelings of others; however, I have never seen anyone go to such lengths. My grandpa is many things, but the role he has chosen, although is his most challenging, is being worn permanently on his sleeve; Their love is still so strong that he has the strength to make her smile again. And even though it will become increasingly difficult as her memory continues to fade, like the statue his silent strength will remain. His selflessness has changed my perspective on the issue that used to leave me haunted: instead of stewing in my own fear of being forgotten, it is better for my grannie if I put it behind me, and rather be thankful for the time I had and will have with her.

After all of the chaos and tears dinner was a success. Laughter and stories resumed as we escaped into lamb and garlic mashed potatoes. As our forks hit our plates, we all looked at one another not knowing what to say: to top off the merriment, tradition called for the part of the evening when Grannie eagerly served us her famous trifle. Biting into the layers of strangely coupled fruits, cream, jello and sponge cake, I thought back to the first time I had it long ago and smiled; as I caught her eye she winked at me, her wise face all knowing. Although the road ahead is rough, and holds unimaginable pain, the present is still filled with happy moments here and there.

Logan Milne lives in Fredericton, New Brunswick and loves to find things to paint in the most unlikely of places. When she isn’t painting in her spare time, Logan is playing as a winger on the Fredericton Loyalist rugby team, where she has made many lifelong friends. Currently, Logan is preparing to help coach an under seven flag rugby team this summer. Logan would like to thank her parents for always supporting her efforts, be them academic, athletic, or artistic.
Sew and Tell

“Today you are You, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is Youer than You.”
– Dr. Seuss

When I was an elementary school student it seemed as though everybody’s parents, including my own, were trying to answer the same question: “What is my child good at?” They attempted to find the answer by enrolling their children in every after school activity available. I had friends in horseback riding, gymastics, theater and more, and in my eyes they all seemed to have a talent and a passion for what they were doing. My parents put me in what felt like hundreds of different programs including golfing, basketball, running, tap dancing and acting classes. By the time I reached middle school I realized that I was not enjoying any of my extracurricular activities. I still continued to pursue a handful of them to keep my parents happy, but I was always feeling as though I never excelled at any of them. I always had trouble filling in sheets to describe myself. What were my interests? What were my talents? As far as I was concerned I didn’t have any and probably never would.

When I moved onto high school I was introduced to a whole new realm of possibilities through the world of fashion. I found personal enjoyment in using my clothing as a form of creative expression. I had struggled with bad self-esteem and body image in previous years, and this new outlet helped me to deal with my insecurities. I started an online fashion blog and began to post pictures of what I was wearing. In turn, I gained recognition from people around the world. While this new platform of expression granted me a boost of self-esteem, many of my peers seemed to deem my interest trivial and materialistic. At times I believed them, feeling that my ability to put together outfits was not something that could be taken seriously. I wasn’t satisfied with the fact that I still didn’t feel ‘talented’. This all changed in the summer of 2011.

My two closest friends had decided to spend the summer working as camp counselors, leaving me to a very lonely couple of months. During that time my parents started to take up their old routine of trying to get me interested in things by suggesting I go to a theater camp. This did not interest me in the slightest. After passing by most of July feeling lonely and bored I took it upon myself to find something worthwhile to do. I opened the paper the next morning to find an ad for the Ed Ventures summer camps. One course being offered was “Sew much fun: sewing for teens.” The class was taught at the Craft College in one of the fashion department’s studios. After approaching my parents with the idea, they graciously paid my entrance fee and were glad to finally see me out of the house. For the next five days I spent my time learning to sew on the yellowed Singer sewing machines provided by the college. It was in those five days I realized exactly what my talent was.

I can still remember the very first thing I sewed. In that moment, as I sat at my sewing station, I realized that this very first stitch was going to be meaningful, the first of many. Sitting on that tall chair with my foot on the pedal felt more natural to me than swinging a golf club or performing on stage ever had, and so I relished in the thought that this was just the beginning. I pinned together two squares of black cotton and traced a faint chalk line down the center. I gently lifted the presser foot and lowered it again to hold my fabric in place, and then ever so slowly I pushed my foot to the pedal. The needle bobbed up and down slowly, then quickly, as I tested the machine’s abilities and watched with an excited grin as my bright pink thread turned into my first line of stitching.
The remainder of the camp seemed to whirl by in a hurricane of threads, pins, and fabric scraps. By the end of the camp I had made a shirt, a purse, a zippered skirt and a pin cushion, all of which I proudly displayed to anyone and everyone. I became so infatuated with sewing that I made my mother drive all the way to Campbellton to acquire my grandmother’s old Janome sewing machine. I cleared out an area in my living room and dictated it as my sewing corner and my family spent the rest of the summer listening to a symphony of satisfied hums omitted by my machine.

From that one class spawned so many things, but initially it gave my interest in fashion a purpose and also gave my parents the opportunity to lend their full support to something I was passionate about. Fashion in general helped me to discover who I am and who I want to become, but learning to sew made my dream tangible. The following summer I created my own personal business and sold handmade accessories at a local craft shop. This success made me realize that I wanted to pursue this as a career, not just a pastime. It’s hard to believe that the goals I now have for the future and the person I am today all revolve around the decision I made to attend that class, and what makes me happy is that it was my decision and not someone else’s. Although I appreciate the fact that my parents tried to guide me and give me opportunities to discover myself, it is very rewarding to know that I chose the path that I am currently on and that I will continue to do so in the future. Dr. Seuss says “There is no one alive who is Youer than you”, and I believe that, but I also believe that sometimes it takes a while to realize just who “you” is and for us to discover the talents we have hidden within ourselves.

Cassidy Allan is a sixteen year old grade 11 student with pink hair and a vintage flair. Cassidy has an affinity for sewing and runs her own small business called The Cutest One, selling accessories and clothing online and in store. In her spare time, Cassidy writes her own personal fashion blog “Shorts and Sweets” and was previously a fashion columnist for The Daily Gleaner. Her biggest role models are her older sisters Hilary and Darcy, and of course, Coco Chanel. Cassidy plans to pursue a career in fashion and hopes to one day live in London.
Shoes

I could feel the blood rushing to my head, my heart pounding at an unbelievable speed. I nervously reply with a whisper, bringing my hands close to my face but it was impossible to hide the red hue that enveloped me. My hands became moist as I stared at my shoes. They were blue and white, the laces, tied in a perfectly even bow, were worn and starting to fray at the ends and there was a slight scuff on the toe of the left one. I had them memorized, for that was where my eyes constantly drifted. There were no people in my world; no smiling at others in class, no eye contact in the hallways. It was just me and my shoes.

I grew up the only girl in a group of boys, often causing my opinion to be drowned out by the cries for attention that they created. It seemed as though my thoughts, my desires and my feelings would go unnoticed, and so would I. I heard that it is difficult to be in the spotlight, but what many people do not realize is how difficult it is to avoid it. Most of the time people paid no attention to me and that was how I liked it, I took every precaution humanly necessary to go unnoticed, always making my way to the back of the room, never leaving the house, eating alone at lunch; it takes a lot of work to be invisible.

Each morning I would have to mentally prepare myself for the day, planning ahead and going through hundreds of “what if” scenarios that may occur. What if someone asked to copy my homework? What if all the stalls were full when I walked into the bathroom? What if the teacher asks me to answer a problem on the board? I couldn’t focus on my school work with all of these thoughts constantly running through my mind, and I couldn’t ask questions when I was clueless. Days would go by where I wouldn’t say a word. I hated being shy but it was who I was. What I was known for. I had no idea how to be anything else.

All my days were the same, and they all blended together. It wasn’t until the ninth grade that I realized how much of my life I was truly missing out on. English class; we had to write a memoir on a significant event in each of our lives. Looking back on my life up to that point, nothing substantial had every occurred. I thought long and hard but even though it was only a few short months ago I couldn’t even remember anything about the sixth or seventh grade. Either they had completely disappeared from my memory or there was nothing to remember. Imagine, having nothing to remember; no memories to visit while restless in the middle of the night, no stories to tell your children of your own personal childhood. The thought of it terrified me. It terrified me more than the thought of people’s attention. Something had to change.

It wasn’t a quick transformation that occurred over night. Forcing myself to leave the protection and comfort of my old habits was one of the most challenging things I have ever had to face. It took time, motivation and confidence. Although I lacked confidence, I had an enormous amount of motivation. I would catch myself watching my peers interacting with one another and attempted to take mental notes. None of them were overwhelmed by the attention nor did they seem to care about what those around them were thinking. Acting like complete fools and enjoying every minute of it. I wished I could stop caring what others thought. Achieving this looked to be impossible; but I was not going to grow old and have nothing, not even memories to show for it. I was no longer going to be invisible.

I forced myself to stop hiding my hands in the sleeves of my sweaters, to smile all the time, try to make eye contact and stop gawking at my sneakers. Eventually people would start to smile back which boosted my confidence. People started to talk to me, and I stopped re-wording my sentences in my head three times
before saying them. When the teacher called on me I answered; occasionally I would even raise my hand and ask a question, or spit out a wrong answer.

I was a completely different person three years ago compared to who I am now. Co-captain of my basketball team, working as a cashier, offering to read aloud to the class and randomly complements a stranger; my friends can’t imagine me being anything but outgoing. They don’t remember when I was shy, and neither do I, for there was nothing significant to remember. It took a tremendous amount of effort and even more time, but after a while, I had forgotten what my shoes looked like.

Sixteen year old Rachel comes from a large family and lives in the small town of Hartland, New Brunswick. Her friends admire her optimistic outlook on life. Her positive attitude is reflected in her involvement in extra-curricular activities. She has been a member of her school’s basketball and volleyball teams throughout Middle and High School. After graduation in 2014, Rachel plans to pursue a career in education.
Gandhi once said, “be the change you want to see in the world.”

To make a difference, you must grab the situation by the reigns and steer it in the right direction. However, individuals have a tough time taking a stand for those who are weak. How much pain can you watch another human suffer before it is too much? For me, that moment was in the second grade. It was the moment I got a true glance at humanity.

The instant the bell rang, we trampled out of the classroom like a herd of elephants. Rapidly, we raced down the never-ending hallway and emerged onto the playground. I found my group of friends gathered around the old wooden fence. As we formed a small circle, I glanced around at all the kids playing. There were some kids on swings, some on the jungle gym, and one girl was playing by herself. My eyes squinted to get a better look at the girl. I quickly realized it was Kate-Lynn.

Kate-Lynn never engaged with other students. Maybe it was because she was shy or maybe she was tired of feeling like she didn’t belong. Either way she needed a friend. As I continued to watch her, a lump formed in my throat. I tried to work up the nerve to walk over and reach out to her. Nevertheless, all I could think was what will my friends think? With every second I wasted, I could feel myself questioning what the right choice was. I glanced away knowing I didn’t have the strength to walk away from my friends. Guilt struck me as I followed my group of friends in a game of tag.

“Good luck catching me”, I taunted as I raced back to the wooden fence. My friends staggered behind me ending the match. Sweat glistened off our faces as our grueling game of tag came to an end. I closed my eyes as I waited for my breath to return. When I opened my eyes, I had a clear view of Kate-Lynn. This time she wasn’t alone. Towering above her were two of the school’s biggest bullies.

My eyes remained glued on the situation. I couldn’t possibly imagine what they wanted with her. I continued to watch as they reached down to pick up her doll. My stomach knotted into a thousand tiny lumps. Before I knew it, my protective instincts had propelled me towards her. I pumped my legs as fast as I could. I hoped I would reach her in time. I could see myself closing in on the situation but I was too late. My heartbeat slowed the moment my feet came to a dead halt. Strewn across the ground in front of me were a million doll parts. Laughter flooded through the air in every direction. They continued to taunt her over and over again as they watched her cry.

My knees buckled as I took in what had happened. How could someone be so cruel? I willed myself to help her. I wanted to find a way to stop her pain. I lifted my feet to move, but it felt like I kept running in circles. The more I tried to move, the more I could feel something holding me back. Fear of standing out kept me from defending her. Maybe if I had said something this kind of thing would happen less. Instead, I stood there like a cowardly bystander, afraid to take a stand.

The bell sounded over the intercom to signal recess had ended. Everyone disbursed into the building like nothing had ever happened. However, I can still remember Kate-Lynn’s face as she wiped the cascading tears off her cheek. She remained heartbroken over the doll that she knew her family did not have the money to replace. I watched her at a distance while she collected the broken pieces of doll and carried them to...
the trash. Before she entered the school she wiped away the falling tears from her face. I remained on the playground wishing I had done something to help. If I had just gone over and played with her, this might not have happened. Somehow I had to make it up to her. Somehow I had to show her that someone cared.

The minute school ended, I shared my idea with my mother. We immediately drove to town to pick out a new baby doll. I tried to pick just one, but I couldn’t. What if someone ruined this doll too? I decided that I should buy the package with twins. As I carried the doll to the cash register, I couldn’t help but smile. I knew she was going to love these dolls. Not just because it was a gift, but because it symbolized hope.

The next day at school I couldn’t wait to give Kate-Lynn her gift. I found her sitting in the corner by herself. My palms were sweaty as I carried the neatly wrapped gift to her. My heart felt like it was about to leap out of my chest. I set the present down in front of her without saying a word. She didn’t make a sound as she opened the present. She didn’t have to. I could tell by the tear rolling down her cheek she was beyond grateful. I gave her a parting smile as I walked away. At that moment, I realized one person can make a difference.

From time to time I still see Kate-Lynn. She has grown up but there is a sadness in her eyes that remains. We never speak but instead share a glance that means more than words. It reminds me that there is still hope for humanity. Hope that one day we will treat others how we wish to be treated. Kate-Lynn taught me a lesson I will never forget. She gave me the chance to be the change that humanity needs.

Grayson is a grade 11 student at Canterbury High School. She is the student council president and captain of the varsity girls’ basketball team. She loves being active and taking on new challenges; this summer she will be volunteering with Projects Abroad, in Costa Rica for two weeks. This experience abroad opportunity coupled with what she has witnessed with bully inspired her to write this Turning Points essay because she feels that everyone is equal and deserves opportunities and respect. She hopes to study at Dalhousie University in the Faculty of Science.
For all of my life, and from every ambiguous memory that I can recall, I have been fat. My size was in no way comparable to the extreme cases of childhood obesity that deteriorates a child’s health and immunity, nevertheless I was still a rotund and considerable sized girl. As I was a nine-pound baby, one could conclude that according to genetics, I was larger in relation to most babies. It was true - I had inherited the thickset frame of the women on my mother’s side of our family. To clarify, as I aged I would be prone to saddle bags, back fat, and, of course, a bountiful pair of love handles. To me, the mere thought of this combination of perceived flaws was enough to make me cringe. Consequently, growing up in a one-size-fits-all type of society, I became my biggest critic. I would constantly scrutinize every feature of my body, until finally I lost all of the pieces of myself that made me an individual, unaware if I could ever redeem them again.

My story really begins when I enrolled in school, because that’s when I first started to meet new friends, and was thrust into a completely unknown environment. Throughout elementary school, I was basically oblivious to the emphasis that my weight could have on my life. Physically, my brain was not developed enough to understand how my size could affect my social life, health, and dwindle my self-esteem. Therefore, in my early years, life was unproblematic. I was quite a confident child; I had many friends, and excelled in school. At night, however, I would come home and engulf as much food as I could, and it took its toll on my body. Of course, at this age children are very blunt, and would directly criticize me, regarding my weight. Still, I was very feisty and would snarl snide remarks in return. These comments didn’t have much of an affect on me, as no one seemed to have a filter and everyone tormented each other to some extent. My strength has always been one of my dominant qualities, and I could deal with insults on my own.

However, a few years ago, every characteristic that made me unique was abated, and I lost the ability to be strong for myself. I had started the sixth grade and that, for me, was the critical year that affected my body, attitude, and morals. Unfortunately, it affected my life immensely. I began to care about other people’s opinions of me, social circumstances, and, more importantly, my body image. Slowly, my usual upbeat and exuberant personality crumpled, and a shy, timid girl emerged. My grades and self-esteem diminished significantly, and I could barely concentrate on anything apart from my waistline. To lessen the stress I felt, I would eat, and the more I ate, the more stress would generate inside of me. It was a vicious cycle, that I thought I was hopeless of vanquishing. Night after night, I would tear the glossy yellow packaging off of an Oh Henry Bar, crumpling the smooth plastic in my hands, until the savoury nuts and caramel enveloped my mouth. With every POP of a newly opened chip bag, my self-esteem would further plummet, and I would hate myself for indulging in the salty, crisp chips, and hate myself even more for endorsing my atrocious body. By the time eighth grade arrived, I had picked apart my body for so long, that I was empty. I saw no other option on that clear September day, but to change, if I ever wanted to recognize myself again.

The change to my new lifestyle occurred in a gradual yet lengthy sequence. I began by exercising, even though it doesn’t seem like exercise in my eyes now. I’d walk and jog a short distance around my neighbourhood, coming home breathless, exhausted and doubtful that it could ever make a difference in my appearance. Then, after that combination of cardio became simple to accomplish, I cut out the walking and jogged exclusively. Eventually, I was running five kilometres daily, without the need of stopping to rest. The thing that I have acquired about running in the past three years, is that it is just as addictive as chocolate, except there is no guilt afterwards! All the while I still treated myself, but abolished the majority of my
unhealthy eating habits permanently. By implementing my new eating habits and my love for running, I enabled the extra weight to melt off after six months. After I was liberated from my larger shape, I continued to exercise vigorously because I loved the feeling of satisfaction from a sweaty, strenuous workout.

To this day, maintaining my shape is a full time job, and I am always cautious of what I eat. Gaining weight is no longer an earth shattering experience, and I’m content with it moderately fluctuating. Regaining my strength and confidence was the toughest of obstacles for me to overcome, even more so than losing the weight. Once I grew to love myself again, it opened the doors for many opportunities. Now, meeting new people excites me, I am no longer self conscious around the opposite sex, and my confidence has effected my grades, which have surpassed my expectations. From my perspective now, considering the fact that my life would be drastically different, had I not chose to alter it three years ago, my old life seems ludicrous and unimaginable. The struggle with my weight and self-image will be a constant battle; however, I know that I will always triumph over it with my relentless disposition, as I have once before.

Amber Kelly is a grade 11 student attending Fredericton High School. Amber has a passion for school work; cherishes her family, friends, and adores animals, especially cats. Amber’s favorite school subjects are sciences and math. In the future, she plans to obtain a Bachelor of Science Degree and make application to medical school. Amber’s ultimate dream is to move somewhere tropical to be in the sunshine and near the ocean. She cannot wait to see how her future unfolds.
Wake up. Listen. Listen to the rhythm of the angry earth shaking beneath you. Feel the resonance. Run. Run to a door frame, under a table, outside, anything. Anything to keep you from the inevitable destruction of the home you live in. “Those are the things you do without consciously thinking about them. They are not a choice. You are bound to flee, no questions asked. However, as a naïve child, the adrenaline overrides the fear. If you do not account for the danger of it, earthquakes can be quite exhilarating. Little do you know that the excitement of that particular Earthquake is not one to gain satisfaction from. Little do you know that the same earthquake you feel, is injuring thirty thousand individuals, and taking the lives of over twenty-six thousand others in a city only 100 miles away from you.

On the early morning of December 26th 2003, I discovered that an entire city’s population was not remotely as lucky as I was. I entered my living room on a weekend’s morning, only to see my mother watching the news with tears in her eyes, and a phone to her ear. One sound I heard was my mother breathlessly assuring someone that we were fine. The other sound was a news reporter explaining the situation in a way that I remember as: “An Earthquake of magnitude 6.6 has struck the city of Bam in the southern part of Kerman. The number of killed victims is 15,000 and counting. The effects of the earthquake have intensified due to the poor construction of the majority of houses in the area. Most deaths have occurred due to suffocation under ruins and the injured are being relocated to surrounding cities. This national tragedy has caused intense scenes of grief in the city, with people weeping next to corpses shrouded in blankets”. When I stopped listening, the air suddenly felt heavy, and I felt weak. I desperately wanted to lift this cursed veil of grief from the victims’ minds, but I did not know how. Instead, I just stood there, and watched it unravel.

During the aftermath everything changed. Schools were cancelled for a few days, and once they opened, classes were filled with students from Bam who survived the earthquake. I had a strong desire to approach them and say that I was sorry that their life was colored like this. Sadly, it was hard to encounter any without asking the inevitable question: “How do you keep on living?” Outside of school, our city became crowded with humanitarians preparing to leave for Bam. It seemed that many of these relief groups were from the Western world. Personally, I thought it was interesting that so many foreign relief forces were united in assisting Iran, despite the recent political quarrels. It was an interesting union. A union caused by death.

I barely had a chance to see my dad during the next few weeks He only came home to sleep, and the rest of the time he spent at the hospital tending to patients. I was surprised to find out that survivors were being pulled out of the ruins after such a long time. I never wanted to ask my dad what he had to do, or how many patients he witnessed dying. I felt cheated, but I preferred to be sheltered as well. One day, my mother was unable to pick me up from school, so my dad did. On our way home he received an emergency call from the hospital. Without hesitation we headed there. My dad decided that it was safer for me to stay at his office at the hospital, instead of being alone in the parking lot. Before we left the car, he said, “I want you to close your eyes and cover your ears. Promise me. Promise me that you won’t open them until I tell you, okay?” I agreed, and he quickly led me inside.

With my eyes closed shut, and my ears covered, I could only smell the bitter smell of the hospital. I was holding my dad’s hand and I could feel myself almost trampling over things more than once. I sincerely hoped that none of those were human flesh. One could argue that I made either one of the best or worst decisions
of my life at that moment. Nevertheless, I broke my promise to my dad. With the sound of a seemingly- 
distant and heart-wrenching shriek, I opened my eyes and uncovered my ears. The source of the sound was 
only a meter away from me - a woman crouching over in the side of the hallway, was screaming in pain. 
Doctors and nurses were running around, almost not knowing where to begin. Ghost-like amputees moved 
around in wheelchairs or crutches. Some made eye contact, but others seemed deep in thought with their 
heads down. Inevitably some victims were also children. I contemplated how many of them were orphans. I 
also wondered if they were originally told to cover their eyes too. Maybe for them, the damage was already 
done.

I believe that sometimes you see things from a different cloud, and a different light. Sometimes, it's just 
an image that passes you by, other times, you remember it forever. You grasp it with all you being and you 
embrace it, until it changes your passion, desires, and feelings. My moment started with an earthquake, 
but it was deeply acknowledged during an aftermath. As terrifying as deciding a path in life may be, I have 
settled on one: I wish to help others by giving them the comfort of health. There is no sense in sheltering 
yourself, once you have already been freed.

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Kiana Mozaffari is a grade 12 student at Fredericton High School. She is vice-president of the Student Council and 
involved in multiple activities in the school. She enjoys art, music, and working towards equal rights for all. Kiana hopes 
to explore the world and its cultures as she is the world's biggest fan of National Geographic. She is honored to be a 
part of the Turning Points Program for the second year in a row.
The tilted mirror reflects my anxiety back at me, obsessive repetition as I make my way back and forth across the same pale stretch of tile. My mind worries tirelessly, ignorant to the other restless occupants of the waiting room. The social requirements of “hello, how are you?” are forgotten here, as nobody truly wants to know your answer, and fears the reciprocation of the seemingly innocent inquiry.

After what feels to be decades, the telltale squeak of a neglected door opening interrupts my focus on the insights of the tilted mirror. Muffled voices confer for a moment, and I hear the door close quietly, as though whoever was closing it was afraid to disturb the fragile sense of fabricated peace pulsating in the very walls of this monument to suffering and healing. I tense, waiting to see if the silence will continue, dragging on and on into eternity as these past few minutes have seemed to, a time warp of infinite proportions, trapping me forever in this desperate state of uncertainty and agitation. Finally, I am relieved for a moment, catching the sound of my mother’s voice in the hallway. The relief quickly fades as I begin to understand her words, and my mind registers the wobbly tenor of her breaking voice. The silent presence of sorrow reaches me through the thin walls. “Sending her to Fredericton… yes, tomorrow… we don’t want to label… anorexic.” At that, I make my escape, freeing myself from the prison of the waiting room, running down the hall towards my mother, pausing only long enough to see the phone clutched in her hand and the tears streaming down her cheeks. Bearing witness to the unmasked agony of the woman I care for most in the world, I wrap my arms around my mother, gently accepting the weight of her head on my shoulder, and feeling the weight of the world settle alongside it.

On March 1, 2012, my sister Cassidy was admitted into the Dr. Everett Chalmers Regional Hospital in Fredericton, officially beginning her treatment for anorexia nervosa. Anorexia is a mental condition that causes the sufferer to seek control, and attempt to find that control by exerting it over their food intake and exercise. It’s a tilted mirror, causing those inflicted to see themselves in a negative light. That is the textbook definition; for our family, it became the name slapped onto our two and a half hour trips back and forth to Fredericton; Cassidy’s tears when we had to leave her, a 13 year old girl, all alone in a strange place that was hours away from home; the silent family meals, nobody wanting to say anything in case their words shattered the now fragile strands of composure that were holding each and every one of us together.

That day, I dutifully took what I thought was my place at the base of my family, attempting to keep everything together when it was already so clearly fragmented. Dad took time off work, using it to keep Cassidy company when he could in that lonely hospital room, remaining mostly unspeaking in his silent show of strength and support. Mom did the work of two, putting time in at her job through the week and heading to Fredericton the moment the weekend rolled around to relieve Dad or Grammy of their posts at Cassidy’s bedside, and to plaster on a smile for her baby, who was trapped in a hospital bed. The three of us girls, left at home although not forgotten, were entrusted to keep going, to keep pushing on in the face of this catastrophe, never letting on that everything was a huge mess. So that’s what we did.

On the day we all visited Cassidy, we walked through the doors of the DECH and were immediately assaulted with the overwhelming scent of sanitizing agents. The people milling around us were very subdued, the nurses sickeningly cheerful as we reached the third floor paediatric ward. We entered Cassidy’s room, the beeps and blips of her heart monitors like background music to our strained visit. We spent the day just
passing the time, playing games in likeness only to our childhood; spending time the four of hadn’t spent together since we were kids. When it came time to leave, there were hugs all around, but nobody tried to fake a smile. With one last whispered goodbye, the three of us walked out the door with mom, leaving my baby sister all alone once again in a hospital bed. The silent ride home was a testament to how we all felt in that heart-wrenching moment.

As a family, we marched head-on into our reality, and continue to do so each day. Although Cassidy is no longer a patient at the DECH, she continues to see a team of professionals at the Health Center here in Plaster Rock. Cassidy’s battle with anorexia is an ongoing one, but she is not fighting it alone; she has the backing of a steadfast family, all rooting for her recovery. My family’s experiences this past year have reminded me of how important they are to me, and have caused me to hold them a little tighter when I hug them goodnight. This has all taught me that no matter what life throws at us, we will persevere unfailingly, and come out on the other side stronger, and closer than ever. There is a silver lining in the dark clouds of every tragedy; the blossoming strength of my family is that lining in the light of our recent struggles.

Almost a year later, the four of us sit together on my youngest sister’s bed. We’re gossiping and laughing, talking about nothing in particular, just enjoying our time together. I glance to my left, and something happens to catch my eye; it’s a tilted mirror, and in its reflection I see the image of happiness; the image of my beautiful, strong family.

Abigail Porter (Abby), a grade 11 student at Tobique Valley High School, is involved in many school teams and activities. She enjoys spending free time biking or making videos, and has plans to join a Live Different team in the Dominican Republic this July to help build a house for a family in need. Abby’s goals include attending university after graduation and experiencing as much of the world as she can.
Newfoundland and Labrador

“We ought to weigh well what we can only once decide.”
– Pubilius Syrus

Thank you to our generous anonymous donor.
“When you consider that Shakespeare produced his great writing with a bird’s tail feather, you realize that it isn’t always what you have to work with that matters, but how you work with what you have.” – Richard Fernandez

Kailey Ikkusek-Rogers
First Place – Grade 7 & 8
Eastern School District

White Feathers

White. It’s the color of hope, light and purity. It’s the skies eyes at night, and the clouds making their way across the sky. It’s the light at the end of the tunnel, the smiles on our faces. It’s also the color of hospital walls.

Seems fitting, doesn’t it? You want the color of hope around you while in a hospital. But there is something cold about the color. Something cold and blank.

And on that day, it was cold outside too. Even though it was sunny, you could still see the chill in the January air. I sat at a stool near my grandfathers’ bedside, waiting for my aunt to return.

Hope, the thing with feathers, was flying around my mind, white like the walls. Its swift movements told me to believe that my pop’s illness was a false alarm. That we could finally leave this dreaded hospital as a family. Instead, the monotone of a nearby heart monitor and the clacking of my aunts’ shoes coming down the hall brought me back to reality. There was something more to my pop’s sickness then the doctors led us to believe.

Like every other visit we made, we gave him love and aided in occupying his time. He’d make his witty jokes and put smiles on our faces. Maybe the doctors were right. For, as the hour hand danced around the clock, as the days were crossed off the calendar, my pop seemed more and more like himself. But the cage with the feathered thing inside must have broken one day and the hope brought my grandfather’s good health with it as it flew out of our minds. Those once peaceful walls now mocked us as he fell down the pit of illness with no rope to catch him.

As he fell down this pit, we helplessly watched him, not knowing what we could do. The doctors weren’t much help either.

“I’m tired,” seemed to be the only thing he said nowadays. “I’m so tired.”

I was tired too, on the morning of February 3rd. My grandmother got a call from the doctor, and I was left in the care of a friend while the rest of my family went off to the hospital. Hours passed and the phone rang. My father wanted me there.

My father is a respectable man, though silly; I never thought I would see the day when he would cry. But that day was here.
We both cried for pop died that day. The whole world seemed to shake as we sobbed, longing to wake up from that horrid nightmare. The thing with feathers was now long gone. After all those tests, the doctors never caught his Hemochromatosis, which destroyed his liver, until it was too late.

My world flipped that day. I lived with my pop. I would no longer have the things I loved about him. Now he wasn’t going to be there anymore. Neither was the thing with feathers.

Hailing from St. John’s, NL, Kailey is a grade seven student who loves reading, writing, and listening to music. She aspires to one day become anything from an engineer to a clown to an author. She loves travelling, an interest her grandfather (whom this essay is about) shared with her. Kailey would like to thank her family, the Rogers, as well as her friends, peers and teachers (especially Ms. Williams). Dedicated to Poppy!
As a teenager I've experienced many things to make me the person that I am today. Silly and stupid things such as relationships, fights and fits with friends, breakups and so much more. But for me there was one experience that molded me to be the person that I am today.

Scream, cry, stay quiet, I didn’t know what do when my dad told me… my mom had a brain tumor. As a nine-year-old girl I didn’t think something like this could have such an impact on my life. But it did.

I remember my last words to my dad before he went to the hospital with my mom. “Is she going to be ok?” I said over and over struggling to stay calm. Then it hit me, tears flowed out of my eyes like rain falling out of the sky. It hurt. I was scared. What if I lost her? Who would tuck me in at night, tell me they loved me, or more importantly…take her place. The laughs we had were so magical and unforgettable. How could I let that go?

I had so much left to tell her, to share with her. Who would be there when I graduated high school, moved out for college, walked down the aisle? I was scared. Scared that I would lose her, that I wouldn’t live the life of a regular nine-year-old girl, but mostly scared that I would have to let go. Let go of all our long lasting laughs, deep eyed looks. Everything would be gone!

That night when my dad came home from the hospital I ran up to him, setting off and taking a huge jump into his arms, thinking, “This may be all I have left.”

I will never forget the feeling I got when he let the words go, “She is ok.” A feeling of relief opened inside of me like the opening of a new Christmas present. Thankful… that’s all I felt.

My mom’s brain tumor causes her to have silent seizures. Silent seizures are usually not dangerous. However, they can result in learning difficulties because the affected individual misses important information during each seizure. Even though my mom has this and is different from others, I would not pass her up for anything in the world. I guess I could say she is my… everything.

Even though I do not know what it is like to have one of those totally social moms who are always having a good time with her friends and volunteering at their kid’s school, she still strives to be one of those kinds of mothers. She does it for me.

I think this is a turning point for me because it taught me to live everyday to the fullest and to value the people around you. I for one have noticed that within the snap of a finger these people could be gone. Losing a loved one could have a huge impact on your life, but losing someone you have so much of a connection to can be worse. That is why I am grateful to still have my mom by my side today.
A New Perspective

It was July 31st, 2012 and it was just another normal summer’s day for me playing softball with the Boys and Girls Club. My position was third base, and I had just caught a ground ball and threw it hard to first base. However, the runner got there first. The next batter hit a hard line drive to the short stop and the first base runner was already in motion.

The runner had rounded second base and was charging towards me. The short stop threw me the ball, in the hopes that I would tag the runner out. The runner decided to slide and was coming straight for me, at a tremendous speed. The runner’s right foot made direct contact with my left shin, and I heard a horrifying sound as my bones snapped into pieces.

Instantly, I fell to the ground in excruciating pain. By the time the first person got to my side, my tibia and fibula were nearly protruding through the sides of my leg. The bulging skin was as black as tar, and the pain was unbearable. I was taken to the local hospital, assessed and sent to the city for emergency treatment. Being nervous, I refused to go in the ambulance and my transport in our own vehicle was exceptionally uncomfortable.

Once seen by the doctors in emergency, it was decided that they would attempt to set my fractured bones before casting. Although I was partially sedated, I could still feel them twisting and turning my bones. Their attempts failed, and surgery became my only option. To make matters worse, I had an allergic reaction to all the pain medication I was given.

The pain the first night was like nothing I’d experienced. The next day, I had surgery and the doctors put in hardware to keep my bones together. At my follow up appointment a week later, I learned that my surgery was unsuccessful and I would need another bone reduction to keep my bones in place. The third bone reduction was the worst. The doctors turned me on my stomach, and without pain medication, forced my bones back in place. Although it was extremely painful, it would save me from walking with a limp for the rest of my life.

Going through all of this was a hard experience for me because sports were my entire life. I became quickly depressed and shut out everyone. I thought my life was over because I was unable to take care of my basic needs myself. Being in a wheelchair for a month, on crutches for several months, and going to rehab regularly gave me a new outlook on life and what it means to have your mobility. This dramatically affected my life, and forever changed the way I think. I now have a deeper appreciation for people with non-functioning limbs, and those confined to wheelchairs. I will never take the simplest things in life for granted, and appreciate life’s blessings.

Logan Hurley is a 13-year-old student from Bell Island. He is an energetic and personable young man who possesses a passion for sports, especially hockey, and enjoys spending time with his family and friends. This past year, he placed first in the Science, Heritage, and Language Arts Fairs at his school, and second in a public speaking competition. Logan enjoys being involved in a variety of school and community based activities, and assists in many fundraising initiatives. Logan’s ultimate goal is to play professional hockey and pursue a career in engineering or oncology.
Wanting Friends

Being bullied. You hear about it, you’re taught about it, but it’s never the same as when you live through it. Seven years ago I was bullied. I was only six years old, and I’d just moved to Newfoundland. I had none, but wanted friends.

Shortly after moving, I met four people around my age and I thought we were all friends.

However, one of my so-called “friends” began to bully me. He continuously kicked and punched me, every single day. I’d come home with bruises all over my arms and legs. When my mom would ask what happened, my reply was always that I fell. One day, that person literally broke my pinky finger, but I told my parents that I “fell” on it.

One of my “friends” had a camper in their driveway, and we used to play in it all the time. One day, we all went in the trailer. They sat me down and, using rope, tied me to a chair. I started to get out of the rope when they noticed me. They shouted, “If you untie that rope, then we won’t be your friends anymore!” So I stayed.

After that, they thought it would be funny if they made me eat a small lump of raw pizza dough and drink a full glass of ketchup. Then, they decided to leave me locked in that camper – alone – for two and a half hours. I didn’t know how to unlock the door, so I was stuck in there. I never even got out of the chair, because if they came back and I wasn’t in the chair, my only friends would be gone.

Another time, we were all drawing pictures of each other. When they were drawing me, they drew my stomach the size of the entire paper. Other days, they’d simply call me names such as fat, annoying, stupid, weird, smelly, pig, and Pinocchio. They also told all of my secrets to everyone. They made my life miserable. Thinking back on it, I would’ve been better off not having any friends at all.

Being bullied changed me in many ways. It changed how close I get to my friends, because I’m afraid that everything will happen to me all over again. I’m now extremely shy and sensitive, and I find it very hard to tell anyone any of my secrets. In 2009, I eventually told my mom what had been happening. It took me three years to stand up and actually tell someone. Why? Because they were the closest things I had to friends, and that’s all I really wanted.

Ever since I’d been in kindergarten, teachers have told us that if we are being bullied, tell someone. I understand how hard that is, but if I’ve learned anything from this experience, I’ve learned that it’s better to tell someone. In the end, I made new friends, and I learned that I didn’t need fake friends in my life.

Thirteen-year old Jaimee moved from Nova Scotia to Newfoundland when she was six years old. She takes a big interest in music, reading and writing. Since sixth grade, Jaimee has been involved in the late French Immersion program. She hopes to one day be fully bilingual. When Jaimee grows up, she hopes to be a famous person or a music teacher.
Not Everything Happens for a Reason

During the summer of 2007, my mom was diagnosed with M. S, a disease that has no cure. No, it’s not a life-threatening ailment, but it was a shocking event for my whole family and me.

It was my first trip to Florida for my 7th birthday. It was a trip I would never forget. At the time, I was so overwhelmed by the magic of Disney, that I didn’t really notice my mom getting sick. As the trip continued, she got worse. When we got home, we had to take her to the hospital. The doctors still didn’t know what was happening. At first they thought it was ALS, a fatal disease that after a while will shut down your whole body. Thankfully, they ruled that one out, along with a few other scary possibilities. Finally they came to the conclusion that she has Multiple Sclerosis.

Mom had to take a few months off work because of some of the effects. First, it was her arms. She couldn’t write very well and her left hand had gotten weak. Second, her legs deteriorated. She had to use a cane and walking poles to move around. Now five years later, she takes Wednesdays off from work each week so she isn’t as tired. She has been doing this for two years and it seems to be helping a lot.

This changed me because I realized that bad things can happen to anyone without warning. I had to adjust to change quickly. I learned that when you’re seven years old it is hard to not always have your mom there doing stuff with you. It was difficult having to learn not to push her too hard where she couldn’t do the same things she could before. I had to learn that my time with my mom would be different. I also learned to be thankful for my family and to cherish my time with them. My family learned to focus on the positive; it could have been something much worse. It could have been life threatening.

My mom getting M. S is the biggest turning point that I have experienced. I learned a lot from this experience. I learned to be patient; my mom couldn’t do everything when I wanted. I learned to be positive and see the upside of things. I learned that there is not a reason for everything. But right now, I’m thankful that it wasn’t something worse.

Grade 7 student Hannah goes to school in Conception Bay South. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, writing and listening to music. She hopes that one day she will be an author. Hannah has been playing piano for seven years. She lives with her parents and a dog.
Oscar Kilfoil
Honourable Mention – Grade 7 & 8
Eastern School District

Aliya – A Sister Forever

My life began as a happy life - I was adopted from Guatemala. I was king of the castle, the top dog. Numero UNO. After five years or so living in Canada, Mom said the fatal words,

“Oscar, we’re going to Kazakhstan to get you a little sister.”

The plane ride there was very long. It took three days to get there, but it felt like three years. When we got there, we had to go to a government office. We had to be interviewed to see if we were a good family. After that, we went to Baby House #3, an orphanage, to see a girl who could become my potential little sister. The name I had been using for her was “BABY SOCKS” because we did not know her name.

As we walked up to the front of Baby House #3, we could smell cooked cabbage. The smell became worse as we came closer to the door. We had to go into this little, tiny office. There were at least eight people there, including us. They brought in two little girls for us to meet. One was wearing a pink dress. One was in a blue dress. Right off the bat, the “blue dress one” started bawling like a howler monkey at night. Two workers took the little girl named “Aliya” outside. Through the window, you could see her. I just waved my hand at her. Then she started crying again. It was so loud you could hear her crying through the glass. She was the one my mom and dad chose to be my new little sister.

For a month, we visited Baby House #3 every day to see if this bluely dressed, howling creature, “Aliya”, would be the one with whom we’d bond. Mom and Dad would do the bonding. Me, no! I don’t do bonding.

While my mom and dad talked to the people of the orphanage, I played with Sweta, our translator. Baby House #3 had a pool but no water. Instead of water, it had mold. The children of Baby House number #3 played in a sector of the playground that had nothing in it at all. In a visiting room, Mom and Dad had to play with Aliya while I played with my “leapster”.

We went home and after two months, Mom had to go to pick up Aliya. That first summer Aliya was home, Mom and Dad treated her like the queen of England and I was her humble servant. My jealousy was like a burning flame. I just wanted to get rid of her.

Five years have passed. I don’t mind her that much now. I play with her now and then. Aliya is a sister to play with, to keep your heart open to, and to keep you on the edge of your seat. It’s like having a roller coaster that never ends – bumpy, rolling, spinning sideways, an amazing ride that requires luck and survival.

Oscar Kilfoil is a grade seven student. He was born in Guatemala and, at the age of nine months, joined his family in Newfoundland. Oscar likes to write scary stories and has received a lot of pointers from his Language Arts teacher. Future goals include becoming a #1 gamer and reading all the books in the world. This essay was inspired by his sister’s adoption.
Growing up is never easy, you hold on to things that were. You wonder what's to come. But that night, I think we knew it was time to let go of what had been, and look ahead to what would be. Other days, New days. Days to come. The thing is, we didn’t have to hate each other for getting older. We just have to forgive ourselves for growing up. – The Wonder Years

Cheryl graduated high school in 2011 and that year was one of my hardest. I’ve always had my sister there to take care of me when I get off the bus every day. However, in grade six I had to get used to being home alone, preparing things for to eat and start taking more responsibility. In the past two years I’ve learned in many ways how to be independent within my house such as doing chores.

My brother, Collin, moved out when I was seven years old; I didn’t really understand why he was leaving, but when my sister left I felt lonely, sad and upset. I had thought my sister’s leaving would fill me with joy, but it was such a different feeling.

My sister always practiced piano three to four sometimes even five hours a day. The house just seemed so quiet and empty without her. When it was the day of Cheryl’s graduation it finally sunk in that I wouldn’t have my big sister around. I was so upset I didn’t want to take the family picture! I realized the sound of classical music wouldn’t go through the house. All that remained was just a silent walk from the bus to my house. (I could still hear the piano outside. ) I would have no one to tell what happened in school that day – just a quiet home all to myself.

Sometimes I wish my brother and sister were here to see me grow up and accomplish many things and help me when I need them. They both went through the French Immersion program and if they still lived home I think they would’ve been able to help me out a lot. When they come out on a weekend (which is usually rare) I get help with my more difficult subjects.

Some things I’ve had to take responsibility for are cooking food for myself. (My specialty is Kraft dinner, fries and Mr. Noodles.) Also I’ve had to do the dishes, sweep the floor and clean my bedroom. In the past two years I have started babysitting as well, but for now it’s mainly been mainly caring for my younger cousins. Another responsibility has been to balance out free time and studying. This has been hard for me because I’m not one of the most studious people; I just listen and interpret what I hear.

I think my sister’s leaving home has made a big impact on my life and I have become more independent and responsible. In the last two years I think I’ve learned that growing up and being independent isn’t always that easy and it comes with many tasks. Hopefully, as I get older, these tasks will become easier without my sister.

Thirteen-year old Sarah Knight lives in Blaketown and comes from a family of five. She is currently in Grade 7 French Immersion. She enjoys reading, writing, running and helping others in her community. She enjoys participating in the music program at her school and is a member of the vocal ensemble. As part of the vocal ensemble she will be travelling to Ottawa in July representing her province in “Unisong”. She is a junior representative with Avalon Achievement and has donated her hair twice to Angel Hair for Kids, as well as raised money for the Janeway and Ronald McDonald House. Her sister Cheryl whom she has listened to play classical music all her life inspires Sarah.
When I heard the news about my new baby sibling, I was delighted. I was in grade two or three at the time, so that was one reason for all the excitement. I would sing to mom’s belly every night. I waited patiently for about two to three months until my mom came back from the hospital with my Nan, her head stuffy and her eyes red. I was worried that something had happened. My mom turned to me and said, “I’m sorry… You’re not going to be a sister.”

It felt as if time had frozen. My throat became tight and my eyes watered. I didn’t want to believe it, but I had to face reality. For some reason, I believed it was my fault. I thought that since I stopped singing to mom’s belly every night, the baby got sick and died. Truth is, there was no baby to begin with, and her stomach was just growing. I was in a horrible state for about a month after. I would cry every night, and sometimes while in school. I remember the incident as if it was just yesterday.

A few years later, after a lot of begging for a sibling, it finally happened. My parents had kept it a secret from our entire family, in case something else had happened. We found out on the day of my Nan’s birthday. There was a baby frame with a picture of the ultrasound and a letter. My Nan started to laugh. She didn’t believe that it was actually happening. I was in shock, goose bumps rising on my arms and shivers moving through me. I was frozen. I looked at my mom then at my step-dad and ran and hugged them. The only reason they intended to have her was because of me.

On 2011, March 3rd, 8:31AM, my sister, Alyssa-Jane Burke, was born. I was so happy. I couldn’t even look at her. I was hugging into my step-dad, crying. When I finally took a good look at her, I saw that she looked like me, well, kind of. Her hair was red, like mine. That was about it.

Even to the present day, I still get upset about my mom’s miscarriage. Most people my age would have grown up and forgotten about it. On the other hand it was a completely different story for me. It opened my eyes and made me realize that you don’t realize how much you love something until it’s gone.

Right now, my sister is living in a bubble of happiness. Whenever I get home from school, she’s there to welcome me. When I go to school in the mornings, she hugs my legs and tells me not to go. Whenever I go out of her sight, like downstairs or out around with friends, she looks around for me and then waits for me to get back. Even though I have a wonderful sister, I can’t help but get upset sometimes. It isn’t as bad as it was and it doesn’t happen often, but I still think about it. It feels like a piece of my heart has chipped, like iron, rusting and then falling off. But now, as I grow older and mature, I realize that these things happen for a reason. If that baby had been born and then died, it would have been harder than having the miscarriage. So thinking back on it, I would honestly rather have the miscarriage instead of an unhealthy baby being born, suffering with treatments and so on. I’m now glad that my mom didn’t have that baby. I’d rather have no baby than an unhealthy one.

Twelve-year old Victoria lives in St. Mary’s, NL with her parents and younger sister, Alyssa. She loves writing, drawing, playing piano and acting. Victoria attends a K-12 school, where she is a member of the basketball, ball hockey, and frisbee teams, as well as, a member of the school’s leadership committee. Someday she would like to write a novel or direct a movie.
Influential

This is where the creativity started, one of the most influential experiences of a girl named Justine, an oblivious little girl, around age seven, optimistically walking down the hallway with her classmates.

Along with her best friend, Grace (whose friendship with the little girl obtains more stability in this story) and her other second-grade classmates, this young girl heads to the library with excitement in her heart. But why was she so excited? Most other children might’ve actually found the experience quite tedious. But for her, it was a wise room filled to the brink with wonder, knowledge, and most of all, creativity.

That day turned out to be a memory that doesn’t seep away into the mind, shrouded in darkness, never to appear again. For on that day the creativity from a single book would soar into her thoughts.

As per usual, the two girls eagerly headed down to the drawing books. The books whispered in hushed tones about everything the girls already knew. But then the two girls abruptly noticed a new book. This is because this book didn’t whisper like the others; it spoke, quite clearly. The book was entitled How to Draw More Manga (manga is a Japanese comic art style) by Katy Coope.

Being naturally curious about unknown subjects, the little girl listened to the stories it had to offer. The two girls became intrigued in the new piece of creativity and it altered their interest in drawing and the bond they shared. For even today, years later, they still cherish drawing manga together.

Each conversation they had with the book enhanced their interest in the subject. It made drawing come to life. Instead of just instructions on how to draw certain figures, they were to create their own. The creator of the handbook actually put characters with their personalities as explained in the introduction. They showed up often for examples from poses to wardrobe. You basically could have created anything you wanted.

The book eventually became like an old relative to the young girl. Being juvenile and stubborn, the girl wished for her drawings to be exactly like the ones shown to her, despite the book’s constantly telling her to create her own character. Even when she made her own creation, it was usually based on the ones she saw in the book.

One day, much to her dismay, when she wished to check the book out once more, the handbook was gone. Someone else wanted to hear the stories it told. So, the girl eagerly listened for it to return. Eventually, curiosity overrode patience. So, she questioned the librarian. The librarian had concluded someone had checked it out and had lost it. They had lost it. The words streamed through the girl’s mind. An underlying selfishness broke out and all other emotion became fabricated. The girl thought of the carelessness of whoever was at fault. How it may have been just a book to them, but to her, it was influential.

Justine Yick is a Canadian born Chinese. The 12-year-old was born in St. John’s and currently lives in Portugal Cove - St. Philips, Newfoundland with her parents, older brother, and twin brother. The family runs a convenience store. For Justine, drawing takes up an extensive amount of her free time. Besides drawing, music and reading are favorite activities as well. She is currently in French Immersion program. Justine intends to further her education in graduating middle school, high school, and university.
Nova Scotia

“It’s easier to do a job right than to explain why you didn’t.” – Martin van Buren

As the Turning Points program continues to expand across Canada, we were delighted to have the province of Nova Scotia join us!

Thank you to teacher, Judy MacDonald, for implementing the program and for involving the students of Uniacke District School this year.

Thank you to our generous anonymous donor.
“God gives every bird its food, but he does not throw it into the nest.” – J. G. Holland

Jack Curry
First Place – Grade 7
Chignecto Central Regional School Board

The First Day I Caught a Fish

Fishing is Amazing!

Well, we sat at the kitchen table, setting up the little orange and black rod. We was goin’ fishing, I was four.

We had to go dig worms, so on went the rubber boots and we went up to the old garden, mason jar and shovel in hand. Dad started shoveling and I picked the worms out of the cold, wet, spring soil.

A truck pulling a big boat went by and Mom said, “They are going to catch all the fish in the lake.” But we wasn’t goin’ to no lake, we was goin’ to old Eliot road.

After that we loaded up and drove back old route 66 (Eliot Road) way back in the middle of nowhere to some people, but to me it’s just up the road. We hopped out and walked over to the creek. I remember the banks hung over and the rocks would make the water jump. I thought that those were so cool; I thought that they were mini waterfalls.

So me and Dad sat down and put a worm on the hook and started fishin’. After a couple of casts we started getting some bites. The bobber went down. Then it popped back up, and then wiggled, then… bang! The bobber sunk. Then dad set the hook! Dad handed me the rod and I started reeling.

The tremble of that little orange rod, the flash of the fish, just knowing that a trout was on the other end of the line -- at that moment I knew fishing was the best thing in my world!

I hauled up the fish and Dad asked me if I want to keep him. I said “Yes, as a pet.” But Dad said, “If we keep the fish, we have to eat him. So I said, “yes.” Dad kept fishing while I played with the dead fish in a small pool of water. After that I walked over and seen some bones; I thought they were dinosaur bones but they were actually raccoon bones.

Then we drove home and fried up the trout. I loved the taste of my own fish! And from that day on I can’t walk past the fishing aisle in Canadian Tire without getting excited.

Grade seven student Jack Curry lives in South Rawdon, Nova Scotia. He loves fishing, picking guitar and playing softball. He hopes to one day become a helicopter pilot in the Air Force. Jack wishes to return back to that same fishing hole someday to catch another one of those tasty little trout.
One Phone Call Changed Everything

Good things can happen.

When I was little I lived in a big house, with just my dad, a dog, and me. My mother had passed at a young age when I was just a baby, so I had no mother to sing in the morning, while she was making breakfast, or to make cookies with.

My Dad used to work through the week and sometimes on the weekends, so I had to go to the babysitter’s. Her name was Cindy. She had two daughters and lived in a small house not too far away from me. She and I shared a special bond; she was much like a mother to me and I spent most of my time with her. I remember we used to dance around the living room to the song “Dilemma” and go outside and run through the sprinkler.

I always had this idea that Cindy and my dad would get together. Once when we were sitting at the table and Cindy and my dad were talking, Cindy started talking to me. “No.” I said. “Don’t talk to me, talk to Daddy.” Laughing, she continued her conversation with him.

One day when I was three and Cindy was moving out of her house, I had this great idea. I asked my father if Cindy could move in with us. “That’s a great idea,” he said and dialed the number and handed me the phone. I asked Cindy if she and her daughter, who still lived at home with her, wanted to move in. After clearing a few things up with my dad, she said yes and moved in.

Now we all live together as a family and I think of Cindy as my mother. I call her mom now and think of her daughters as my sisters. To me this is like a fairy tale story and on my worse days I remind myself that good things can happen and that keeps me going every day.

Now I have a mom to sing in the morning while making breakfast (even though she might be off-key) and make cookies with and I am thankful for that.

Emily Parker is thirteen years old and a grade seven student at Uniacke District School. Emily’s favourite subjects are math, English and social studies. Emily enjoys horseback riding, dance, hockey, running and volleyball. She especially loves reading a good book. Emily hopes one day to become a successful author.
This changed my life forever…

One night, my dad and I went out for ice cream. I was really curious about why because it was 9:30 at night but I didn’t care; it was ice cream!

So he picked me up from my mom’s house and then we headed off and we had a nice little chat. We got to Mickey- d’s and got our cones and then we got to a spot where we could eat and parked the car.

About five minutes in, he asked me, “How’s your ice cream?” And I said, “Good, thanks!” And then it started. He told me, “I went past Grampy’s house, and there was an ambulance there. And I realized something. “Wa-why?” So then I just turned around to get to the house and I got in but they wouldn’t let me the room. He had a heart attack and I had to sit there and watch.”

I sat there in that car seat frozen. “Did he make it?” “No.”

I started tearing up and so did my dad tear up at the time because there was no reason not to. After that we left. Neither one of us said a word on the way back.

So I got back to my mom’s and I walked in the kitchen to put my ice-cream in the freezer and my mom came in and asked, “How was the ice cream?”

I said, “It was okay.” Then we started talking about what we did and then I mentioned Grampy and I started crying.

A few weeks later, the funeral came and I didn’t want to go. We got there and I had to sit in front where my Grampy’s ashes were, two feet away from me. Marshall, my step brother, had to sit up front, too, I didn’t feel he deserved to be up there too, but I had to live with it. We had to listen to a sad song called Kicking’ Stones -- a really sad song.

After that we left.

That was it.

He’s gone.

Miss him every day.

Grade seven student, Dawson Howcroft, lives in Mount Uniacke, Nova Scotia. He loves to make films, do photography, and listen to dub step. He also loves to collect free stickers from companies that advertise their companies (and because they’re free). He wants a career in automotive repair, and he would also like to be a photographer. He hopes to one day own a Toyota Supra and a Honda NSX.
Man's Best Friend

This is one of the bigger turning points in my life. I love dogs. I own two -- Chloe, a German Shepherd/Lab Mix and Cooper, a short-haired Dachshund.

I had just got on the highway to get to my mom's house (my parents are divorced). I was excited to get back and see my dogs. When we got there, something seemed odd. Usually when I opened the door, my dogs would run to the door, but this time it was different. Only Chloe had run to the door. I petted her, and then started looking for Cooper.

When I found him lying down, I knew something was wrong. I turned him over and noticed his eye was all pink and had small bumps and holes all over it. I ran to my mom and told her what I had seen. She told me that when I was gone, she had put the dogs outside and a porcupine had gotten into the backyard and the dogs attacked it. Chloe ended up with a lot of quills in her snout and torso. Cooper ended up with over thirty on his torso and legs, forty in his facial area including eighteen in his mouth and twenty six in his eye.

This had me stressed for a long time, because we didn't have a lot of money at the time and just going to the vet to see what they could do would cost us a hefty amount of money.

Cooper just wasn't himself; you could tell he was in a lot of pain. When I called him he wouldn't come; he wasn't eating much either. He had troubles moving a lot and usually all he would do all day was lay down and cry.

A week or two later his eye was blood red and it starting watering and bleeding. My mom and I were really stressed because we thought he was going to die of an infection.

A month passed and we finally had enough money to afford something for him. We called the vet and they told us they would have to do X-rays to see if he had any quills still in him.

When the x-rays were done, we found out Cooper still had one quill under the left side of his snout slowly grinding into his bone every time he moved his jaw. The veterinarian performed the surgery and removed Cooper's eye and the quill in his snout, leaving a big scar and an empty sealed eye socket. They asked us if we wanted to have a marble put in his eye socket so it looked like he still had an eye for an additional two-hundred dollars, but we chose not to.

After his surgery he had some gnarly looking stitches that gave me shivers when I saw them, but after they were out he was a normal one-eyed happy dog who still enjoys walks, snuggling and playing.
Moving to Nova Scotia

An Unexpected Journey

The biggest turning point of my life was when I moved to Nova Scotia from Ontario. First we lived in Sackville and now we live in Mt. Uniacke. The things I remember about my home in Ontario is that we lived on a circle part of the road in South Mountain. Our house was blue and white, and two of my siblings weren’t born yet. I remember the EXACT ditch that my brothers would tease me about, saying it was a bottomless pit and that I had to jump across it. We had the biggest white van I’ve ever seen. Also a very fun part of living there was that my dad would let me play with some of his old toys.

I was three years old when I moved here and I came here because in my grandfather’s family everyone has died at the age of 72. He is now 78 with diabetes so my family is pretty much biting their fingers off. So we came here to live closer to him (he lives in Greenwood) so we could check on him every weekend.

My grandfather’s name is Donald Carver. He is really smart. Every question we ask him he answers as soon as we ask. Every time my brothers and sisters pick on each other he talks about how we shouldn’t fight and he tells us stories about bullying from when he was our age and how he is completely against it. He helps everybody in our family whenever they need it. He seems pretty rich because he used to own an exhibition and whenever we help him out he pays us five dollars. Also, when we’re at the table eating supper he usually tells us a story or a joke and then he has a conversation with the older members of my family and I enjoy listening in on them (this is at supper so it’s NOT eavesdropping).

After we’re done supper the older ones sit around the fireplace in the TV room while the younger ones are upstairs watching a movie. We talk with each other for about an hour (I’m 13 now so I’m considered an older person, so I get to be part of it now).

Grampy is a very nice grandfather with a nice farm and house, and all the things I talked about. When he goes, we won’t be going to his house anymore which is pretty sad.

Maxx is a grade seven student who lives in Mount Uniacke, Nova Scotia. He loves reading and playing soccer and video games. Coming from a military family with eleven kids (he’s number eight), Maxx has lived in four different cities in thirteen years. He hopes to one day have the opportunity to be a military engineer.
And Then There Were Three

It’s not just me and my mom any more…

At the time it was only my mom and me living in a small house in Sackville. I went to a good school, and had great friends. One day my mom came to me and said that she had a new boyfriend, and that his name was Donnie. He seemed really nice, but then I found out he had three kids, all older than I. The night I found out was the worst night of my life.

It seemed like a normal week night; Donnie came to visit my mom and me, but as he was getting out of the car I saw that three other people were getting out, too. My mom came over to me and told me that Donnie had three kids, and that their names were Chelsey, Brenna, and Donald. It was okay, though, because we didn’t live with them -- yet.

About a week later, my mom told me that we were going to move in with Donnie. That meant a new school with all new friends. I didn’t know where he lived.

Over the next few weeks we packed up all of our stuff and moved it to Donnie’s house. When we got there, we realized that there was no room for me. So, I had to share a room with the oldest, Chelsey. Over the next few months, we got everything organized. Just as I was getting used to three new siblings my dad called me one day and said, “Summer, you’re going to have a new baby brother or sister.” I was only six at the time so it wasn’t that big a deal. About nine months later I had a new baby brother named Tyson.

Now I’m twelve, Tyson is six, I have a new step mom named Nicole, a new step sister named Shawntel, a year old niece named Kaylee and I will soon have another niece or nephew.

Sometimes my life is crazy, but I love them all and don’t know what I would do without them.

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Summer Jennings is a grade seven student who lives in Mount Uniacke, NS. She loves to read and hang out with her friends. She is actively involved in Sea Cadets and plays the trumpet in her school band. Summer loves to travel in the summertime. She hopes one day to be a photographer.
Pets change your life forever.

I was two. My old dog, Morgan, had recently passed away from cancer. My parents were meaning to get the family a new dog so one day we got in the car. Mom strapped me in and my parents jumped in the front seat. We drove out of the little town we lived in and out into the countryside. The scenery was beautiful.

We came to a little house with a big red barn behind it. We stopped and my dad unstrapped me and put me on his shoulders. My mom would have done it, but she was pregnant with my baby sister, Madison. We walked to the house; my parents talked to the man in the house like they knew him for years. He led us out back to the barn, and he opened the door.

There had to be at least a dozen puppies there. I felt so excited; everything was overwhelming. A dozen puppies were running around. I wanted to stay here forever. Dad lifted me off his shoulders and put me down on the ground. The man walked around scooping up puppies and showed us.

I loved looking at puppies but there was one that stuck out. It was a little light brown puppy. The puppy was really chubby. The man picked her and showed her to us. He told us that she was the runt of the litter. Mom tried to persuade me to get a small fluff ball of a puppy, but I wanted the runt. The man picked a box off the shelf and put a rag, some food and the tiny dog in. Dad lifted me onto his shoulders again, and we walked to the car. When we were all buckled in Mom and Dad started discussing what to name the dog. I sat in the back seat watching the dog run around the box; I waited patiently for the car to get home. We finally got home and my parents took us out of the car and brought us in and put us on the floor. My parents decided to name her Jesse.

Jesse and I grew up together. She has been through eleven of my birthdays, through good times and bad. Jesse is my best friend, she will always be; no one can replace her. Even now I am thirteen and Jesse is eleven and she grows old and chubby again. I love Jesse. She was my friend every step of the way through my life.
A Day That Made Me Feel Really Important

Did you ever think what it would be like to go to your parents’ wedding? You might feel happy, overjoyed, excited, nervous, mad, worried, or sad, but it’s much more than that, so I am going to tell you about that day.

August 5th 2007, my mom and I and Angela (my mom’s friend) drove out to Ontario to get my grandmother. The four of us were going out to Alberta to visit my dad, grandfather and my uncle. I was excited to be seeing my dad! My dad works in Alberta with his dad and his brother. My dad and grandfather are mechanics on big, huge equipment. My uncle is a welder. My dad has worked away for as long as I can remember. It’s really sad when he leaves because he is my dad and I love him.

We finally arrived in Alberta. When we got to the place where my Dad was staying, I jumped out of the car and ran to him and gave him a big hug. A few days later we decided to go to west Edmonton Mall and go sightseeing. When we were at the mall we went in the wave pool! The waves were huge! Well, I was 6 so in thought they were. When we got home, I was told that mom and dad were getting married! We went dress shopping, flower shopping, cake and food shopping! It was fun!

When it came time for the wedding I was wearing a nice, colorful, summery dress and Mom was wearing her beautiful nice white dress. Dad and his brother were wearing black tuxedos. There were flowers everywhere! Mom and Dad were saying their vows while crying. I would pop my head up in between them and say, “Stop crying.” It was funny.

After they were married, Mom and Dad and I sat down on the bench and got lots of pictures taken. Then Mom and Dad had a surprise for me. They gave me my very own wedding ring! It was tiny with little crystal type stones in it! It was beautiful! The feelings I had are everything I mentioned in the beginning, but it’s much more than that. You feel so special! Not everybody gets to go to their parents’ wedding, but I was lucky enough to get to go.

Taylor Norman lives in Mount Uniacke, Nova Scotia. She loves horses and all animals; she has a dog named Bentley and a cat named Figgero. She says, “They are my world!” Taylor loves sports; she plays soccer, basketball and volleyball. When she is finished university she still wants to play soccer and also become a professional photographer. Taylor likes her friends, school and traveling. She would really like to go down south again!
He is more than a friend, he is family.

When we first went to see the puppies, my family wouldn’t let me hold him. We had to wait three weeks to bring him home. My sister thought of his name, but I love him the most. Once he was home, he slept in the kitchen with his toys and newspaper. I played with him and helped walk and bathe him. He was full grown at the age of one. He would not go up and down the stairs until he was seven years old because he slipped and fell down a couple of the stairs when he was little. This is a story about Farley.

Farley is a Shish Tzu Lhaso apso. He is small and black and white with big brown eyes. Farley does not like big dogs; he acts very big and fierce around them. Farley prefers to have a nice clean fur cut; he gets very hot very easily. Farley likes to lie in the sun though; he is a very complex dog! He is also very friendly.

Farley hates thunder, swimming and fireworks. He loves food, attention, outdoors, and lying in the sun. Farley loves bacon treats. One time my brother and I were swimming and Farley jumped in, but he couldn’t get out and he never went swimming again. Once, Farley peed on the floor at preschool and we made my aunt clean it up. It was hilarious.

Farley’s favorite toys are his bucket and sock. He puts his bucket on his head and flips it off; it is so cute! Farley plays tug-of-war with his sock. Farley’s favorite person is me.

Farley likes to chase his tail. He loves chasing squirrels, but he hates crows and cats. Farley does not like cuddling; he prefers belly rubs and scratching behind his ears. Farley loves meeting new people, but not their dogs. He will not stop barking until the dogs leave or we take him inside or for a walk.

Once, my mom and I took Farley for a walk down by the lake so he could get a drink of water, but there were waves and when he started to drink he brought his head up and started drinking the air because the water was hitting his face. Farley is very funny. He means everything to me.

If we had never gotten Farley I would not have such a great best friend. I have lots of best friends but none are as important to me as Farley. I love Farley. He is more than a friend, he is family.

My turning point here is that I would never have known what it is like to have a dog if it wasn’t for Farley. I am so happy we got the dog we have because without him I would not be so happy right now. He makes me happy every day - even when there is nothing to be happy about.

Jenna Williams is in grade seven and goes to Uniacke District School. Jenna lives in Mount Uniacke, Nova Scotia. Jenna enjoys ballet, jazz and contemporary dance. She also plays on her school soccer and basketball teams. Someday Jenna would like to become a veterinarian.
Brantford, Ontario

“Even when opportunity knocks, a man still has to get off his seat to answer the door.”
– Speakers’ Desk Book of Quips, Quotes and Anecdotes

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“Hit the ball over the fence and you can take your time going around the bases.” — John W. Raper

Natasha Townsend
First Place – Grade 11 & 12
Grand Erie District School Board

The Perfect Nightmare

Everyone has a story. Sometimes it’s a sad story that actually changes who they are. It makes them strive to do better and rid themselves of the demons living inside them. It makes one realize that they never knew the harsh realities of life until their parents gave them the boot. What’s even worse is trying to fill that empty space in their heart once they’ve been let down time and time again by dear old dad.

It wasn’t always so hard to cope with being the family outcast. Shortly after I met my boyfriend, Jordan, we got our own apartment. My first apartment. MY home. No one could kick me out again and again. No hard ass father figure nagging at me all the time. No more being a victim in my own home. The smell of freedom washing over me was as refreshing as the waves tickling my toes at the beach. I felt like I was floating above everyone else. A young teen with my own apartment! It was going great for the first couple of months. I had fallen irrevocably in love with Jordan. We got along so well and grew to be extremely close. We finished each other’s sentences. He was my best friend and we were in love. It wasn’t just our relationship that made it so great. The neighborhood we lived in was so nice, peaceful almost. But then came the parties and the excessive drinking and the marijuana and the cocaine...

Having no responsibilities means not having a care in the world. I had an amazing boyfriend by my side. I didn’t care if I ate, as long as I could shower, pay rent and afford cigarettes. I felt as if all of the answers to all of life’s questions were in the bottom of the bottle of whiskey, or the end of a joint, or a bump of coke. I felt as if all of the years of neglect and wanting attention had been filled by partying all the time. It felt good to have people who came over every day; ‘regulars’ we called them. But these weren’t real friends of mine. They only loved the fact that they were able to have a place to hang out and get high. To them I was so funny and because I barely had enough brain cells to think clearly I let it happen - I was both joke and the punch line. All of the partying had clouded, if not destroyed, my sense of judgment.

I wore my apartment around me like a warm, fuzzy bath robe in the middle of the cold winter. It was my security and what stopped me from giving up on myself. I had no job, no money, no real friends. I had started to turn into my own worst nightmare. I had started to turn into what my dad had predicted I would become -- a drunken loser, “Just like your mom,” he would always say. I smoked like a chimney. Drank so much I was drowning. Got more stoned than Amy Winehouse. All of this poison demolished any motivation I had left. I was stuck in a very deep rut, tires spinning -- going nowhere. I started to lose control of my surroundings. The air in our apartment was stale from all of the cigarettes. The smell of marijuana that hung in the air was so heavy that it was more of a stench. We lived off of Jordan’s paychecks but that wasn’t enough. We started falling behind in our rent, getting served with eviction notices every other month. I dropped out of high school and didn’t have any plans on returning. My life had stopped.
Sometimes all it takes is one significant event; others may not see it or feel it. But to you it changes who you are, the choices you make, or who you associate yourself with. It crushes your lungs, clenches your heart tight, so tight that it knocks you down to your knees.

I drank so much that night. But the booze was only the beginning of a long night of unfortunate events that were about to unfold. My life was about to change right before my eyes.

It was Friday night and my life was about to be ripped out from under my feet like a rug. I woke up feeling so nauseous that it hurt to breathe. My head felt like someone had scooped out my brain and filled my head with razor blades. I looked around my bedroom only to find it completely torn apart. The screen to my window had been ripped out of place and bent like a balloon animal. My boyfriend, Jordan, was gone, which immediately filled me with a sense of panic.

I slowly staggered to my feet and dragged myself to the living room. There was a public intoxication ticket on the table with my name on it; “Great,” I thought, “now I have a police record.” On the couch was Jordan, curled up in a ball under a thin blue sheet. A quick inventory of the evidence painted a clear picture of what I had done to him: Blood had crusted on his face and in his nostrils, his back was scraped up and already bruising, glass still embedded in his skin, glittering in the afternoon light - it was bad. A broken glass that had been swept into a pile lay on the floor, mocking me. A towel that had once been pristine white now resembled an angry Jackson Pollock painting. He woke up and stared at me -- but not with love in his eyes. His beautiful ice blue eyes were hollow, almost sunken, repressing memories from last night. He was weary of my every move; like a wounded animal as I walked closer to him. I had done this to him.

I let all of the anger that was bottled up unleash at him in a drunken rage. The one person in the entire world that I loved had become a victim of this creature I had morphed into. All of the years of abuse and neglect from my father erupted from me like a fiery dragon attacking a helpless village. Jordan, the one person that had taken care of me better than my own family, sat before me broken. When everyone turned their backs on me he was there, guiding me through it all. He was my protector. This one person genuinely loved me and I destroyed him. It was right then and there that I knew I had to change. This was not how I wanted to live. I had to get my act together or else this would be the hellish nightmare I would forever call reality.

The best day of your life is when you decide your life is your own. The haunted walls of the past begin to crumble and a new light starts shining through the cracks. No apologies, no regrets or excuses. No one to lean on, rely on, or blame. You alone are responsible for the outcome and quality of your life. When you overcome the challenges that life brings or change bad habits, it’s almost as if your life has reached a new beginning. The end is never really the end. This is the day your life really begins.

Natasha lives in Brantford, Ontario, and loves to read, listen to music and participate in outdoor activities with friends. Natasha hopes to attend college in the winter of 2014 and partake in a Recreation Therapy program. She hopes to one day be able to start a program for troubled youth that will enable them to stay on a positive path. The challenges and changes that Natasha faced through her troubled teen years is what inspired her Turning Points essay. She looks forward to the many experiences and opportunities that will come in the future.
Life is a struggle. Society is the bully. I sit in the chair waiting for the results, like a kid waits for Christmas, or Easter, but specialist after specialist, the answers remained the same: they can’t help me. So as I sat there, the only thought in my mind was, “I’m always going to be different from other kids.” Being unique. Being a freak. I sit there crying, asking “Why me and only me?” These disorders cover about 80% of my body, and about two-thirds of my eye. The eye was a mutation but the skin, they said, could be caused by a couple of different things.

As I sat there in the chair I kept thinking the only reason I was even there was because the people I thought were my friends were making fun of me. Even with all the questions I was being asked, “What is wrong with your skin?” or “What is wrong with your eye?” all I heard was: “What is wrong with you?” As time went on I continued to get bullied, and anger issues began to develop. As life went on I got angrier and angrier, even about little things that were happening, because I had no idea how to get rid of it. My anger seemed to just bottle up, and kept on building pressure and more pressure.

As my anger progressed, I had to go to anger management sessions to learn how to express my anger in a civilized manner instead of throwing things around, throwing tantrums, and blacking out. I remember the very first thing that the therapist asked me in my first session, “What are you angry at, and why are you angry at it?” As the sessions came and went I learned to cover up the anger with a smile, because a smile can hide any emotion that a person may feel. As life and time went on people stopped bullying me; it seemed that what they were saying had no effect on me anymore. At the end of the sessions after a year, she asked again, “What are you angry at, and why are you angry at it”? Until that last session my answer had been, “At everything, because I am different.” I matured over that year and my answer changed within myself; I had no reason to be mad, because she made me realize that I was different for a reason. After that last session I no longer had anger problems because I let nothing bother me. I just brushed things off as nonsense, since no one cares about nonsense.

Without the anger I still thought that no one would ever accept me. In the eyes of society everyone had to be perfect with no disorders, birth defects, etc. The reality is that no one in the world is perfect, yet I still felt unaccepted and different from the rest of the world. My defects never harmed me other than mentally, so I came to realize mine weren’t so bad. I mean, there are others out there suffering from something even worse like cancer or neurofibromatosis. As time went on I became accustomed to the idea that I was different from the rest of the world, whilst others tried to be different from society. There comes a point in everyone’s life when all we are concerned with is what brands we wear, the way our bodies look, just our overall impression we want to instill on people. With this impression we want to instill, we abdicate ourselves. We give up the right to be who we want to be, and pretend to be something that we are not. We pretend to be what society wants: its image of a person.

The anger and feelings of being different took me to all-time lows. The depression just took over. My life felt like it was being replaced with a small room surrounded by darkness. There was only a tiny bit of light and I was left in the corner. The light seemed to get smaller, and smaller as the days seemed to blend together. Thoughts of easing the pain, thoughts of hurting myself cluttered my mind. I had a knife in one hand, a rope in the other. Then a bunch of hands reached out and pulled me out of the ever darkening room. They
took the knife and they took the rope. The hands were from all the love and support from my family and my friends. They gave me the strength to pick myself up. They made me feel special, loved, un-judged.

How can we expect others to accept us when we can’t accept ourselves, in this cruel and narcissistic world where the puddles are extremely shallow and some people are even shallower. Society tries to control the way we perceive our lives in all aspects. It wants all of the money we make. It wants you to buy brand names, and cheap spray on tans. It is just like the school yard bully. It can bring you to your knees and keep you there permanently, if you let it. Life is a fight that no one is ever prepared for. Life is about how much heartache we can endure and keep moving forward: how much we can take before we break.

Now when people ask me why I always smile, I tell them it’s just a habit. Why shouldn’t I smile? When life is going well for you, you are thankful, and can’t help but smile. A smile is nature’s cure all. Few people understand that a smile is the most powerful thing in the world. It is stronger than any metal. It is a conversation starter, and it is part of a person’s personality. I thought the smile covered the anger but I had it wrong: the anger covered the smile. This smile became me; no one wants to hide a smile with anger.

Kyle, an eager and outgoing student, is currently attending Hagersville Secondary School in his grade 12 year. Born in Brantford and raised outside Hagersville on the New Credit reserve, he hopes to attend post secondary for Environmental Studies to help protect and preserve the Earth and all living things on it. Kyle, a. k. a. “Smilez”, enjoys hanging with his friends and playing all kinds of sports. He would like to thank his teacher, Mrs. Reicheld-King, his friends and his family for supporting him with his writing, and Karissa for her editing expertise.
“Twenty-eight on the floor, number one in your hearts,” was his own personal quote. He was a smart individual with a bright successful future playing lacrosse, but I guess that was too much for him to handle. On August 6th 2012 my life changed forever. I lost my best friend, my favorite cousin, my inspiration. He was gone and was never coming back. For the first time in my life I lost control. My whole world came crashing down and everything I ever worked for seemed pointless. Growing up, life was hard. I was degraded, bullied, beaten, and looked down upon but never once did that stop Carney from trying to protect me. He was my motivator. Without him behind me I felt as if I was a target in a hunting competition exposed to the world, defenseless, and easily tampered with. Life to me at this point was meaningless because the one person I looked up to was no longer physically existent. Carney taught me a lot in my life; he was like my big brother. He taught me that life is a gift -- it isn’t just given. Life is short; so you need to live every day to the fullest, and don’t take anyone or anything for granted because they can be taken from you in the blink of an eye.

He taught me the importance of family; “blood is thicker than water”, meaning my family comes before all. Our relationship was the farthest thing from normal; we were like the human version of “Pinky and the Brain” with a simple plan to take over the world. When we were younger we used to play team army tag. Carn and I were always the dominating and invincible team. Together, we were untouchable; he was my partner in crime. We always did things together -- sleigh riding, quading, paintballing, fights; we were almost inseparable. Our relationship was indescribable. He was with me through everything, the easy and the hard times. He protected me and took care of me like a mother takes care of her children. During the years of 2010-2011 I fell into a deep dark hole of depression. I was failing school, doing drugs, drinking and really not caring much for a future. Carney was the only one besides my friends who knew about my addiction, yet when everyone else walked away he didn’t, he stuck by me through it all. He always gave me words of encouragement trying to get me on the straight and narrow. Never once did he let me down, not even for a minute. He never judged me. Instead he would just give me a hug and let me know that I wasn’t alone and that life would get better. Whenever my family would fight he instantly became my protector; he would take me in his arms which is the place I felt safest, always saying “Everything is going to be ok; we just have to stay strong.” He was my rock. He impacted my life in a way that I never imagined; he showed me what love really was. His love was unconditional; it’s hard to find but nothing will ever break the bond we once shared.

I’m normally a person who loves whole-heartedly, but the day he died was the day I questioned everything. I couldn’t understand the meaning of life. I felt as if love had abandoned me, and I couldn’t bring myself to understand why he had to die and why I got left behind. Seeing “RIP CEJ 28” as the Facebook status for numerous people led me to a state of denial and disbelief. After a continuous stream of condolences, I had to call my mom. Sobbing, crying, sniffing, coughing, speechless and voice almost unrecognizable due to the excessive crying -- it was at that very moment I knew it was really happening. My heart fell out of my chest. I felt numb all over. I couldn’t breathe. I felt as if I’d been hit by a train or I got jumped then shot 10 times. I crashed to the floor in tears, dropping the phone and I became as white as a sheet. I stopped breathing. I felt cold and empty. Life made no sense. I was filled with darkness and nothing could change that.

Suddenly, everything that is or was became a dream. I shadowed myself in the darkness of my thoughts and feelings like a bear going into hibernation for the winter. I didn’t want to wake up because within every
dream he was there; guiding me, smiling, laughing, play fighting just like we used to. Every time I was forced to wake up my mind put me into a world of hallucinations. The day he came home my eyes played tricks on me. I could see him breathing, and I could see that amazing yet devilish smirk that everyone loved. I imagined he would sit up and try to scare me and say “I’m alive,” but it never happened. I knew I would only have a night left with Carney but yet my mind shielded me from reality.

The morning of his funeral I was caught in disbelief, I just wanted to wake up from this nightmare that they call reality. As the speaker gave his message I could feel myself falling into his words and starting to believe, the more he spoke the more I wanted to leave and just start to walk and never come back. As he finished with his final words, “This is the last time that you will physically see him. You now need to say your final goodbye.” People started to walk through, tears flowing like a waterfall from the faces of everyone who viewed his body for the last time. My Uncle Tom, Carney’s dad, grabbed my hand and didn’t let go, he fell into my arms and cried. I can’t imagine the pain of losing your child but I could see his reaction physically. After all the friends, co-workers, and team members went through it came time for the extended family. The sobbing, crying and heartache filled the room. Then finally it was my turn. As I walked to the casket my heart started beating really fast, I held my breath and took one quick glance. At that very moment I knew everything that I feared about this nightmare became true. Seeing him lying there lifeless, motionless, hit me hard. I started to cry uncontrollably but I had to pull myself together and sit back down and be prepared to comfort his parents. It shattered my heart to see the pain that my Aunt Deats and Uncle Tom suffered, knowing that there was nothing I could really do but to hug them and hold them as they cried out to him, “Carney, no, my boy.” Then the speaker came to give the final blessing and the top of the casket was connected to the bottom. At that moment an explosion of emotions crowded the air. Hearing the cries and screams of his loved ones was like being in a horror movie where everyone was dying and nothing would ever be the same again.

Throughout Carney’s life he taught me some of the greatest lessons that I use in my everyday life. He taught me to forgive, forget, love, and the true meaning of life. Live every day to the fullest, live life with no regrets, chase your dreams, and never let anyone bring you down. Always tell those you care about that you love them because you never know when their time will come, and they could be taken from you in the blink of an eye. Most importantly, life isn’t about the number of breaths we take it’s about the moments that take our breath away.

Christina is a Grade 12 student at Assumption College in Brantford, Ontario. Christina loves being active and enjoys playing any kind of sport. In her spare time, she loves spending time with her family, playing guitar and modeling. Christina is planning on attending Georgian College in Barrie, Ontario this September for Fitness and Health Promotions. She aspires to one day become a personal trainer and a firefighter.
My memories, my fears, and thoughts are all out of sequence; they’re imbalanced. -- much like my life at the time, and much like my story. My story is of five days that broke, changed and rebuilt me to who I am today. From razor blades and pills, to hospital beds and prescriptions, no matter how much I may hate it or am ashamed of it, it has become a part of what makes me who I am.

Not once did I think I would end up there, and if I had known, I wouldn’t have said anything. I want it all to be a bad dream. But I still remember that cold room with the vinyl mattress and pillow, the thin coverings and sheets, the chair, and small wooden side table. I remember the window that, at one time could be opened, but was bolted shut. The thick layer of dirt on the window, that made the light from street lamps and cars look like blurs through the glass. A door without a handle that could be nudged open, allowing anyone to walk in. The scream in the middle of the night from the patient with dementia down the hall. Welcome, to room 318. My room.

You get in line, your bracelet is scanned, you get your medication which must be taken in front of them. If you didn’t come, they come and find you. You are not allowed out of the ward to get a coffee, or to go to the exercise room. Phone calls are made from the pay phone in the ward. Everyone is to eat in the dining room so as to become familiar with the other patients. At 11pm everyone is to be in their rooms. A nurse will be around every half hour. Welcome to the Mental Health Unit.

Every doctor or nurse that I came into contact with said the same things to me; “You’ll be safe now,” or “You’re going to get the help that you need,” or “This is the best place for you to be right now.” No matter how much I tried, I couldn’t believe them, I didn’t think they had given me a reason to. When I was admitted into the Mental Health Unit, the bag of things that I had with me was searched. My belt, phone and iPod cords, and my razor were all taken. It felt like pieces of normalcy were removed bit by bit, and those pieces were being locked away in a drawer. I had to answer questions that frustrated, angered, and upset me more. The plastic bracelet with a bar code was put on my wrist. The nurse gave me something to calm me down and relax me. I was taken to the nurses’ station, there the bar code on my bracelet was scanned and I was given a pill that had to be taken in front of her. I was taken back to my room and my parents and grandmother were allowed in to say goodbye and goodnight, then they had to leave. I realize that these were all necessary precautions that had to be followed, but how can I feel safe when I felt like I was cornered.

During my stay I was put on what is called a Form 3 Certificate of Involuntary Status by the doctor, which, a nurse told me in short, means, my basic rights are almost non-existent. Something in the back of my mind repeated, “You brought it all on yourself dumb ass, you took the pills, you took the blade to your arms. You let everyone and everything get to you. You tried to kill yourself.” I was paying the price for it now, being banded, bar coded and sedated. It didn’t feel like a safe place. It felt more like a cage.

Trying to return to normal after being let out proved to be a process. When I got out, I was released from my Form about a week and a half early. I knew from that point on, I would be on my own dealing with my depression. Only my Mom, Dad, and Grandma knew I was put in a psychiatric ward. I wouldn’t let them talk about it; I felt ashamed. I told them that no one else was to know. Even my brother and sister were a little out of the loop on where I was. But the rest of my family found out. Everyone kept an annoyingly close watch over everything I did, giving me the same lecture over, or crying when they saw me. It pissed me off.
For a long time I was ashamed of being put in the Mental Health Unit, for having simple things taken away and having to ask to use them. I resented having to take pills that kept me sluggish, and at the time feeling like I was weak because of it. I am scared of going to the hospital. I am still afraid of being put back in there and at times even get anxious thinking about it. I still censor my words for anything that could be used as an indication. It broke me. Those events made me colder, and made it harder to trust. At the same time, it made me realize that it doesn’t make you any less of a person to talk about it, if anything, not talking about it breaks you down into something less than a person. I forced my way past crawling skin and burning scars to stop cutting. It changed me. Those events, though sometimes out of fear, force me to be stronger. My will to live and be ok again are reinforced with a foundation that was painfully put into place. I still have to live with the marks I gave myself, and hate them, but it’s a price I now have to pay. My marks of self hatred are not marks of a frightening and dark time, but marks of renaissance. It rebuilt me.

Andrew is a grade twelve student currently living on the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. He loves to act, sing and play his violin as well as study the history of First Nations Peoples, pre-contact and post-contact. He hopes to become a vocal major and become a professional actor. Andrew would like to thank his teachers for helping him to get his essay written and for giving support throughout the process.
Playing catch outside, driving the boat at the cottage, going for bike rides. All things I loved to do with him. The warmth of his hugs from the comfort of his arms, the soft kiss on the forehead when he would tell me he loved me at bedtime. All things I miss about him. All things I want back. Chad was my home.

It’s been three years from the day I was told my mom and step dad were getting a divorce. I still remember that day. The sun just peaking over the fields, the rays hitting the dew and the birds singing softly, I thought it was going to be a good day -- until I felt the vibration of my phone from underneath my leg. It was my mom. “Call me,” it said. I couldn’t call, but I knew something was wrong so I had to ask. She wouldn’t tell me so I had to beg, then finally she wrote, “Me and Chad are no longer together. We are getting a divorce.” I still remember how I felt. My heart dropped into my stomach. I felt sick. Weak. Like I was going to faint. My dad was sitting right beside me, but I had no words. I had never been at a loss for words before, but I had nothing to say. I was heartbroken. I continued the conversation, asking questions like when and why, and “Are you guys ever getting back together?” Her response was, “I’ll call you tonight.”

That phone call was the worst experience. I was at Chad’s house and I remember him standing in the doorway, his hand over his mouth, while I sat on the phone with my mom screaming and yelling, “I hate you. How could you guys do this to me and to Mackenzie and Lucas?” Chad stood there crying, telling me he was sorry, that he never meant to hurt me. All I could think about was how I was never going to live here again. Never going to see my brother and sister -- the ones I raised. That hurt.

A couple of months went by and things were starting to calm down. I lived with my father full time and every other weekend my siblings and I would rotate back and forth from our mom’s to Chad’s. I loved Chad. He had been more of a father to me than my real father ever was. But everything changed after that one weekend.

My mom was on her way to pick up my siblings and me from Chad’s house. His new girlfriend was there and I felt that it wasn’t going to end well. My mom needed her things she had left there when she walked out – a jewelry box and a computer. She told me what I needed to do. She arrived and barged right in. No knock, no nothing. She unhooked the cords and walked out with the computer, and I grabbed the jewelry box. This didn’t feel bad. I was simply doing what she had asked -- and it was hers. I wasn’t stealing, but Chad seemed to think so.

The texts I got from him hurt me so badly, it was like the day of the divorce all over again. “How could you do this to me, Tess? Why would you steal from me? I have no trust for you anymore. I don’t want you back at my house until I can trust you again.” That one hurt me the most. It felt as if my heart had been ripped out of my chest. I couldn’t breathe. I cried for days.

It took about a month before I came up with enough courage to text him. I apologized for hurting him. I told him those were not my intentions, that I know I did wrong and that I missed him. He told me that he accepted that and that he missed me, too. I was once again a happy girl. Hearing Chad say that he missed me gave me the biggest smile from ear to ear. Everyone could tell that my mood had changed.
That happiness lasted a month. I thought things would be back to normal. Boy, was I wrong! I’m not sure what happened, but he wouldn’t talk to me. I’d text him. I’d call him. I’d even try and get my mom to talk to him. But nothing. Everything I ever had, or hoped to have with him was gone.

I don’t understand how someone who’d been there through everything, who was a father to me, someone who called me his daughter, could just push me away so easily. Make me feel like I’m nothing to him. For thirteen years of my life he was there and now all of a sudden he wasn’t.

Everyone would tell me, “He’ll come around,” or “Oh, he’s just hurt by your mom.” “He’s going through a lot right now.” “Just give him time”. I gave him a year. Nothing’s changed. A simple “Hi” and “Bye” doesn’t cut it anymore. I need him. My mom tells me to just forget about him, to move on. But I could never do that even if I wanted to.

Sometimes I feel like there is something wrong with me. Like maybe he just doesn’t care. He doesn’t need me anymore. He doesn’t love me. Like I’m regret to him or something. And other times I look at how strong all of this has made me. I’ve had to look out for my baby brother and sister and put up with being stuck in the middle of fights that had nothing to do with me. I’ve grown up a lot. And maybe everything right now isn’t going as planned, but I’m going to keep believing everyone, and push through it, and hopefully one day soon, Chad will come around. But as for now all I can do is play the waiting game. I miss you. I love you. When can I come home? Can I Come Home?

Tessa was born August 1st, 1995. She is in grade 12 and is out going and a lot of fun! She loves to play baseball and to figure skate. She, one day, hopes to pursue her dream of going to school for radio broadcasting and television. Tessa would like to thank her teacher for all the support she gave and for helping her through tough times.
I am a 16-year-old Six Nations Mohawk. I was born in Brantford, Ontario. I was three when I moved to Nova Scotia. When I was only nine, I had the responsibility of getting my 13-year-old sister and my six-year-old brother up for school.

As I was growing up in Nova Scotia, my time at school wasn’t very nice. I was very shy and didn’t really talk to people, and, on top of that, I was bullied pretty badly. The other kids made fun of me because I was different - because I was Native. I was bullied because I had a different skin tone and was from a different culture. I remember I was one of only five Natives in my school.

Eventually, we moved back to Ontario. I thought life in Ontario would be better, and, for a short time, it was. I made some new friends. I liked the school I was at and I liked the teachers, too, but very soon the bullying started again. In Nova Scotia, I was bullied because I was Native, but in Ontario I was bullied for a different reason. I was surrounded by Native students, so it wasn’t because of that. It was mostly because of my weight.

I was bullied so badly that I didn’t want to go to school any more. It got to the point where I would have panic attacks because I knew when I stepped into that school, I was going to be picked on. Over my four years of elementary school, I developed major anxiety. When I got to high school, it stopped ... well, the bullying did, but the anxiety stayed with me.

I have lived with major anxiety for almost six years now. When I have a panic attack, it feels like I’m having a heart attack. My heart races, my breathing becomes rapid and shallow, my hands and face become clammy, and I start to cry. It’s a frightening experience.

While all this was happening, my mother and father were having serious problems. They were always fighting. My father had anger problems and would bring all three kids down. Sometimes, he would hit us, but for the most part it was more mental and emotional. After 16 years of being called ‘stupid, retarded, fat, and a pig,” you start to believe it.
In the same year, I was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. I come from a family that is surrounded by this illness. Ever since I was diagnosed, I have had major problems trying to keep it under control, and it's discouraging. I have to live with this illness for the rest of my life. I’m not happy that I developed this illness, and I don’t want to live my life with this, but I have to accept the fact that I have it. I am going to fight it, by learning to live with this disease.

In the month of February, 2012, my mom and dad officially separated. My father moved out. Just three or four months later, my mother met a man named Joe and they started to date. We all thought Joe was a great guy, but Joe was on disability. So, when he and my mother got together, we were put on his cheque. Joe is a semi-functional alcoholic, and has severe AD/HD, so when he starts drinking he turns in to a completely different guy, and can go days without sleeping. The month of October, Joe had spent EVERY cent of his cheque without giving us money for food or to pay our bills. It was a very hard month for my family. After October, Joe blew his cheque two or three times. That’s when our real problems started.

After a while, my mother and Joe split up, only to get back together a couple of times. Joe eventually found a little town he wanted to settle down in. He and my mother were still ‘together’, but Joe was out of the house. Regardless, his actions had already messed my family up.

Because Joe wasn’t helping us pay bills and rent, in August, we were faced with an eviction. We had only five days to get out. At this point, we didn’t have the money to put all of our stuff in a storage unit, so our landlord let us keep it in the backyard only to have it rained on, looted through and ruined. The only place we had to go was with Joe to his little town. It really was a scary experience - being homeless, not having an address you can call your own and being so far away from all your family and friends. I felt very alone and scared.

I have never told anyone this, but after all this time, as all of this was happening, all the bullying, the mental and emotional abuse my father had put me through and being homeless pushed me over the line. I thought about suicide. I thought dying would solve all my problems. I knew if I did it, then all of it would stop. I wouldn’t have to worry about all the things I was worrying about.

As I grow older and become more mature, I realize not only the pain I would leave my family and friends in, I also realize that there is much to live for. I want to have a good career, a husband, and a wonderful family. I realize that even though times are bad now, things will get better, and they have. My family has settled into an apartment with furniture and we have food in our bellies. I have many friends and family who love me and support me and that want to see me succeed... and they will. I refuse to give up.

Sasha is a grade 11 student who lives in Brantford Ontario but grew up in Nova Scotia. She likes to read and watch hockey. In the future Sasha wants to become a high school teacher and teach history and the Mohawk language. After high school graduation, Sasha plans to take two years off to immerse herself in the Mohawk language before going to university.
It was January 2003. January, the month itself, symbolizes a new year and new beginnings. It definitely was a new experience for me. I was seven years old when it happened, just seven years old. Seven years old when I felt the world crashing in on me. Seven years old when my child-like, carefree personality was being stripped from my body. Just seven years old when my brother passed away.

On January 27, 2003 my parents got the phone call that my brother had been shot. My family was in a state of shock, worry and sadness. We went to the hospital that day to see him. I remember walking those halls holding my dad’s hand tightly. As I walked in the hospital room, all I could see was my brother lying there with tubes and other machinery around him. I didn’t know how to react. I didn’t know how to feel. I gave him a hug and sang a song. I went to a Mohawk immersion school at the time and sang Sken:nokh, a song of peace. As I sang this song with my older sister, a tear drop ran down my brother’s face. I gave him a hug and said that I loved him. My parents promised me everything was going to be okay.

But nothing was ever going to be okay.

That was the last time I saw my brother, the last time I hugged him and the last memory I spent with him. Just three days later he passed away. I had never been introduced to this kind of feeling before, this feeling in my throat that didn’t allow me to speak and this pain in my chest that kept me from feeling free. I cried when I heard the news. We all cried together. I stayed home from school for days while my parents were making funeral arrangements.

My parents asked me if I wanted to go to his funeral; as a little kid, I didn’t want to see such a sight. The sight of a dead body being put into the ground, my brother being buried and put in the ground. I didn’t go to his funeral and as time passed, the days and years after his death, I couldn’t help but feel guilty -- guilty that I didn’t say my last goodbyes, and even more guilty that I hadn’t been there to comfort my family.

On my reserve, families are allowed to bury their loved ones wherever they please. He was buried in front of my house. It was a constant reminder of the sadness and sorrow my family was going through. It was a constant reminder that my family was never going to be the same.

I never really told my parents how I felt about all of this commotion. I was a little kid. My brother had another mother and my dad had him at an early age. My brother was twenty when he passed away. He was my half-brother but that phrase meant nothing to me. We were related; we shared the same blood and same ancestry. As far as I cared, he was my brother and I loved him like a sister would.

I remember when we would go out to get ice cream every Sunday in the summer, how we went mini-putting and when we went on a road trip to the states. I remember that out of the four other kids my dad had with his first wife, my brother, Dwayne, was the only one who made it to all the birthday parties and all the Christmases, Thanksgivings and Easters. These were the only memories I had of my brother. Again I was young and the time I spent on this earth was just a fraction of the time and a fraction of the obstacles my parents and grandparents went through.

My parents had their own feelings to get over and I didn’t want to bother them. I never ever told them how I truly felt. Months after his death, I was still dealing with my own feelings of sadness. I felt like I couldn’t
breathe. I can’t breathe, Mom! I can’t breathe, Dad! I can’t breathe! I’m suffocating! I’m suffocating here and I don’t know what to do! I wanted to scream, just scream. Scream to let out my frustrations and my sadness. I don’t want to feel like this. I don’t want to feel like this anymore.

The feelings I felt could never truly be described. All I knew was that I was trapped in this state of terror and misery. I’m pretty sure my parents knew what I was dealing with, what we were all dealing with. That big warm hug my mom gave me every day really helped and those words of comfort every day really helped.

Years after my brother’s death, I still hadn’t visited his grave, and now I felt like I didn’t have to. I remember when my mom told me “Dawn, don’t feel like you are obligated to go to Dwayne’s funeral, don’t feel like you have to see his grave to say your goodbyes.” She said, “It’s okay if you didn’t want to go, Dawn, it’s okay if you just remember the way he was. Just remember the good times we all spent together, just remember his smile, his fun-like personality and the way he cared for you like a big brother should.” Those words were probably the best things I had ever heard. The feeling I had after these words was like a weight was lifted off my chest. I felt free, I felt alive again.

This tragedy that happened to my family was something we all got through together. This experience let me see the good in everything. This experience made me realize just how precious a life, a memory, and moment can be. I will always remember the way Dwayne was -- that smile, his personality, and as my big brother.

Dawn lives on the Six Nations Reserve, Ontario. She is currently in grade twelve at Hagersville Secondary School. She is the eighth child out of the twelve her parents had. Dawn enjoys wrestling, basketball, frisbee, public and effective speaking, and volunteering in and around her community. Dawn also speaks and loves the Mohawk language and aspires to become a Mohawk language teacher in the future.
Jazmin Sault  
Honourable Mention – Grade 11 & 12  
Grand Erie District School Board  

Tug of War

Age four. I remember sitting in my mother’s small apartment, asking her about my dad. I constantly wondered why other kids lived with their daddies, but I didn’t. My mom always tried to answer my questions carefully, hoping not to upset me. She’d always tell me he loved me, but he was just busy and would visit soon. Months and months would go by and I’d never hear from him. He wouldn’t call, he wouldn’t visit, he wouldn’t even send me a birthday card. At the age of only four, I was neglected by my own father. He didn’t want to have anything to do with me, and I knew that.

Age six. I lost all hope in my dad. I hadn’t heard a word from him in years, and I just didn’t care anymore. My mom found a husband, and everything was fine. She convinced me that her new husband would be my new dad if I wanted him to be. Being a naïve child, and desperately wanting a father figure in my life, I accepted him, and he legally adopted me. For him to become my legal parent, my biological father had to sign papers saying he didn’t want to be my father anymore and give permission to my mom’s new husband to be my dad. As everyone expected, he signed over the papers without a question; without a second thought. He was so set on not being a father, he just signed me away.

Age ten. Darkness swept the cold October streets, while I sat in the car and waited for my mom to return. There was a man standing under a flickering street light, waiting to cross the street. I watched him walk across the road, and up to the store that my mom was exiting. He was tall, lean, and had long straggly hair. As my mom walked past him, they stopped and began to talk. A smile appeared on my mom’s face. She led the stranger over to my car, motioned for me to roll down the window and began to introduce me to the man. I knew exactly who he was. My biological father was actually standing there in front of me. Six years without any form of communication, and there he was. We made some small talk, and he invited me out for dinner that following weekend. Overwhelmed with so many different emotions, I went home and cried. My dad became a part of my life, and we’d do things at least twice a week. He was actually trying to be my father, and that made me happy.

Age twelve. Two weeks since I had last seen my dad. He stopped answering my phone calls. One night, I went to log into Facebook, but was already signed in. A red notification popped up, saying I had an unread message. I went to open it, and recognized that this message wasn’t for me. I was on my mom’s account. She had decided to message my dad’s girlfriend over Facebook to see why he was ignoring me. His girlfriend snapped and said, “It’s your daughter’s fault that he doesn’t want anything to do with her! She only visits when she wants something, and plays sick when she’s supposed to visit any other time!” Her words hurt, and I knew what was happening. I had subconsciously prepared myself for this moment, and it shouldn’t have hurt as much as it did. He was gone again. I knew it. I didn’t hear from my dad any more after that.

Age seventeen. Since I had nothing to do with my dad, I never tried to have a relationship with his side of the family either, until one day at school when his mother sent me a note. I knew my grandma had cancer years before, but in her note she said that it was back and she’d like to see me before time ran out. Before she passed, I’d visit her house and we got to know each other quite well. One day, while I was sitting beside her bed, she apologized for never being in my life, but that she’d love for me to become a part of my dad’s again.
The day of her funeral was the most awkward, and emotional day of my life. My dad hugged me at first, but didn’t say much. After the funeral, he cried and apologized for being an asshole, admitting that he was constantly in and out of jail for years because of drugs, theft, and attempted murder. I was relieved that he was never a big part of my life because no child needs to grow up around that. He told me he’d changed, and wanted to start over again.

Up until I began to write this essay, I thought he was still the reason why we never communicated. Thinking back to the times he actually tried to have a relationship with me, I now realize it’s been me pushing him away for the past year. I have become so used to blaming him for everything wrong in my life, that I never recognized it was my own doing this time. He pushed me away countless times before and I’d become so used to him letting me down that I was scared to let him get close to me again. I don’t know if he’s actually changed his ways, but I need to allow myself to get past the bitterness I feel towards him and move on. It’s hard to let down your guard after someone has constantly screwed you over, but I still hope to be close with him someday. After a year of avoiding the situation, I feel like I’ve come to terms with myself. I think I’m almost ready to try and work on our relationship again, but I know that things will never be the same. I’ve grown to accept that. I don’t expect a perfect relationship with him, but I wouldn’t mind having someone to call my father again.

Jazmin Sault is currently in grade 12 at Hagersville Secondary School. She was born and raised in New Credit Reserve. She has 2 brothers and hopes to pursue a career in the media studies field.
Greater Toronto Area, Ontario

“Keep on sowing your seed, for you never know which will grow – perhaps it all will.” – Ecclesiastes

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“There is no use whatever trying to help people who do not help themselves. You cannot push anyone up a ladder unless he is willing to climb himself.”

– Andrew Carnegie

Natalee Veisi
First Place – Grade 6 (English)
Toronto District School Board

Raw Footage

Memories are snippets of the past, resembling reels of film constantly rolling in one’s head. They can never be deleted and we sometimes fantasize about what we could’ve done to alter their outcomes. Some memories bring joy and are to be cherished. Others inflict pain, existing as a nightmare for eternity.

Whether I like it or not, scenes of my film have already been shot, and it isn’t always easy to watch the footage.

Months ago, I began spending a lot more time hiding out in the depths of my room. I refused to take part in family dinners, and the soap operas my parents and I used to watch in the living room. We rarely spoke anymore.

When we did talk, it was an argument; each side disagreeing with almost everything that came their way. During our nastiest battles, doors were slammed, objects were thrown and words I thought I’d never hear were said. No, not said -- yelled.

Tears pricked at my eyes, like the thorns of a stem delicately slitting into one’s flesh. I’d bite my lips in hopes of muting the sobs threatening to escape my throat.

I remember running upstairs, crawling underneath the covers and hugging my phone. Never before had I felt so frail. My hesitant fingers would tap the screen sending distress signals to the two people who have also fought in these trenches; my sisters.

Seconds later, I received word stating everything would be fine.

I can’t imagine what it took for him to say, with pure venom in his tone, “I wish you weren’t mine.” Had I pushed my own father that far, allowing an angry side of him to completely devour the one I loved?

It was at that moment where I hoped my movie would end, but I needed to move on.
I’d been taught to forgive and forget my entire life. The problem with the duo is that they don’t always mix. Anyone can forgive; it’s easy. However, the effort it takes to forget is worth a lifetime.

I’ve forgiven, as did they. I’m just hoping I can forget.

Twelve-year-old Natalee Bryanna Veisi currently lives with her parents in Toronto, Ontario. She relishes athletics and participates in a diversity of sports, including track. She aspires to complete a triathlon in her upcoming years. Natalee also enjoys listening to music, and she is well-known for the bands she venerates. She takes an interest in writing, as well, and despite her young age, Natalee is inclined to leave her mark in the world of literature.
Henry Sharpe
Second Place – Grade 6 (English)
Toronto District School Board

The Little Paper Cup

Half a loaf is better than no bread at all.

Before the winter of 2011, I had always viewed the homeless as dirty, frightening people. I didn’t know why they had ended up on the sidewalks and street corners, though I had always assumed that they were contagious by the way that people skirted carefully around them as if they carried some sort of disease. In short, I was terrified of them.

But that all changed in the winter of 2011. My dad and I had flown to New York City to view a museum exhibit worked on by his colleague. We were staying in Brooklyn with a family friend for two days. One night, we decided to go to a restaurant. My friend was talking about Brooklyn with my dad and I was walking silently alongside them. We turned a corner and walked along a street where construction was obviously going on. Covered scaffolding momentarily protected us from the light rain and as we entered another section where I noticed a woman.

I didn’t know whether she was alive or dead, but she sat motionless against one of the scaffolding “walls”. Her middle-aged form was clothed in tattered rags. A small cup rested beside her in which a few coins had collected. It was from that moment on that my judgment of homeless people changed. This woman didn’t look frightening. If I had had any money on me, I would have plopped some into that almost empty paper cup, but my pockets were empty.

Her crumpled form made me ask myself how someone like this could possibly be dangerous or contagious. She hadn’t chosen this life. Look at me, with my books and movies and a roof over my head. She had none of those things. The people who carry signs reading: “Will Work for Pay,” or “A Smile for a Dollar” have now captured my heart and will never let go of it.

That little paper cup didn’t just help that poor woman, it most definitely helped me as well.

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Henry Sharpe, a student at Toronto District School Board, explores his newfound respect for the homeless in his essay, The Little Paper Cup. His experience changed his perception of homeless individuals, highlighting the importance of empathy and understanding. Henry’s respect for the world inspired his essay, reflecting on his future endeavors in scientific research. He looks forward to his future education and cannot wait for the future to unfold.
A Pair of Socks

It’s December. Festive lights are everywhere, and small snowflakes dance in the frigid air. People rush by with bags full of gifts, and a group of workers heave a large Christmas tree into place. Malls are full of shoppers, trying to purchase everything on their mile-long lists, and Christmas carols blast from speakers overhead. The only place lacking in Christmas spirit is the homeless shelter – a drab brick building everyone is too busy to notice.

I dropped by the shelter one day with my mom to donate food. As we unloaded our cans onto the counter, something on the wall caught my eye – small sheets of paper with Christmas wish lists scrawled on them by the shelter’s residents. I expected them to include things like flat screen TVs and other elaborate items, but upon closer inspection, I saw they consisted of simple gifts; the ones we ignore and push aside, like a new sweater or pair of socks. I was astounded – surely those with nothing would hope for something a little more grandiose, maybe?

My mom finished dumping out all the canned food and I followed her outside, getting hit by a blast of bitterly cold wind. As I walked, I heard children begging their parents for the newest trends, and I remembered what humble gifts the homeless wanted. Most of us would be furious if all we received for Christmas was a pair of socks, and yet those living at the homeless shelter wanted nothing more. I couldn’t stop thinking about it.

On Christmas day, I felt a sudden urge to return to the shelter. When I arrived, everyone was looking through their donated presents. I saw one man, with a shaggy beard and squinty eyes, pay no attention to the new Smartphone on the table and instead open a newly knitted sweater with exuberance, his eyes shining with happiness.

For the rest of the holiday season, the same thought kept running through my head; happiness isn’t found in extravagant presents, and that for those less fortunate, what may seem to be the smallest gift can make the biggest difference.

Tony An
Third Place – Grade 6 (English)
Toronto District School Board

Tony is a 12-year-old boy living in Toronto, Ontario, where he attends a gifted program. Born a natural martial artist, he’s had over 4 years combined of experience in Okinawan Karate and Shaolin Kung Fu, and plans to go for his second degree black belt in November. He is also a writer, a sketch artist, and a mathematician. Tony credits his success to the two years he’s spent in a writing class toiling in a world of subordinators, conjunctions, and 6-syllable words, not to mention his supportive family as always.
The Heart of a Champion

As the competitors came out, I could see the hope and excitement on their faces. You could feel the rush of anticipation as the crowd watched the men proudly wear their colours. Then, the pistol went off and the men began their race. As the first man crossed the finish line, the crowd went absolutely crazy. That was the 2008 Olympics. I was one of the people cheering in my home. Two years later, I was at the starting line of my school’s cross country tryouts. I also had my anticipation for a good place, but I came last.

After that race, I came home very distraught. When I was at home, my family could see that I was sad. I told my mommy that I was last in my race. I also proclaimed that I would never join cross country ever again. My mom laughed. That night, to encourage me, my mom told me the secret to long distance running. She said “Do you know what cross country is all about? It is PAIN!” The next day, I stepped up to that same line and raced again. As I ran, I felt my legs wanting to stop, but instead, I pushed through the pain. I persevered and finished second place.

From that experience, I now believe that to get any result, you must work really hard. In fact, I scoff at movies for being so unrealistic. They give people the wrong message about achievement. Anyone who has done something “praiseworthy” will know the thousands of hours of hard work needed to become great. Any athlete, at the top of their sport, like Usain Bolt, Wayne Gretzky or Michael Jordan, has done it all.

I will always remember this very important turning point which has changed my life and perspective. Every day, I wake up knowing I must put 110% effort into all my ambitions. I hope to make my mommy proud because of those inspiring words. For a person who said I would never ever do cross country again, I understand that it is hard but I embrace the challenge.

Katelyn is an ambitious, artistic, outgoing sixth grader. In her spare time, she loves to doodle, fold intricate origami, and make unique claymations. She enjoys running, basketball, and swimming. Katelyn plays piano, and is learning the trumpet at school. She lives with her caring mom, goofy dad, and cute sister in Richmond Hill. Katelyn hopes to be a positive influence to those around her, and aspires to make the world a better place.
One October morning I awoke to the sound of my alarm clock. Little did I know, that this day was the beginning of the biggest turning point in my life. Today would be the day that I was diagnosed with Guttate Psoriasis. Guttate Psoriasis is a rare skin condition that is itchy, painful and uncomfortable. It can affect your entire body from head to feet and appears in a pimple-like form. Guttate psoriasis does not only affect the body, it also affects the mind. You can start losing your confidence and self-esteem.

Later that day, I went to the doctor’s office where my diagnosis was confirmed. I had lots of thoughts going through my head. “Am I going to be like this forever?” “What are people going to say?” “Are they going to laugh at me?” I was scared. I thought people were going to make fun of me, tease me, and laugh at me. I just kept saying to myself “Just because I look different, shouldn’t mean I am different on the inside.” I hoped that people would understand. The day after, I built up enough confidence to go to gymnastics. On the way there, I had butterflies in my stomach, my head was pounding and my palms were sweating. I was scared about what my teammates would say. Then I realized that it doesn’t matter. Their opinion doesn’t count.

It was at this turning point that I stopped paying attention to how people looked at me, whether it was because of my Psoriasis or for who I am. I was not going to change my personality for an outside opinion. My Psoriasis, although difficult to deal with, turned out to be a lesson in that I could receive criticism without taking it personally. The saying “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” I learned, holds true. There can be “beauty in the beast” after all.

A Grade 6 student, Erika lives in Caledon, Ontario and attends Hollycrest Middle School’s ‘High Performance Program’ in Toronto. She is an elite gymnast and studies opera. The eldest of three sisters, Erika enjoys spending time with her family and travelling. She hopes to pursue a career in medical research. Her experience with Psoriasis inspired her Turning Points essay. She hopes to one day discover a cure!
“Fear is only as deep as the mind allows.”

There I was. The lights were bright and hot. The audience was hidden by darkness. I was terrified, but excited too.

I was on stage for the first time ever.

I have always liked performing. I just feel so comfortable on stage, when all eyes are on me. But that first time, I wished people were looking at anybody but me.

It was ridiculous. I wasn’t the main character in the play. I had barely any lines. But let me tell you, standing there with the audience staring up at me, I was terrified.

When I was little, I used to perform for my family all the time, and I basked in the attention it got me. I sang, I danced, I put on little skits. My cousins would help me. We’d bring down the entire family and put on a show. Sometimes it was based on a book; sometimes we’d make up the plotline ourselves. I had also performed for the school before. I had been one of 40 kids wearing black pants and white tops, singing. The piano’s melody had filled my ears as the grade started singing.

I thought it would be similar. I thought I’d feel the same. But no. I didn’t feel goofy like I did in my family’s skits. I didn’t feel indifferent like I did during school concerts. I felt…different.

I knew I had to overcome this fear. So… I took a deep breath. I could hear the murmur of the play going on. And then I became the character. I was a minion of an evil king who was trying to destroy the environment. It was at that moment that I decided I wanted to be an actress. It was at that moment that I decided what I wanted to be when I grew up. Sure, other things have come along that piqued my interest. But the actress is in me is always bubbling just beneath the surface.

Olivia was born and raised in Toronto, Ontario. She loves to read and write. Her other interests include photography, little known musicians, and of course, performing. Olivia hopes that people were inspired by her essay and looks forward to any challenges she may meet in the future.
It was not my elementary school that was the problem. It was the grade 4 curriculum. I had great friends, the school was fine, but I dreaded going to school every day. I would crawl to school if I could, and I begged my mother not to make me go. In class, I would sometimes stare out the window, wishing I was anywhere else, somewhere besides there. “Did you get enough sleep?” my teacher would ask when she would see me daydreaming. “Yes,” I would answer, but I really wanted to say, “Can’t we ever do anything interesting?” Same math, same Language Arts, same textbooks, same everything since Grade 1. Over, and over. I was miserable. And then... it happened.

We were told that my CCAT test scores showed that I was a candidate for the Gifted program. I didn’t know what the Gifted program was, or where I would go, but anything away from that school was fine with me.

In September 2011, I started Grade 5 in the Gifted program at my new school. I didn’t know what to expect. It was a big change: new school, new classmates, and an absolutely amazing teacher. But the best part, a new curriculum!

What a difference! I am so happy and can’t wait to go to school every day. The gifted program and my teacher have expanded my creativity to new limits. The many research assignments have challenged me to do better, and more! But most importantly, I have learned real life skills. The many oral presentations have given me more self-confidence than I’ve ever had, and the group projects have given me leadership and social skills. We are given a lot of opportunities for responsibility and decision-making. We even learned how to prepare résumés, and had ‘Job Interviews’ with our business partners from the Learning Partnership!

Many people will look back at their elementary school years and not remember anything significant, but I will never forget how grateful I am for all of the experiences I had and will continue to have in the Gifted program.

Grade six student Alexia lives in Mississauga, Ontario with her parents, older brother, and younger sister. Alexia has a passion for books, and when not reading enjoys listening to music and playing video games. She also enjoys writing and has a published poem in ‘A Celebration of Poets’.
My head is pounding. My stomach hurts. I’m about to pass out. With my mom beside me, the phone starts ringing, so I quickly jump. The doctor has my test results. I can see my mom’s face become pale with fright because of what was going to happen to me tonight. She tells me to go get dressed quickly. I rushed to my room, grabbed my t-shirt and sweater.

Seeing the reaction on my mom’s face I thought that this was going to be a long night. Yes, my life changed very much. I went from drinking juice or pop whenever I wanted to eating carefully by adding up the carbs and drinking only diet pop. I also had to test my blood four times a day and take insulin three times a day. NOT FUN! When I was eight-years-old I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes.

When I got to the hospital my heart was racing because of all the fear of my mom not telling me what was wrong with me. My blood sugar was 53.7 and the doctors were surprised I was still walking. I am really lucky that I am still here today. I still remember how my nurse cheered me up by singing “When I get older”. I also remember my Mom sleeping in a chair so she could stay with me.

On the day I got out of the hospital I was never so happy to be outside. The first thing I asked my parents was, “Can we go to McDonalds?” and everyone started laughing at me. I ordered two double Big Macs because I had not eaten much that whole week. I even lost 7 pounds.

Today I am doing what I want. I am playing sports and enjoying being a kid. I am living life to the fullest but I still take insulin and test my blood every day. At first it was hard to do but now that I am 11, it’s fine for me. I just keep reminding myself, “I have Diabetes; Diabetes doesn’t have me”.

11-year-old Karlee lives in Mississauga with her family and was diagnosed with diabetes at the age of 8. She loves to play every sport that she can and to be active all the time. She loves music and hopes to write a book about living with diabetes.
One day, I found a beaker outside our house. Little did I know that that very beaker would change the course of my life! At first, I ignored the beaker, as if it was just part of the furniture. But one fateful evening, when we had chicken for dinner, I suddenly remembered an experiment from a science textbook. I ran to my room, snatched up the beaker and poured white vinegar and baking soda inside. Then I dropped a chicken bone into the beaker and covered it with a stopper. The waiting was slow and prolonged, but after about a month, the bone had turned pliable. This one experiment got me interested in other experiments. I slowly got attached to science. Soon I began exploring physics and chemistry, too. They were very interesting to study, because it helps me understand the laws of life better. I learned about Schrodinger’s Cat, Bernoulli’s Principle, The Higgs Boson, and other quantum mechanical theorems.

I spent spare time drawing up blueprints of bio-turbines, bio-shelters, and other inventions. I read physics books and science experiment books. I even tried to do an electrical experiment involving water. (Do not try!) Soon science was not just my hobby, but my dedication as well. I wanted others to be interested in this amazing subject. I presented physics presentations, and made inventions blueprints. I was so attracted to science that I started planning to make one of my inventions come true. Hopefully in the future, the R8-ReGlasses would be out and running or bio turbines set up in every country. But I won’t forget the beaker that started my life as a scientist.

Twelve-year-old Brian Zhang lives with his parents and younger brother, Patrick, in Richmond Hill, Ontario. He is aiming for Stanford University to further develop thinking skills. He has received 7 trophies so far, 2 for science, and 4 for writing. In his spare time, Brian enjoys collecting bacteria samples from plants and writing his planned novel.
Connaître la famille biologique est essentiel pour les enfants adoptés et quand ils arrivent à le faire, ils espèrent avoir la réponse à des questions qui les ont hantés jour et nuit: « Qui est ma mère biologique ? » « Pourquoi est-ce que j’ai été adoptée ? ». Je suis un de ces enfants, une petite fille adoptée à six mois.


Cette expérience m’a changée. J’ai compris la force des sentiments. Les liens restent solides malgré la distance. Les sentiments vainquent tous les obstacles que la vie nous prépare. Je sais maintenant que ce n’est pas la technologie ou la science, non plus les armes qui sont les plus forts. Ce sont les sentiments. Et si ceux-ci en sont de bons, alors c’est merveilleux. On pourrait avoir un monde meilleur. Comment pourrais-je enseigner cette leçon à tout le monde?

Brynn was born twelve years ago in Thai Nguyen, Vietnam. Six months later she travelled to the other side of the world to her new home in Toronto, Canada. She enjoys travelling and discovering new cultures. She has high expectations for herself. With the help and support of her teachers, friends and family she assures herself that she’ll turn out successfully!
Rien de nouveau si je vous disais que les guerres enlèvent des vies ou tuent des âmes. Nos proches sont perdus à jamais et la terreur de la guerre reste en nous pour toujours. La guerre de la Corée n’était pas différente des autres. C’était un conflit majeur entre le sud et le nord qui a coûté la vie à presque dix millions de personnes. À cela j’ajoute les trois millions de citoyens qui devaient s’échapper du communisme par tous les moyens. Quelle tragédie! Ma grand-mère l’a vécue pleinement.

Ma grand-mère était la plus jeune de cinq enfants. Quand la guerre a éclaté, elle n’avait que 12 ans. Comme les autres trois millions de personnes, sa famille s’est précipitée de quitter le nord, où elle habitait, et à se réfugier au sud du pays. Il fallait fuir à tout prix pour échapper aux communistes qui n’auraient pas pardonné aux anciens propriétaires. La guerre est impardonnable. Combien de personnes ont été déchiquetées, combien de vies ont été anéanties? La division de la Corée a rendu la situation encore plus difficile. La nourriture était rare, la sécurité fragile. Et pourtant, l’atrocity de cette guerre n’a pas écrasé l’esprit de ma grand-mère. Son esprit restait solide malgré le travail de galère qu’elle devait faire à son âge tendre. La vie continuait même piétinant. Mes grands-parents ont décidé de quitter la Corée et d’émigrer au Canada. Ils n’avaient que 200$ pour les cinq membres de la famille. Ce n’était pas beaucoup. Par contre, ce qui était énorme, c’était leur volonté acharnée de vivre, leur détermination de réussir, et ils ont tous réussi.

Quelle merveilleuse leçon pour moi! Cela m’a fait mûrir tellement vite! J’ai compris que dans la vie les malheurs sont parfois inévitables. Certaines situations sont plus douloureuses que d’autres. Ce qui compte, c’est l’attitude qu’on adopte dans ces situations. On devient gagnant seulement si on garde l’optimisme et une confiance totale en soi-même, et surtout si on a la joie de vivre. Voilà donc comment je réagis dans toute situation malencontreuse, grâce à l’histoire de ma famille.

Abigail Kim
Second Place – Grade 6 (French)
Toronto District School Board

Soyons optimistes!

Abigail lives in Toronto, Ontario with her parents and younger brother. She is 11 years old in Grade 6. Abigail likes to make her friends laugh and enjoys pestering her brother. She wants to thank all her teachers for their help and support this year. Abigail is looking forward to Grade 7!
Il faut sourire

a fait moins d’un an que ma grand-mère est venue au Canada. Pour un bon bout de temps, elle a habité chez mes cousins. Quand elle est venue habiter chez nous, j’ai vu qu’elle avait des difficultés à faire certaines choses et même à marcher. Je ne savais pas que c’était si sérieux, que c’était le cancer.


Je n’aurais jamais pensé qu’elle me donnerait une leçon si importante de vie. Ma grand-mère m’a changé. Elle m’a fait apprendre apprécier le don de la vie. J’ai appris de ma grand-mère à être content, à accueillir chaque jour avec un sourire. Elle est un exemple pour nous tous. J’aimerais que les gens grognons, mécontents, fâchés, jaloux, insatisfaits et paresseux puissent la connaître. Ils apprendraient, comme moi aussi j’ai appris, qu’il faut vivre la vie avec dignité et joie, que c’est notre tâche de célébrer la vie. Faisons-le, mes amis!

Christopher was born in Toronto and currently lives there with his family. Currently Christopher enjoys many things including soccer, reading, and playing video games. In the future, he does not know what he wants to be but he’s always had a passion for writing. He has written a few short novels.
Je ne t’oublierai jamais

Le 6 octobre 2011 représentait simplement une autre journée dans ma vie. Je suis rentré chez moi après l’école et du moment où je suis sorti de l’ascenseur j’ai entendu un aboiement qui venait de mon appartement. C’était mon chien qui m’accueillait toujours en sautant sur moi du moment que j’ouvrais la porte. Cependant, je ne savais pas que ma vie changerait aujourd’hui.

Ce jour là, il y avait une élection. J’ai accompagné ma mère et mon chien Ammy à l’emplacement assigné. Notre marche était prolifique et je jouais avec Ammy en attendant que ma mère vote. Il y avait un peu de confusion pendant le chemin de retour. J’étais en train de ramasser une feuille d’érable pour mon projet quand j’ai entendu un cri qui perçait l’air du soir. C’était le cri de ma mère. Je me suis mis debout pour voir ce qui se passait mais je ne m’attendais pas à voir mon chien au milieu de la rue. Une partie de moi pensait que tout va bien se passer, car je n’ai jamais eu un décès dans ma vie. Mais l’autre part de moi savait que ça peut devenir un événement tragique. J’ai commencé à dire dans une voix apaisante, mais en même temps pressante : « Viens Ammy! Tu ne peux pas être là! ». Mais BAM! Une voiture l’avait déjà frappé. Ça m’a pris quelques secondes à réaliser ce qui s’est passé. Les autres événements sont tous brouillés parce que je pleurais sans cesse. Je me suis dit que Ammy n’allait pas retourner.

Cette nuit là j’ai pensé aux bonnes mémoires de Ammy. J’ai perdu le membre de la famille que j’ai toujours voulu dans un battement de cœur. Cette expérience m’a enseigné trois choses. La vie n’est pas pour toujours et il ne faut jamais la prendre pour acquis. Ma deuxième leçon est qu’il faut s’attendre à l’imprévu. Finalement, j’ai appris que les personnes que tu aimes restent toujours avec toi, même après le décès.

Cette nuit, je me suis couché en pensant à la façon que Ammy m’a accueilli à la porte cette journée là.

Chantel is a Grade 6 student who lives with her parents and older brother Charlie. She was born in Canada but her ancestors are from China. Chantel absolutely loves reading and playing sports. She is also looking forward to new subjects to learn in middle school next year such as History. She will soon get her piano credits for level 8 and recently joined a baseball league for the first time.
Ma classe a lu le livre d’Alain Raimbault, « Herménégilde l’acadien ». C’est l’histoire d’un jeune Acadien qui se lie d’amitié avec un Autochtone et apprend de lui à regarder, à écouter et à comprendre différemment la nature. C’est le livre qui m’a décidemment changée.

Par la suite, j’ai commencé à faire beaucoup plus attention à tout ce qu’il y a autour de moi. Mes yeux sont grands, mon esprit ouvert, mon attention aux aguets. C’est comme si je me réveillais d’un long sommeil. Je regarde ma mère. Elle rentre de son travail très fatiguée. Est-ce qu’elle avait la même mine auparavant ? Certainement, mais je ne le voyais pas. Alors, je me précipite à son aide dans tous les travaux ménagers. Le goût de la nourriture me semble meilleur, la maison plus propre. J’apprécie son effort.

Je regarde mon père, je vois ses mains qui n’ont pas arrêté de travailler toute la journée, son visage préoccupé, et je lui donne un câlin, et je l’assure de ma gratitude, et je fais tout ce que je peux pour suivre son exemple. J’apprécie son effort.

Je vais à l’école. Je regarde mes collègues. J’écoute attentivement ce qu’ils disent et je leur donne mon opinion avec gentillesse, je les réconforte s’ils sont tristes, je désapprouve à forte voix les gestes méchantes des autres et je n’accepte pas les brutes.

Pourquoi auparavant je ne voyais pas tout cela ? C’est comme si j’étais aveugle. Je m’en veux.

Moi, j’ai changé. Le livre que nous avons lu et les discussions auxquelles nous avons été incités par la suite sont devenus mon point tournant. Maintenant je suis contente que je fais des efforts pour mieux comprendre les gens, que j’ai plus de compassion pour eux, que je me mets de bon cœur dans leur peau, que j’écoute le monde qui m’entoure. Je suis une nouvelle personne.

Eleven-year-old Natasha lives in Toronto, Ontario with her parents and brother, Nicholas. She loves reading, playing hockey and soccer. Natasha is multilingual, speaking English, French, Greek and some Macedonian. In high school she would love to learn Spanish. Her goal for the future is to become a criminal lawyer.
Un jour de printemps, quand j’avais 4 ans, ma famille a décidé d’aller à Bayview Village pour magasiner. En premier, nous sommes allés à une pâtisserie italienne pour manger. J’ai mangé une pâtisserie de chocolat. En moins d’une minute j’ai réalisé que la façon que mon corps a réagi à cette pâtisserie n’était pas la façon qu’il réagit d’habitude à ce type de nourriture. J’ai attendu un peu, mais dans un instant, je savais que quelque chose n’était pas normale.

Nous sommes sortis du restaurant et mes parents ont réalisé que mes lèvres étaient enflées. Ils m’ont emmené à la voiture où je me suis reposé. Ensuite, j’ai commencé à devenir étourdi et je suis sorti de la voiture et j’ai vomi. J’étais encore très confuse. Qu’est ce qui ce passait? Est ce que c’était quelque chose que j’ai mangé? Ma mère était confuse aussi. Elle savait que c’était une réaction allergique mais elle ne savait pas la cause.

Quelques semaines plus tard, je suis allée au docteur pour un bilan de santé. Le docteur a mis des extraits de noix sur mon dos et elle a utilisé un cure-dent pour mettre les extraits dans ma peau. Mes parents ont compris que j’étais allergique à 8 noix. Quand j’ai entendu ça, je ne savais pas comment je peux vivre avec toutes ces restrictions. Ceci a changé ma vie et je ne peux pas faire un demi-tour maintenant.

À cause de mes allergies, je dois vérifier les ingrédients dans tous les aliments que nous achetons. Je suis aussi devenu plus responsable à un jeune âge car je dois dire aux personnes que j’ai des allergies quand mes parents ne sont pas là. Quelquefois, je deviens triste quand je pense à mes allergies, mais maintenant, je sais que ça c’est la façon que Dieu m’a fait et je suis chanceuse que je n’ai pas d’autres maladies sérieuses. Mon souhait est qu’un jour, des docteurs peuvent trouver un traitement pour les allergies pour qu’aucune personne ne doive s’inquiéter de ce qu’ils peuvent manger et qu’ils ne se sentiront pas exclus.

Stephanie is a Grade 6 student who loves spending time with her parents and her older brother, Bryan. She has been playing piano for eight years and she has been swimming for almost seven. During her past time she loves helping her mom cook. She is very happy that her friends and family are all happy and healthy. She is also looking forward to meeting new people in Junior High School next year.
Qu’est devenue de ma famille

Personne m’a préparé pour ce qui allait se passer. Je suis une clé dans une montagne de pailles, perdu et dans la distance.

Le 22 octobre marque le jour qui a changé ma vie pour toujours. Je ne saurais jamais si ce changement est pour le bien ou pour le pire. C’était un samedi comme tous les autres. Je me reposais dans mon lit, regardant le plafond que mes parents ont peinturé ensemble et soudainement j’entends un bruit venant de leur chambre. Tout s’est passé trop rapidement. Mon père est arrivé et a commencé à crier à ma mère. La journée se passait bien. Pourquoi a-t-il du la détruire?

Je me réveille le matin prochain, mes yeux rouges des larmes de la nuit dernière. J’espère que hier soir était une exagération et j’espère entrer dans la salle de famille pour trouver mon père sur un divan. Il n’est pas là. Il n’est pas dans la maison. Il n’est pas dans notre famille. Mon père nous a quittés. Il a quitté l’amour qu’il a une fois partagé avec ma mère.

Un an plus tard, je regarde les photos de ma famille. En regardant mon père je commence à pleurer. Mon père n’est pas mort, mais d’une façon bizarre je l’ai perdu. Dans nos photos, mon père semble content et je me demande comment il a pu jeter toutes ces mémoires à la poubelle. Est-ce qu’il m’aime vraiment? Qui est-il maintenant? Mon père est un inconnu. Ce qui me déprime n’est pas que mes parents se sont séparés. C’est le fait que quelqu’un que tu aimes et que tu connais bien un jour peut devenir inconnu l’an prochain.

J’ai appris que j’ai pris ma famille pour acquis. J’ai appris qu’il faut parfois s’attendre à des événements que la vie ne te prépare pas pour. Il y a aussi des choses dans la vie que tu ne peux pas prendre pour acquis, tel que ta famille, tes professeurs et tes amis. Si ce n’était pas pour le support de mes amis, je n’aurais jamais survécu l’année. Merci!

Kaitlyn is a Grade 6 student who lives in Toronto and has Greek and Persian parents. She loves to read, dance, make arts and crafts and spending time in nature. She will be attending Windfields Junior High next year with her friends whom she cherishes for their care and support very much.
La panique

Il était un jour normal durant mes vacances à Orlando. C’était une vacance magnifique, rempli d’excitation et de nouvelles expériences. Mais aujourd’hui, je ne m’attendais pas à ce qui allait se passer.


Cette expérience m’a enseignée que tu peux perdre quelque chose en un clin d’œil. La morale que j’ai prise avec moi est de prendre soin de ce que tu as et d’être reconnaissante de cette personne. J’aime beaucoup mon frère. Même si nous chicanons parfois, il est un membre de ma famille que je ne pourrais jamais remplacer. Maintenant, on plaisante lorsqu’on parle de cette journée là.

David is a Grade 6 student who lives in Toronto with his parents and two younger siblings. He was born in Toronto but his ancestors are from China. His favourite past times are sports such as soccer, tennis, baseball and hockey. Last year, his hockey team made it to the provincial level but lost in the finals. He plays violin and enjoys reading. He plans on playing lots of chess! In the fall he will gladly be attending Windfields Junior High. David is very excited to be honorably mentioned for his Turning Point essay.
Une amitié inattendue

Un jour chaud durant l’été de ma troisième année, je me suis assise à l’arrière de l’autobus bruyant avec mon amie et on s’est mis à parler. Deux garçons de ma classe étaient assis à notre droite. On était pratiquement des ennemis. Mes amis et moi les détestions et ils nous détestaient aussi.

Après quelques minutes, mon amie est arrivée à sa destination. Maintenant, je me trouvais toute seule avec les deux garçons. L’intimidation a commencé.

On a jeté des insultes à l’un et l’autre jusqu’au moment que je n’arrivais plus à prendre plus d’insultes. Quand j’arrive à mon arrêt je pars sans dire un mot. Pendant que je regarde pour mon frère pour aller à la maison, j’étais au bord de larmes. Pourquoi est-ce qu’ils doivent être si méchants? Je me suis dit avec fermeté qu’ils ne seront jamais mes amis. Ceci s’est passé pour un an, jour après jour.

L’an prochain, j’ai commencé à jouer avec ces deux garçons. Ce sont nos intérêts communs qui nous ont joint ensemble. Nous aimons tous les sports alors nous jouons au soccer ensemble de temps en temps. Durant ces moments-là, j’ai commencé à penser que peut-être nous pouvons être des amis…peut-être. Après tout, ils n’étaient pas si mauvais que je le croyais et ils étaient aussi amusants!


Parfois, je pense que peut-être je les ai jugés trop rapidement et que je ne m’attendais pas à l’inattendu. Bien que je n’aie pas prédit ces événements, je suis béni avec deux des plus fidèles et fiables amis dans le monde et je ne vais jamais les tenir pour acquis.

Olivia is a Grade 6 student who lives in Toronto with her family. She was born in California but moved to Toronto when she was 3. Olivia’s family is from China. She loves to read, play sports and is a competitive swimmer. She has always had a passion for music and is in the process of writing a fantasy novel. She cherishes her friends and family like gold and would do a lot for them.
Faire bon usage de notre temps

Effrayé ! Ça c’est l’émotion que j’ai ressentie quand ma grand-mère était dans l’hôpital. Moi et elle n’était pas très proches mais nous nous aimons quand même l’un et l’autre. Mon père allait la visiter souvent avant qu’elle est devenue malade. Je n’allais pas souvent avec lui parce que je ne trouvais pas ces visites amusantes, mais maintenant je donnerai tout juste pour être à coté d’elle. Je n’ai pas ressenti la peur jusqu’au moment où je l’ai visitée à l’hôpital.


Maintenant ma grand-mère se remet. Maintenant, je la traite de la même manière qu’elle me traite. J’essaie de ne rien prendre pour acquis et je vois tout le monde d’une différente manière. Moi, comme personne, j’ai beaucoup changé pour le mieux. Je ne l’ai jamais cru auparavant, mais il est vrai que vous ne savez pas ce que vous avez jusqu’à ce qu’ils disparaissent.

Anya is a Grade 6 student currently living in Toronto, Ontario. She was born in Bermuda where her parents lived for four years but her background is Sri Lankan. She plays the piano and enjoys art, music, drama and rollerblading. She will be attending Windfields Junior High in the fall.
A Shoulder to Lean On

In the moment that my brother walked out of the house, off to university, I knew that life in the house would never be quite the same.

Having him around had become so normal, that I never really savored the time he and I spent together. I used to be able to walk into my home with the peace of mind that my brother would be home any minute, but nowadays I come home to an empty house only to while away my time doing homework and watching shows. I never realized how comforting it could be to know that my brother was just a few steps down the hallway if I ever needed him. To have my brother around was to know that there would always be laughter in the house, despite the pouring rain outside. Most of all, I never realized how much of an impact he could really have on me.

The impact wasn’t only the fact that my house felt so empty without him in it, but also what a big role he had played in my day-to-day life. Whenever I had ever felt a little gloomy, I could simply listen to the hysterical laughter of my mom and my brother downstairs, and sure enough, I’d break into a smile. If I needed help with my work, or I had broken my laptop yet again or I was simply feeling a little lonely, I knew that just a few steps away was someone who could make all of my problems disappear, and leave me laughing off my seat in the end. Instead, now I must face to solve my problems on my own, without a brotherly shoulder to lean on for support. As sad as it is to not be able to see my brother besides the once-a-month visits, through this I’ve learned to be more responsible and more self-sufficient. Not being able to “beckon” my brother at any given time for help taught me how to fend for myself.

I can only imagine that almost every younger sibling doesn’t really think much about what life without their older sibling would be like, and I’ve heard some even wondering if they’ll actually miss them when they’re gone. Only after they’ve left do you realize how empty and lonely your days tend to get without them around. The wiser of the younger siblings all dread for these days to come.

I’ll forever miss the days my brother and I would watch Mr. Bean together laughing away, just as I’ll forever regret the days I told him to get out of my room in a rage. I’ll forever cherish the time we spend together now because I know I’ll be left feeling empty when it’s over, just as I’ll forever love him no matter how often I see him.

Thirteen-year-old Renessa lives in Mississauga, Ontario with her loving parents and her brother. She loves spending time with Reuben, her older brother and the inspiration for her essay. In her free time, she enjoys biking, rollerblading and watching the latest episodes of her favourite shows. She absolutely adores volleyball, badminton and watching anime. She looks forward to participating in the International Baccalaureate program next year for Grade 9!
Life is full of joys and sorrows. Someone once said, “No one in this world can be truly happy.” Sometimes one moment can change a life forever. I believe this because a sad moment in my past, changed my life forever.

July 6th 2006 is a day I will never forget -- a day that changed my whole life. I remember my summer break had just started.

When I woke up in the morning, my mom told me that we were going to a doctor’s appointment. I got ready and went downstairs. My dad was lying on the sofa already watching TV. I noticed he was sleeping, so I took the remote from his lap and changed the channel.

My mom came and asked my dad to go up and get ready, but he didn’t respond. She went near him and tried to wake him, as he had a habit of sleeping on the sofa, but his head fell to the side. We got scared. My mom called 911. She shouted and called for my uncle.

My mom and uncle tried to wake him, but nothing happened. No one could believe that he was no more. The ambulance came and we were asked to leave the room, so I went upstairs to be with my siblings.

From my window I saw my dad for the last time on the stretcher en route to the hospital. He was still unconscious. Hours passed and we soon found out that my father had passed away. It was the most shocking moment for my whole family, especially my mom.

At the age of 5, I was not aware of the meaning of death. I saw my mom’s tears, but she was still so strong for us. She was in deep shock. How could this happen? My father had no health problems. He was a happy and healthy person. For many days we were not able to accept this.

As I am the only boy among two sisters, I had to perform all the rituals of the funeral. At the age of 5, can you believe I understood what happened? I was the one who sent my father to God and put his ashes in a holy river in India with my small hands.

When I remember this, I feel very sad, but my mom says “a fear in life will not go away by ignoring or denying it; it will only be overcome by facing and accepting it.”

My mom taught me that “even if you can’t see papa, he is still around you and can hear you.” Every morning I start my day wishing “Good morning” to his photo and take blessings from him, not only for me, but for my mom and sisters as well. We believe he is around us. My mom always puts fresh flowers in front of his photo. We all love him and miss him very much. After his death I became very responsible in life.

July 6th will always be the saddest day for my family.

Gurlove also known as Love, is 12 years old. He is an honest young boy studying in grade 7 in Ms. Everett’s class at Middle School. He lives in Brampton with his mom and 2 elder sisters Simran and Rashi. Love accepts challenges and always tries to achieve them. Love is like a helping hand to his mother. In Love’s eyes, it is too early to predict his future goals but he believes that success is simple: do what’s right, the right way, at the right time.
Learning to Love

We had just missed the ice cream truck on a hot 2007 summer day. The breeze picked up and blew my hair back. I looked at my mom and asked if we could chase the truck. She looked down at me, smiled and said yes. Following my ears, I ran several blocks before giving up and returning to my mother. Suddenly, I heard the familiar tune and looked down the street. The truck was happily rolling towards us.

We sat on the curb licking our chocolate ice cream cones, when I turned to my mom and asked her why she and my dad didn’t love each other anymore. She didn’t answer. My parents had recently separated and my mom was currently sleeping in the basement. I looked at her again and asked, “Mom, are you a lesbian?” She glanced at me, laughed and replied, “Yes.” Still staring at her, I gave her hug and whispered in her ear, “I still love you, mommy.” I was eight years old at that time.

That one word, “yes,” changed my life forever. Other kids could hope and have faith that their parents would get back together, but I couldn’t. There was no way on earth my mom and dad were getting back together. In some ways, it hurts. In others, it’s better this way -- I would rather see my mom happy with a woman than unhappy with my dad.

At first, I kept the fact of my mom’s sexuality a secret, but I soon realized that I wanted to share with my friends. I had no idea how they would react. I doubted myself, but when the time came, I became brave and told them. They didn’t react the way I worried about. They still loved me just like I still loved my mom.

My mom’s being a lesbian has made me make changes in my life, learn many things and most importantly, have new points of views. To be completely honest, I wouldn’t really care about gay marriage in the U. S. A. if my mom wasn’t a lesbian. I am so thankful that we live in Canada and my mom can happily be married here without being colossally judged. This experience has taught me empathy for kids who have homosexual parents who don’t have proper rights. This has taught me that everyone is equal and not to be quick to judge people. This has been my life for almost six years and will be until the day I die.

I appreciate every valuable lesson my mom has taught me and I’m so thankful for everything in my life. I have learned to love and appreciate everything because I now know that everything could change with one word. It may not always be bad, but it could change. I love my mom in every way.

Fourteen years old and in grade 8, Jordan lives with her sister at her mother’s house and her father’s house bi-weekly. She spends most of her time reading and writing. One day she hopes to be a teacher or a journalist. She speaks French and English, but mostly English. Jordan would like to thank her teacher, Mme Zamin and her family, especially her mom.
**Who Should I Be?**

“Be yourself, everyone else is already taken.” – Oscar Wilde

When I was younger, my aunt and uncle got a divorce. I didn’t really understand what was going on at the time, but I began seeing my uncle less and less. My older cousins, their children, were saddened by this and although I tried comforting them they still wouldn’t open up. I am not sure when, but quite a while after the divorce, my aunt looked deep inside herself. She met a beautiful woman and fell in love. While my aunt was in a relationship with her partner, I was certain my cousins felt very awkward about it initially. When my mother told me about it, I’ll admit that I felt strange. To love a person of the same gender? It was completely different than the relationships I had grown up around.

When I met my aunt’s partner, I didn’t know what to say around her. She wasn’t always a part of my family, yet there she was. While I watched the adults talk, I noticed that my aunt was laughing and smiling like I had never seen before. She was happy, and happier than I had seen her lately. I knew that she loved her new partner by the look in her eyes. My cousins seemed more and more comfortable around my aunt’s partner as time progressed, and so did I. I began to feel as though she was part of our family. Everyone did, and she was. In the fall they got married and when I heard the news, I was overjoyed. It takes a lot of courage to do that, especially since many people don’t accept same sex marriages.

I have never thought of same sex relationships to be strange since then. I realize that it doesn’t matter what gender or sexuality you are, you are free to love whomever you want. Who you love or choose to be is up to you and nobody should decide it for you. This was a turning point in my life because it changed my point of view of other people’s differences, like sexuality, and made me believe that you have a right to be yourself, no matter how different you may seem. I love my family and fully support the people around me, no matter what they may be experiencing.

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Nora Mossman is in Grade 7 at Hollycrest MS in the High Performer Program. Nora is a national level synchronized swimmer. In the future, she aspires to represent Canada in her sport, become a teacher and write. Nora would like to thank her aunts for being her inspiration for her Turning Points essay, and her teacher and family for supporting her writing.
My Life Changing Moment

My life changing moment would have to be when my grandmother passed away. At the age of 12, my grandmother was diagnosed with cancer. She was in the hospital for about four to five weeks having chemotherapy treatment. I went to visit her every moment I could. After her time in the hospital had passed, she was good as new. She came to my house every day of the week. She was talking and having fun, just like before she went to the hospital. I asked my dad if the cancer treatment was over. He said that she had only gone through the first treatment phase. He said that she would return to the hospital that weekend.

That weekend we all went with her to the hospital. She said that she would come back in a few weeks. But sadly she did not. She was moved to many hospitals during the time she was alive. Every time I went to see her, I held her hand and prayed, telling her that everything was going to be all right. I saw many people saying the same words to her including her two daughters, my parents and my uncles. We were all hoping that she would make it through. During the 2 last weeks of her treatment, she had two to three strokes a day. It must have been so painful for her. Each time my parents and I were driving to get there we knew deep inside that there was a 90% chance that she would not make it through. But that did not keep us from praying and hoping the best for her in the afterlife.

One Sunday afternoon, I came back from my Arabic and Muslim school with my friends, Sara and Sami, like I do every Sunday. When my mom came to pick me up, I could see in her face that she brought unpleasant news, so I asked her how my grandmother was. She started to cry and I instantly knew what she was about to tell me. I fell on the floor and I cried my heart out. I got back up still crying and my mom told me that my grandmother had passed away. Suddenly a big ball of anger, sadness and hate came up in me. My mom said that it was for the best that I didn’t see it happening.

That night we all went to my aunt’s house, where my grandmother lived and we all were saying that she was a good woman and that God would forgive all the little things that she had done wrong. The next day was her funeral. All of her family and friends had come to say their goodbyes. I was not surprised to see so many people because my grandmother was a much-loved woman. Everyone around me was crying, including my friend, Sara, who came to be with me on this emotional day. Seeing for the first time someone dead, I experienced the worst feeling. I loved my grandmother so much that life without her would be something unspeakable.

I had so much more to learn and to hear from her that it was almost impossible to say goodbye. But everything happens for a reason. This tragic experience has taught me that anything in life can change any moment of any day and that I should appreciate what has been given to me. This moment changed my life and I’m absolutely sure that it made me a better person.
Switching Hands

Eight years ago, when I was a baby, my mom and dad got divorced and I stayed with my dad. When I got older, my dad and I would wrestle and do almost everything together. But that all changed when I turned five.

One day I went to visit my Mom and I had a scar on my face. She thought my Dad hit me, but I did not know she thought that yet. So one day my Dad told me to put on my good clothes because we were going somewhere. I did not know where we were going. I asked, but he did not tell me, and that kind of scared me. I just went with it because I figured nothing bad would happen. But I was wrong.

I watched my dad drive up to a courthouse and he carried me inside. Some people came and started talking to my Dad. He said that the people were going to take me somewhere, and that I should be okay, I said, “Ok.” But I was really scared to go with these people.

As I remember it, the room was white and there were a bunch of people in either white or black suits. They told me to sit down where the microphone was, and so I did. They told me that I was in here because the Judge was going to ask me questions and I was too young to be in the courtroom. The people kept on asking me questions but I wasn’t paying attention to them because I was very scared about what was going to happen after this.

At the end of court, I ran to my dad and hugged him, and I asked what happened. He said that I was going to live with my Mom. After that day, I cried so much. It is still the same today. I now visit him every other week. I personally believe that my Dad and I have a better relationship now than we ever had before, because we see each other less so we appreciate each other more. I had always loved my Dad so every chance I get, I choose to go to my Dad.

And now I live with my Mom and that’s what ‘switching hands’ is about. One day you live with your Mom, the other with your Dad and vice versa. Living with my mom now is good because I see my sister every day. So I have learned to cherish every moment with family because they are not there forever.

Raheem Dennis
Honourable Mention – Grade 7 & 8 (English)
Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board

8e lives in Mississauga, Ontario with his mom, sister, stepbrothers and stepsister. He is in Grade 7 and loves playing sports, especially basketball. His hero is Lebron James and he hopes to play like him someday. Raheem also loves math and is trying to do the best he can in school.
My grandfather lost the ability to speak when the surgeon made a mistake during brain surgery, causing permanent damage to his frontal lobe – and my father.

I’ve never once taken time to consider how my father felt or tried to comfort him over the fact he would never be able to have a conversation with his father again.

It was sometime in 1997 when my grandfather lost consciousness and collapsed into my father’s arms. I was told it was Arteriovenous Malformation (AVM) - a clustering of blood vessels in the brain. I later interpreted it as a stroke and it had paralyzed the right side of his body. Major brain surgery presented a 50 percent chance of survival and my father made the decision to proceed. He continues to live with the burden of his decision to this day.

I still have difficulty imagining the hardships my father has so boldly confronted - and I’ve never stopped to appreciate it. I’ve selfishly relished a life where the greatest roadblocks I’ve faced were about academics and my social life.

Last fall, the haze covering my eyes was abruptly removed and I got to view the world in its entirety for the first time. We received the sudden news that my father’s foundation of life, which helped support and develop every aspect of his being, was beginning to crumble.

My grandmother was dying.

The following months after my grandmother took her last breath, I would often notice my father in a state of reverie. A body would be physically present but I could sense his soul wandering back to a time when a little boy helped his mother carry rice home from the market. He was by her side every moment, helpless to assist, watching the life slowly trickle out of her still form. November 8th became an eventful day. It was the day he was brought to the Earth, and also the day her soul left it.

We’ll never truly understand the value of life and its meaning until we see a loved one being taken away from us. I reflect on my life previous to my grandmother’s departure, watching another 13-year-old girl living in my position, carrying out actions that now seem foreign. Her worst fear was failing a test and her biggest concern was being rejected by her peers.

The smallest, most insignificant elements of my day would seem like the end of the world. Money, popularity and all of our material obsessions are meaningless if we don’t stop to fully appreciate the gift of life, the value of family and the opportunities that surround us.
In the end, what matters are not the clothes we wore or how much money we had, but the lives we changed and the people we’ve impacted. It’s the legacy we’ve left behind.

Angelina is a confident and outgoing grade 8 student living in Richmond Hill, Ontario. In her spare time, she enjoys water-colour painting, charcoal drawing, baking, and inventing home remedies. Angelina finds beauty, health and wellness to be fascinating topics and is beginning to spread awareness to her peers. She is the winner of multiple public speaking awards and hopes to be a lawyer, dermatologist or nutritionist when she grows up. Her goal for the future is to leave a positive, impactful and lasting legacy on the world in hopes of inspiring the generation after.
My Life Changing Experience

Waking up to the smiles on the faces of your closest friends, eating meals together, heading to the lake for a swim, going kayaking, canoeing, hiking, singing, playing games together, learning about God, and going to sleep. It all sounds like an amazing dream, right? Well, this dream is something I lived at Camp Kemonoya.

Camp Kemonoya has taught me many things, and I am very thankful for that. They taught me a lot about God, and that's how I fully accepted Christ in my life. Before I came to Kemonoya, I was confused and had many questions about God and why He was so nice and loving. But as I learned more and more during my experience there, all my questions were answered, and everything seemed crystal clear. During my stay, my absolute favorite thing to do was to sit by the fire every night, sing, and listen to our pastor talk about the importance of Christ. In the end, we all got a tasty treat to end our day!

Camp Kemonoya helped me bond with my friends even more, since we spent the entire day together. Seeing their faces first thing in the morning and last thing at night really made me happy. I stayed at camp for four days, and as the days flew by, I began to realize that it was only a matter of time before I had to pack up and begin the long journey back home. That was very shocking for me, for I felt as if I had just started to love and enjoy life around me, but it was all being taken away. As I explored the camp inside and out one last time, I thought about God, and what He has given to us; this wonderful place full of life, laughter, and joy. I thanked Him greatly for the opportunity to be a part of everything.

Camp Kemonoya is one of the greatest blessings of my life. And as I said before, it is a wonderful place to learn about Christ, and what He has done for us all. Kemonoya helps build stronger connections between you and your friends, changing them from close friends to best friends. Kemonoya helps you not only to hear about memories of your friends, but to live the memories with them, and to keep for a lifetime.

Grace, who is currently a Grade 7 student, lives in Richmond Hill with her parents and younger sister. She shows interest in drawing, arts and music, and participates in various activities at school such as the basketball team. She was awarded the Third Place for the 2012 MADD Canada National Writing Contest, Second Place in the Royal Canadian Legion Ontario Provincial Command Remembrance Day Poster Contest, Second Place in the 2011 Canadian-Chinese Children’s Drawing Competition, and Third Place for the 2013 Richmond Hill Public Library Arts Contest in photography.
A Birthday Gift

They say that the world is a small place, and yet there are so many of us on this earth: rich, poor, black, white, diseased, healthy... all of this is determined by destiny. We are all born into this world with determined parents, a determined income and in a determined country. One is born on a silk cloth and another on the sands of the desert. One is born with parents that are billionaires and one is born with parents begging for money.

Luckily, I was born into a family with a stable income that could support me with food, water, a safe shelter and send me to school, but before a certain experience I did not understand how lucky I was. Being born into a family who has moved from the third world to Canada was lucky enough; we immigrated from Iran in the year 2001 and things were difficult. That is why my parents always acknowledge to giving money, support back to the communities in Iran and helping those in the developing world.

When I was 9 years old, one week before my tenth birthday, I was talking to my dad. He told me that it was a special day. I, being excited about turning 10, thought it was about me and my birthday. I was right on the birthday guess, but this sure wasn’t about me. My dad turned to me when we walked into the elevator and said, “Today is the 10th birthday of Fatemeh, one of the girls we help go to school in Iran.” Then he asked me what my birthday wish was.

I went on and on: Playstation, new bike, games, computer... my dad then replied “Fatemeh is the same age as you, only one week older and you want all these expensive gifts for your birthday and all she wishes for are pencils and paper so she can do her school work. You two were born in the same city, only one week apart, why is it that your fate is so different?”

His words made me think, in fact those words and that concept changed many of my life goals and my direction in life. They showed me that what we see and what we are exposed to in the media is not all there is and that there is more in the world. After that day I had a new birthday wish, to donate the money my parents were going to spend on a present for me to charity.

Since that day, I have always thought of the other side of the world before buying something. I think about those who have to walk an hour to get water before leaving the tap on; I think of those who have never had a toy in their life before throwing out something from when I was little. In the end, I learned that the world, in fact, is not such a small place, but is filled with different people and different destinies.

Thirteen-year-old Marianna was born in Toronto, Canada, and lives with her mother, father, and sister. In her spare time, Marianna likes to sing, draw, read, write, and play sports, like volleyball and basketball. She is an outgoing girl, very talkative, and makes friends easily. She speaks English, Mandarin, and a bit of French. She strives to become a psychiatrist when she grows older, as well as write a novel in her spare time.
Vers l’infini et au-delà

« Vous ne savez jamais comment tu es fort jusqu’à être fort est le seul choix que vous avez. » – Anonyme

Je me souviens de la dernière fois que je l’avais vue, c’était une journée ensoleillée, assez chaud à l’extérieur, et nous étions assis dans le salon à parler des choses les plus absurdes et contestables. Comme elle a commencé à murmurer à elle-même en silence, je me suis aperçue qu’elle avait l’air plus mince et que son visage était devenu drap blanc. Mais comme n’importe quel autre enfant de 7 ans ferait, j’ai haussé les épaules. Ma grandmère était ma meilleure amie, ma protectrice, et je pensais que rien de mauvais ne pouvait lui arriver. Je me suis trompée.

Quand j’ai regardé ma grand-mère qui soufflait ses bougies pour son 73e anniversaire, j’ai senti un mélange d’émotions. Elle était malade depuis un an, dans et hors de l’hôpital, parfois clouée au lit. Je pouvais à peine me contenir. Je voudrais lui rendre visite deux fois par semaine, parfois plus et rester le week-end. Même si elle était malade, elle a essayé si dur pour moi. Je me suis sentie comme si c’était ma faute, comme je l’ai rendue de plus en plus malade.

Lorraine Hartley, mon héros de l’amour inconditionnel, est décédée le 15 janvier 2007 en raison de l’insuffisance rénale. J’ai pleuré pendant des jours. Je me souviens que je ne pouvais même pas assister à cinquante minutes de son enterrement. Je savais qu’elle voudrait que je reste forte. Il était difficile pour moi, de perdre une telle personne si inspirante et extraordinaire. Elle avait l’habitude de me dire que j’avais de plus grands rêves que n’importe qui d’autre qu’elle connaissait. Elle croyait en moi. Chaque nuit que j’étais avec elle, avant de m’endormir, elle me disait « Rêve sur l’infini et au-delà ». Jusqu’à il y a quelques années, je n’ai jamais vraiment compris ce qu’elle voulait dire par là. Mais maintenant je le saisis. Elle voulait me dire que tout ce que je veux faire, je peux vraiment faire. C’est une vérité que j’ai choisi de vivre dès le moment qu’elle est morte.

Parfois je pense à ce qui serait devenu de notre famille si elle était encore avec nous. Mais j’ai l’impression que nous sommes plus proches maintenant qu’elle n’est plus sur la Terre. Je me souviens de chaque moment que j’ai passé avec elle, et je me rends compte que c’est correct de laisser aller, tant que j’ai encore le souvenir. Dans mon esprit, je me sens comme elle a essayé si fort à m’apprendre à vaincre mes propres batailles, et la façon de surmonter les obstacles. Elle ne voulait que le meilleur pour moi. Ma grand-mère était, et sera pour toujours la femme la plus courageuse que j’ai jamais rencontrée.

Autant que cela me fait mal de le dire, je m’habitue à son être disparu, même si elle me manque plus que toute autre chose. Je l’aime, vers l’infini et au-delà.

Madison is a grade 8 student living in Toronto, Ontario with her parents and younger brother. Her love for reading became obvious at a young age and continues to this day. She also lists creative writing and singing as interests. Madison hopes to one day become a best-selling author.
Mon voyage vers l’indépendance


Je me sentais nerveux avant le départ. Je n’avais rencontré cette équipe qu’une seule fois à une pratique de soccer. Lorsque nous avons quitté le parc de stationnement, j’avais très hâte parce que j’ai eu la chance d’être autonome et responsable. Pendant le trajet, on ne parlait pas beaucoup et nous avons commencé à nous endormir. Mais soudain, à mi-chemin dans le trajet, la voiture a heurté un cerf ! Tout le monde s’est réveillé en état de choc ! Nous avons tous commencé à parler, rire et à partager des histoires. Cela m’a fait sentir plus à l’aise parce que je commençais à être amis avec eux.

Le lendemain matin, nous nous sommes réveillés tôt pour notre premier match de football. Je devais me préparer pour le match tout seul. Au début du match, nous avons été intimidés parce que nous avons soudainement réalisé que pour avoir une chance de gagner le tournoi, nous devions être plus agressifs, plus intelligents et jouer avec plus d’intensité parce que l’opposition était beaucoup plus grande par rapport à nous. Nous avons trouvé la force et nous avons travaillé de notre mieux pour les deux premiers matchs.

Notre troisième match contre l’équipe classée deuxième aux États-Unis représentait notre plus grand défi jusqu’à ce point-ça du tournoi ! Nous avons été intimidés et effrayés d’abord parce que nous avions besoin de les battre pour avancer. Nous avons tous ressenti le désir brûlant et nous avons joué de tout coeur pour gagner le match ! Nous nous sentions invincibles et nous avons acquis beaucoup de confiance. Nous avons ensuite réussi à avancer à la demi-finale mais avons perdu à cause d’une pénalité. Nous étions tristes que nous avons perdu le match, mais nous étions très fiers et heureux parce que nous avons battu l’équipe classée deuxième en Amérique.

Après notre retour, je me sentais heureux non seulement de l’honneur d’avoir fait partie de cette équipe, mais d’être devenu plus autonome. Pendant le voyage, j’ai pris soin de moi-même et j’ai pu m’affirmer comme je ne l’avais jamais fait auparavant. Dès lors, j’ai la confiance nécessaire pour prendre plus de contrôle sur ma vie. J’ai aussi commencé à comprendre et à corriger mes propres erreurs et à affronter les conséquences de mes propres décisions. J’ai appris à toujours me fixer des objectifs pour moi-même. Je peux travailler plus efficacement avec mes pairs. Je me retrouve plus souvent maintenant à être un ‘leader’ ou à gérer une équipe parce que j’ai forte croyance en l’équité et en ce qui est juste. Mes collègues me font confiance car je les écoute attentivement et ils savent qu’ils peuvent compter sur moi.

Matthew Rosolen
Second Place – Grade 7 & 8 (French)
Toronto District School Board

Matthew is a highly motivated grade eight student living in Etobicoke, Ontario with his parents and younger sister. At school, Matthew performs with the announcement team and enjoys participating in extra-curricular events. He is regularly recognized with school achievements and continues to learn two languages: English and French. Matthew is very dedicated and committed to his provincial level soccer team as he strives to compete towards national and professional level soccer. He would like to thank his family, friends and his teacher for helping him achieve this success.
Introduction au monde de la musique

« Si la musique est la nourriture d’amour, jouez! » – William Shakespeare

J’avais 6 ans quand mes parents ont décidé de m’inscrire dans les cours de piano. L’endroit des leçons était au sous sol d’une maison. C’était confortable et accueillant et la professeure était gentille aussi. Par contre, j’étais nerveux et je boudais. Je n’avais aucune expérience dans la musique quand j’étais jeune. Et je n’avais presque jamais écouté de la musique non plus, alors j’étais perdu quand je me suis assis devant le long piano pour la première fois. Les premières leçons étaient horribles; je n’aimais pas les leçons et je n’étais pas du tout intéressé à n’importe quelle pièce de musique qu’elle me donnait. Je devenais frustré chaque fois que je faisais une erreur, car j’avais peu de patience pour la musique quand j’étais jeune. Je pensais que les leçons étaient une perte de temps. Et j’étais furieux envers mes parents de m’avoir inscrit dans ces leçons.

Mais après du temps, j’ai commencé à apprécier les leçons plus qu’avant. Je ressentais plus de légèreté chaque fois je jouais du piano. J’ai enrichi beaucoup ma connaissance ainsi que ma confiance quand j’entendais une pièce de musique, ou une mélodie. Je me retrouvais à aller sur internet à chercher les notes puis pratiquer multiples fois, jusqu’à ce que ça avait l’air parfait quand je tentais de les jouer.

Le piano m’a ouvert au monde de la musique. J’ai commencé à explorer différents genres de musique et j’ai décidé quelles chansons j’ai favorisé plus. J’apprécie la musique de plus en plus à cause de mes leçons de piano. Maintenant je joue d’autres instruments comme la guitare, le tambourin et le cor d’harmonie.

J’ai travaillé pendant des années, et maintenant j’ai un talent qui peut durer une vie. J’ai appris que le résultat dépend toujours de l’effort et la quantité de temps tu es prêt à consacrer à la tâche. À la fin, je suis reconnaissant de mes leçons. Elles m’ont ouvert au monde de la musique, et cette expérience m’a fait réaliser que notre planète serait très plate s’il n’y avait pas de la musique.

« La musique peut changer le monde, parce qu’elle peut changer les gens. » Bono
Aimer lire

« Non je ne le ferai pas! » J’ai crié à ma mère. « Non, je crois en toi. » Ma mère dit gentiment en retour. Ces mots sont familiers à moi je les dis au moins une fois par semaine et j’ai couru à ma chambre. La dernière fois que j’ai dit c’était quelques jours avant, ma meilleure amie Aliya, est venue chez moi après avoir lu, The Hunger Games de ma sœur et me pria de le lire. Après la plaidoirie d’Aliya je lui ai dit que j’allais le lire. Ce jour-là était magique en effet, ce jour-là, j’ai appris à aimer lire.

Depuis que j’étais petite, j’ai détesté la lecture. Je n’ai jamais été bonne en lecture. Je n’ai jamais été l’élève des plus brillants. Mon papa et maman m’ont toujours encouragé à lire. Vous savez à l’école quand votre professeur a les étudiants dans les différents groupes et tout le monde sait toujours qui est dans le groupe intelligent et qui ne l’est pas (j’étais jamais dans le groupe intelligent). À ce moment-là, j’ai renoncé à la lecture.

Tout a changé un jour au début de 2012 quand ma meilleur amie Aliya est venue chez moi pour rendre ma copie du roman The Hunger Games. Elle m’a dit que c’était le meilleur livre qu’elle a jamais lu! Après une longue période de me convaincre de le lire, j’ai dit que je le lirais. J’ai commencé à lire et tout le temps les gens a commencé à dire que j’ai commencé à agir comme ma sœur (elle adorait lire, et elle a une histoire similaire, mais ça c’est la sienne à raconter).

Un peu plus tard, quelque chose de fou a commencé à se passer; mes notes à l’école ont commencé à s’améliorer. Eh bien pas toutes en même temps, mais peu à peu mes notes se sont améliorées. L’année dernière j’ai ramené mon tout premier 85 % sur ma carte de rapport. J’étais tellement excité, mais je ne devrais pas le montrer à l’école parce que c’était une chose normale avec mes amis. La plupart de mes amis sont très intelligents ils obtiennent des honneurs ou, au moins le mérite. L’année dernière, j’ai été tellement fâché et tellement déçu en moi-même car ma moyenne n’était pas aux normes pour le mérite. Je reviens sur mes pieds et je suis déterminé à faire les choses bien cette année.

J’ai vite compris pourquoi j’ai aimé la lecture et la seule chose à quoi j’ai pensé peut être; que je ne le faisais pas juste pour passer le temps, mais pour voir à l’intérieur de l’esprit d’autres personnes et pour me distraire de ma vie bien remplie. Ça c’est pourquoi j’aime lire à-propos des personne dans l’amour ou les livres qui sont comme « elle était une fille normale, mais… » C’est tellement intéressant et presque réel! Avant de découvrir mon amour pour la lecture je détesté l’école, j’aimais seulement les sports mais maintenant la lecture m’a fait aimer les deux.
Laura Robertson
Honourable Mention – Grade 7 & 8 (French)
Toronto District School Board

Quel honneur

« Dans toute affaire humaine, il existe des efforts et des résultats et la force de l’effort est la mesure du résultat. » James Allen (1864-1912)

Assise dans l’auditorium, silence tout autour, un jour vraiment inoubliable. C’était quelques jours après avoir reçu nos premiers bulletins scolaires de l’année et tous les étudiants étaient silencieux en attendant de savoir s’ils avaient atteint leur but. J’étais en sixième année à l’époque et c’était mon premier rassemblement de prix à ma nouvelle école. Oui, ce n’était pas le rassemblement de la fin d’année, mais c’était vraiment important pour moi, car c’était la première fois que j’ai reçu une mention « Honneurs ».

Ce jour-là était très angoissant pour moi. Je devais attendre si j’avais atteint mon but de recevoir une mention honneurs. Notre professeur ne voulait pas nous dire si on avait reçu une mention honneurs ou mérite. Elle voulait que ce soit une surprise. C’était vraiment difficile à attendre! Il me semblait que tous mes amis des autres classes le savaient, pourquoi nous ne pouvons pas le savoir aussi ?

Quand nous avons reçu nos bulletins, on a pu trouver la moyenne de nos notes, mais le Conseil scolaire calculait les pourcentages différemment. Les matières majeures telles que les mathématiques, le français et l’anglais avaient un poids plus significatif des autres. Pour moi, j’aime ce système, car je reçois de meilleures notes dans ces sujets que des autres comme l’art, la musique et l’art dramatique.

À l’école le jour du rassemblement, nous sommes allés nous asseoir pour que la cérémonie puisse commencer. J’étais vraiment nerveuse pour voir si j’avais réussi mon but. En premier, notre directeur a parlé un peu. Avant que nous le sachions, les noms ont commencé à être appelés, chaque professeur a lu la liste d’élèves qui ont reçu mérite. J’ai eu de bonnes notes, mais je ne savais pas si ma moyenne était assez élevée. Mon professeur s’est levé et a lu les noms des élèves qui ont reçu une mention mérite. Elle n’a pas dit mon nom. Je pensais alors que je n’avais aucune chance, je n’ai pas reçu mérite et je n’allais certainement pas recevoir une mention honneurs. À ce moment mes amis étaient très gentils, mais ils m’ont dit qu’ils croyaient que j’allais le recevoir.

Après avoir longuement attendu, les professeurs ont commencé à lire les élèves qui ont reçu les honneurs. J’étais vraiment nerveuse. Je suis très exigeante, car j’aime réussir. Finalement, mon professeur s’est levé encore une fois, mais cette fois-ci pour lire les noms des étudiants qui ont reçu les honneurs. Elle a commencé à lire les noms, et à la fin elle m’a appelée. J’étais vraiment excitée!

Recevoir les honneurs pour moi représentait une expérience inoubliable. J’ai appris que si nous mettons tous nos efforts vers la réalisation d’un objectif, qu’on peut réussir dans tout ce qu’on veut. C’était un grand accomplissement pour moi et je suis encore très fière de mon travail. Cette expérience m’a montrée que travailler fort vaut toujours la peine.

Laura is a thirteen-year-old Grade 8 student in Etobicoke, Ontario. Her hobbies include reading and horseback riding. She loves spending time at her cottage with friends and family and having the opportunity to have her own horse. Laura works hard in her studies and also excels in athletics.
“Nature never intended for us to pat ourselves on the back. If she had, our hinges would be different.”

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Sareema Husain
First Place – Grade 9 & 10 (English)
York Region District School Board

Picture Perfect

Fade in. There you sit, picking at your nails, praying not to be noticed. It’s time to take up the homework. It’s an adrenaline rush every day in this class. You put up your hand halfway, but then stop. What if I stutter? What if I screw up? What if...too late, she’s picked you. C’mon, just spit it out. “It’s J-j-john A. M-m-m-macdonald.” The girl beside you lets out a snicker. Somebody behind you mimics what you’ve just said. People are staring at you, raising their eyebrows. “You okay?” your friend asks. You look down. Your skin’s too tight; the light’s burning into your skin and you wish you could just get up and run out of the class. But you can’t. That would just attract more attention. So you sit there, once again, waiting, praying not to be called on again. Fade out.

This was how I spent most of my elementary school days. Answering the easy questions so I wouldn’t get picked for the harder ones, begging my teachers not to present so I wouldn’t embarrass myself, using the excuse that I had a “speech impediment” -- it was an everyday routine. I’ve got what you call a developmental stutter, a stutter that starts off when you’re a kid and develops as you age. Even if I had something to contribute to a conversation I’d keep quiet because I feared people would think something was wrong with me or that I was some shy awkward kid. That wasn’t me. I was loud, funny, and bold. My favorite subject was drama for goodness sake! Sometimes I wished I could just break down and cry it all out. But no, who’d allow it to be that easy? Instead, I lived day to day avoiding communication. I failed myself over and over and wallowed in self pity ’till I nearly drowned in it. That is, until something happened my grade 8 year.

Graduation was near and my teacher announced a new assignment. Everyone had to write a 5-8 minute speech about anything that spiked their interest and present it to the class. My countless recesses presenting to teachers in private, skipping presentation days, sometimes even accepting zeros as a final mark -- all my efforts were going to go to waste. I was going to make a huge fool of myself.

But then something clicked -- I could do my presentation about my stutter. But here’s the thing -- when you talk about something personal you can’t just half ass it. People won’t buy into it that way. I had to put my heart and soul into this, make the audience feel what I’d been feeling the past five years. My lack of presenting left me with no presentation skills but still, I was confident. The bridge that I spent my whole life creating supporting beams for had become too heavy. Maybe it was a good thing because it seemed the bridge existed solely to hold me up and away from everybody else. It was time for me to join the rest of the world.

I earned a place in the top 10, and ended up presenting to the entire school -- I stood right there in the gymnasium, feet shaking and hands sweating, sharing my story. And once I was done, I felt invincible. I didn’t win the competition but I won something better -- I finally learned to accept myself. I could never get rid of my stutter; it would always be part of who I was. I decided that from then on, I’d never let my stutter control
me. I suffered more in my imagination than I ever did in reality. My stutter was what I made of it and I was going to stop letting it define me.

I’m in grade 10 now. I’m not going to say it’s picture perfect because it’s not. There are still days when my stutter acts up so badly and I wish the ground would suck me up and let me lie in the cool earth until I’m ready to come out again, but it’s never that easy. I’ve changed my attitude and that’s changed me. No, I’m not the kid who raises her hand for every question, but I do take more risks and I’m content with that. I’ve learned that I can’t run from myself and my problems because in the end, I’m the only one who has the power to change them.

Grade 10 student Sareema lives in Richmond Hill, Ontario. She attends Richmond Hill High School. She thinks that a biography of less than 300 words would be hard to write…so she’d rather you know that she enjoys the occasional superhero movie and a cup of hot tea.
As a child, I knew my mom was the best. She knew everything about everything. Asking her any question, no matter how difficult it was, I knew without a shadow of a doubt that she would have the answer. She was smart, amazing, and cool, and I wanted to show her off to the world!

Whenever there was a field trip at school that we were allowed to invite our parents on, I always made sure that my mom’s name was at the top of the list. I was just so proud to have her as a mother, and in my little 6-year-old mind everyone wished that they had my mom as their own. Wherever we went, whether it was the mall, the park, or even just the grocery store, I remember the huge amount of stares that we would get. People would break their necks to look at us! At that tender age, when my mind was still pretty oblivious to practically everything around me, I never even thought to question the reasoning behind all of the stares… “Wow, we must be really special!”

As I grew up and learned more, my mindset began to change. I began to learn that stares weren’t always a good thing. I started to question the stares; they were no longer something that I enjoyed. My eyes were finally opened to what was really going on around me… The stares weren’t of flattery, but of ridicule. With influence from the media and society, I learned who my mom really was. She was a 16-year-old “teen mom”, just another statistic, someone not to be proud of.

As quickly as I understood what the stares actually represented, I started to look at my mom in a different light. My oblivious mindset was replaced with knowledge that had ruined my perception of my mom. She was no longer that smart, amazingly cool person who I wanted to show off to the world, but had now become someone whom I wanted to hide. Being a teen mom in society’s eyes was shameful and unacceptable, so I was ashamed. I was ashamed because of how she was labelled and I didn’t want people to look at me differently because my mom was a teen mom. I tried to keep it a secret as best as I could because I thought that if people found out they would use statistics about children born to teen moms to belittle me. I immediately began to imagine how horrible my life would turn out to be due to this change in perspective.

I started to resent my mom for not telling me that she was a teen mom… Why wouldn’t she inform me about something that was so bad? Why did she act as if everything was normal? Was it because it was in fact not so bad? Was everything actually normal? She still cared for me the same way other mothers did, she still loved me the same way other mothers did, there was never a time that I was in need of anything, she was always there for me… And that’s when it hit me: my mom hadn’t “mentioned” to me that she was a teen mom because it didn’t matter; it had no importance, no relevance. Her title wasn’t teen mom, it was just mom and her age is a number. It doesn’t define who she is, what she can or cannot do, or her ability as a person to be a mom.
I guess my 6-year-old mind had been right all along; my mom is in fact the best; she does know everything about everything; she is smart, amazing and cool, and she does in fact deserve to be shown off to the world! Those other prejudiced labels have no relevance to her and our relationship.

Leayah, currently in grade 10, lives in Ajax, Ontario and enjoys spending time with her amazing family and friends and inventing new recipes. Her favorite subjects in school are English and Psychology. She aspires to get accepted into University of Toronto, York University or University of Ottawa after graduating high school to become a Social Worker like her most favorite person in the world, her mom. Leayah also hopes to, one day, be able to travel to many countries around the world and learn all about their different cultures.
The cloying scent of incense filled my nose and seared across my eyeballs, and I could barely make out my cousin’s figure through a blur of tears. It was a sunny Monday, my birthday, and yet, here I was, watching my cousin kneel in front of his mother’s coffin. His face was smeared with tears and snot, but his eyes were clear, and full of love – an emotion that I had not truly understood at the time.

As a child, I rarely experienced any sort of physical affection from my Chinese-Canadian parents, and had similarly never been told the three words that every child desires to hear; “I love you.” When I was in kindergarten, I used to wait after school for my grandfather, and watch jealously through our classroom’s chalk-smudged window as other children left. Their parents would greet them with a kiss on the cheek or a smile -- mine were too busy working to pick me up.

By the time I was in grade five, I was convinced that my parents’ affection for me was like a linear relation: it increased and decreased in proportion to my marks. Straight As would result in a smile and a reminder to do even better, but anything lower and my parents’ disappointment would almost ooze out of their pores, so heavy in the air that sometimes I felt like I was drowning in it.

The tension from the desire to be the best rose and rose, until one day, in the middle of an argument about my ‘inadequate’ marks, I snapped. I screamed and swore and accused my parents of being heartless and job-obsessed, and refused to listen to any of the ‘excuses’ they gave me. A week later, my cousin arrived with his sickly mother and ever-cheerful father, who both constantly told him they loved him. I didn’t speak to him much, but there is one specific conversation that I remember having.

I had gotten into an argument with my mother that morning, and seeing him had bitterly reminded me of his loving family. I thought of his hospitalized mother, rendered mute by a tube down her throat, and, regretting the insensitive words as soon as they’d left my mouth, asked, “How do you know she still loves you, if she can’t even speak?” To my surprise, all he did was pause, and say, “There’s more than one way to show your love.”

I failed to understand what he meant then, but that day at the funeral when I looked at my cousin, I came to a startling realization. He had not said a single word since he had entered the room, and yet I knew -- from the tenderness of his expression, the tremble in his hands as he lit a stick of incense -- that he loved his mother more than anything. All of a sudden, it was as if a dam had burst in my mind, and a torrent of memories rushed out: my first day at kindergarten, hand-in-hand with my parents. My grade eight graduation, my parents smiling proudly as I received an award. The time I had an asthma attack and my Mom sat in my room all night, while my Dad kept a silent vigil outside. It dawned on me at that moment, that these actions were their expressions of love: wordless proclamations of those three little words I had wanted to hear for so long.

In the end, I talked to my parents, and realized that they only pushed me so hard because they wanted me to succeed, and they worked endless hours in order to give me the opportunities they never had. I had been selfish and narrow-minded, too blinded by my vision of what love was supposed to be to realize that I had been loved all along. My eyes are open now, though, and every day I see and appreciate more and more.
of the little gestures that speak of their love. This revelation came to me in the strangest of circumstances, but in the end, I've reconciled with my parents, and finally understood my cousin's words – that there is, indeed, “more than one way to show your love.”

Grade 10 student Catherine from Richmond Hill, Ontario, lives with her parents, grandparents and younger brother. She loves science fiction, and can be found listening to classical dub-step or slam poetry when she isn’t preparing for a debate tournament or a mock trial. One day, as one can likely predict, she plans to become a lawyer. She’d like to thank Mr. Cimetta for his guidance and her family for always being there for her, and awaits the events the future will bring.
They say money can’t buy happiness. As a child, I didn’t believe this. Whenever I thought of myself being happy, I imagined myself living in a mansion, a closet full of clothes, an obedient butler, and a secret underground cave. I guess you could say I wanted to be a female version of Bruce Wayne. I truly believed all of this would make me happy and since money bought these things, I thought money did buy happiness. I discovered this to be false when my family and I lost everything.

When I was young, my parents made enough for us to get by. However, my parents wanted more; they wanted to give their children more. And so, my lower-middle class parents decided to buy a business—a gas station specifically. It was a risk; not just because it required a large loan, but also because gas tank leaks can result in million dollar repairs. Regardless, my parents finalized the deal. Finally, our chance to be happy was standing right in front of us: constructed of cement, metal braces, and our hopes and dreams for the future.

Buying the gas station was the best decision my parents had ever made. After years of continuous hard work, my mom and dad could finally come home whenever they wanted; they could take us on vacations, and we could spend more time together (something we never got to do). This was the fairytale ending we had been waiting for our entire lives.

Of course, my story doesn’t end here and you probably know where it’s headed. Our happiness was short-lived when we found out that there was a leak. It is against government regulations to operate a gas station when there is a leak. As a result, our gas station was shut down. I felt like there was always a huge rock hanging above our heads, and we never even knew about it. The news was hard to comprehend at first. I choked back tears when it finally hit me one day. Losing the gas station meant losing everything. Losing everything. Lost. Those two words broke me. I wanted to scream and punch the walls around me. I was so confused and yet, I knew everything. My parents considered moving to an apartment on numerous occasions, but we couldn’t leave our home. Our home was the one thing we would never give up. And so, my dad got two jobs and my mom, who thought she would never have to work another day in her life, got a job and managed three kids at the same time. One night, as I was lying in bed and thought of anything and everything, I heard a sound that I had never heard before. My dad, a man of steel, was crying. It was such an unfamiliar sound and I remember lying in my bed, motionless, trying to hold back my own tears. I call this time of my life the lowest point you could possibly hit.

Something odd started happening a few weeks later. We accepted the fact that we were low on money and we knew that we had to support each other. We smiled more often. We made a point to eat every meal together. We started laughing and making jokes more often and just being ourselves again. Although our dream of cement and metal braces was crumbling around us, we were still a family. We were together and that’s all that mattered. We were happy, yes happy! Although I had lost everything, I was happy.
This whole experience made me realize that there are things more important than money and it’s not the only thing that can make you happy. In addition, a family bond—our family bond—is strong and enduring. Money and happiness will never be linked as long as people understand that happiness is found in the simplest of places: family.

Grade 10 student, Harkirat Atwal, lives in Brampton, Ontario with her mom, dad, and two amazing sisters. She spends most of her time reading novels and comic books, playing video games, and playing soccer; she also loves poetry. Harkirat dreams of becoming a detective one day. She loves her family more than anything, and this love was her inspiration for her Turning Points essay.
Have you ever felt like you were being judged, felt as if you did not belong? Now, this story is not about me but it is about someone near and dear to my heart; my sister. My sister and I are very close; we do argue a lot, but hey, what siblings don’t? My sister was born with a global delay, in other words, a learning disability. So I guess you could say that she is different, special, and unique. I never imagined that this could ever be a bad thing. I had never noticed to what point people could be so judgmental until it hit me -- hard.

I was about seven years old when my neighbour invited me to her birthday party, and naturally I asked if I could bring my sister along with me. She replied with a simple “no”. Being young and foolish, my only response was “Why? ” To this day, I still remember her response crystal clear; it was what you would call short and sweet, only not so sweet. “She doesn’t belong,” is all she said. The worst part wasn’t her cold and horribly repugnant response. It wasn’t that I had gone to the party without my sister. It wasn’t that she was at home while I went out and had fun without a single hint of guilt in my mind. The worst part was that I hadn’t, even for one moment, considered how this might have affected her emotionally. After all, her sister, the one to whom she looked up, was the one who was pushing her out of her life.

Slowly I began to hide her; I didn’t like to be in public with her; she didn’t understand things quickly and that frustrated me. This might sound horrible but that is how I felt at the time. Until one day, my mom sat down with me to have a talk. She, too, had noticed my change in character. She asked me what was wrong and I remember complaining to her about my sister and how she was annoying and did not understand a thing. My mom then began to explain to me in depth my sister’s condition. After a long eye-opening discussion, I realized how foolish I had been. I guess you could say that was truly my turning point; my wake up call.

That was the moment when I noticed that I did not fully understand her at all. There were things about her that I had never noticed before. For instance she had many talents. I started to take notice of her more and more. I never realized how amazing her memory was. I could barely remember what I ate for breakfast but she could still remember a main character from a book she read ages ago.

My mother explained to me that it wasn’t her fault. No matter how much I protested and complained about what others would say about her, she kept replying with these same words: “If she’s not worrying, then why should you?” And, she was right. I realized that, not even for a single moment, was my sister worrying about what others thought of her. She was happy. She was young. She was different, and that was okay.
Looking back at my behavior, I feel ashamed. No human being should be treated that way. Being different is not a crime, therefore you should not be punished. Now that I am older and have matured, I realized that this is such a vast issue. We are in the twenty-first century after all, discrimination should not still exist. You should not be judged upon a mere imperfection, such as a mental disability; you should celebrate what makes you different and unique. “Be proud of who you are. Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don’t matter and those who matter don’t mind. ” – Dr. Seuss

14-year-old student Shems lives in Toronto, Ontario. She enjoys reading and writing as well as playing soccer in her spare time. Although she has yet to discover what career she would like pursue in the near future, Shems wishes to continue writing for as long as she can. She would also like to thank her English teacher (shout out to Ms. G) for her patience as well as full support.
You know that feeling you get when you wake up, look out the window and realize that it’s raining? Your day just got worse when you realized you were going to have to stand in the freezing rain waiting for your bus. Well, that’s how I used to feel all the time. It’s like everyday was just another dark, rainy day. There was no sun in my life, only dark clouds.

Grade 7 at Lester B. Pearson was probably the year when my mood changed. On the first day, I realized I had no best friend, just a bunch of classmates that I hung out with. I tried to be optimistic about it, but after a while, it felt like the loneliness swallowed me up. Even when I was surrounded by a bunch of people, I felt so alone inside. My self-esteem plummeted; I felt worthless and I didn’t like what I saw when I would look in the mirror. Unfortunately, throwing out my lunch at school became a habit. Months of sadness passed and I developed this urge to hurt myself.

I lost interest in almost everything. There was nothing I wanted to watch on TV, eating felt like a chore and school was my personal prison. Spending six hours a day faking smiles, pretending mean words didn’t hurt me and making excuses for why I didn’t do my homework was too much for me. Every day, I would ignore the growing lump in my throat and the hot tears threatening to spill at any second. I spent my weekends thinking of how easy it would be to finish with my life; but I was too scared to try anything. By the end of the year, the drizzle in my head had turned into a downpour.

Summer finally came and I spent most of my days indoor. Every day was repetitive and slow but it was much better than school. In August, I went to camp and I loved it. The smell of nature and the cool water relaxed me. However, one of the girls in my cabin hated me and I was relieved to finally get back home. I anxiously waited for the first day of school but then my parents announced the worst news ever: I was changing schools. My parents were forcing me to attend Étienne-Brûlé so I could improve my French. Back then, I did not care if I sounded like a hopeless Quebec tourist when I spoke French. I knew that Étienne-Brûlé had many more students and I was sure they were all going to hate me.

During the last week of summer, this thought just came to me. I could march in that school, ignore everyone and not risk getting hurt again or I could give myself a do-over. I could just pretend that those last four years at Lester B. Pearson never happened and count this as my second chance to enjoy my life. I did, ignoring the fact that I was setting myself up for disappointment, and I entered the school hoping it wouldn’t be bad. At first, the school seemed big and my head ached from all the screaming. However, by the end of the day I loved Étienne-Brûlé and I actually came home smiling. Just like that, the storm was over and I was finally happy.
Looking back, I can’t believe how much has changed but I’m grateful for it. If I hadn’t changed schools then, where would I be now? I didn’t forget everything that happened to me in the past; it still lingers in my mind. Some days, I feel depressed and the sadness comes back but my friends make it impossible to not laugh. I realized that when the rain comes, there are only two things you can do. You can hide under your umbrella, run indoors and let it ruin your day or you can look on the bright side of things and jump in the puddles.

Grade 9 student Fatou lives in Toronto with her parents, two brothers and sister. She loves reading and writing; her favorite class is English. She is interested in literature, psychology and law. Fatou hopes to acquire many more opportunities to share written work.
Life is a succession of moments, seconds and minutes. To live each one to the fullest is to succeed. Many people do not appreciate life's blessings and complain that one's everyday life is always the same, that each day is homogeneous to the next. However, what if one of those days you were to lose one of your legs, a finger, or perhaps even an arm? The latter is an event that occurred to me about eight years ago. This is the story of a 6-year-old girl who got scarred for life.

As usual, children tend to play with objects which they are not informed about, and at times, they get hurt. It was one of those normal days where nothing seemed to be out of the ordinary. I woke up, brushed my teeth, and ate breakfast. Not so long after noon, my dad left the apartment in which we were living a while ago, to reclaim our car that had been towed. My mother had been left alone in the apartment to take care of my brother and me. We had been sitting on the couches for a while, entertaining ourselves with a couple of toys. It was at that moment when my mother decided to enter another room. Instantaneously, my brother and I became rebellious and started jumping from couch to couch. It was all fun and games until one of us fell painfully to the ground, crying in pain and yelling for our mom. That one of us was me.

My right arm was broken. This is a common event for many children, but in my case, it had a serious consequence. It was later in the hospital when my family was informed that my arm was in jeopardy of no longer growing to its full length. The reason why it would no longer grow is because my body was not fully developed, as opposed to someone of the age of 17 or so. Because I fell directly on my elbow, which is a very crucial area to get injured, the doctors feared my right arm would remain the length of 14 inches.

It was then when I realized how lucky I was to even have two arms. An enormous amount of people in this world do not even have legs to walk with, or a hand to write with. I realized how many situations where I had to use my right arm. For instance, the three simple actions that occurred before the incident: get myself out of bed, brush my teeth, and eat breakfast all required the use of my arms. It is these minor things in life that we often ignore, until a tragic event forces us to see how lucky we really are.

It was no more than a couple of years later when I received the full details of the situation and understood the seriousness of the predicament I had been in. I could have reached adulthood with half a right arm and my life would be more challenging in ways that I can't even imagine. Thankfully, I proved the doctors wrong and my arm grew normally and healthily.
When the accident happened, I regretted disobeying my mother, I regretted jumping on the couches, and I regretted following my stubborn mind. However now, when I observe it from a different perspective, I am grateful that through this experience I learned to count my blessings sooner than later. It has taught me that in the blink of an eye, you can lose everything, and that we must be appreciative of the blessings that we come across every day. I feel like this experience has been really overwhelming and life changing. In fact, while I sit at my desk and I watch my fingers busily typing this sentence, I feel a sense of gratitude at having been able to accomplish this simple task. And that is a feeling I hope I never lose.

14-year-old student Hania Eid who currently lives in Toronto, Ontario, wishes to succeed in life and become a prosperous lawyer. She enjoys reading, playing table tennis, and writing as a hobby. Hania hopes to one day attend a well-known university in which she can study law. The fact of having to go through a lot of ‘ups and downs’ in life, yet still smiling every day, taught Hania to count her blessings and be thankful for them, thus, inspiring her Turning Point’s essay. She hopes to continue participating in the Turning Points contest each year and have different stories to talk about every single time.
For most people, a turning point is a life changing event, an event that closes a chapter in one's life to begin a new one. It is not something that sneaks up on them; it shakes the earth to its core and brings them to an epiphany in their life. It happens all in a day, an hour, a minute, or a second. It is a moment in their life, one they will never forget or take for granted. Mine was not like that. I did not realize my turning point was a turning point at all until this assignment. It was not ground shaking, there was no epiphany, so I did not even give it a second thought in the moment. It was just something I ought to do. Sorry to disappoint! I took it for granted, I nearly forgot, but what seems natural in our society, what we all must do, is exactly what changed my life. I never even realized it, but my turning point in life was the moment I learned to write.

How many people love to write? My passion for writing goes beyond just liking stories; it has become my heart and soul. I started to write stories and poetry from the moment I learned to print. The reason was simple: I searched constantly for dreams in the nooks and crannies of reality, always to come up with nothing. So, I started to create my own world, weaving into my new reality the light and dreams I never found in this one. I never wrote to be good at it, and I never wrote to impress anyone; I wrote solely to please myself. I used to burn everything I would write, believing that the hope inside the words, the world I had created, would be freed by the flames and materialize somehow in front of me. I do not do that anymore, and maybe that belief I had was silly. However, I think it might have worked. The ashes became the dreams in the shadows beneath the trees, flitting about in the light shining down through the leaves and whimsy in the whisper of the wind over lazy waters on a midsummer day. I could now see in the natural world my reality, the beauties I had never been able to see, freed by the simple words scrawled in my clumsy handwriting.

How many people realize how lucky they are to know how to write? My passion began before I went to school, so I thought it was only my way of perfecting reality. When I started school, I realized it was so much more than that. If I could not write, I could not learn or create stories and poetry. There would be no schooling and no future for me. Being able to read and write opens up so many doors of possibility, as without it we cannot have an education, a vital factor of survival. Writing is the most important skill one can develop, a skill we would be lost without.

How many people find their true selves? That may not seem to have anything to do with writing, because for most it doesn’t, but for me it does. To find one’s self is to find one’s dreams, happiness and reason for being. It is to completely understand what it means to be ourselves. When I went through hard times, when I felt lost, I would drift into my own reality, dream my dreams until the pain went away. From these dreams stemmed my stories and my poetry, my lifeline. Through creating fanciful worlds of mythical creatures, tragic stories of love gone wrong and journeys into the darkest corners of human nature, I found myself. Something I will never lose sight of.
My turning point is writing, writing with my whole being. It is creating a world where I feel safe, calm, at peace. It didn’t change my world; it opened up to me the world I had always dreamed of. My turning point is in this way not an epiphany, an end to an old way of being; my turning point is the starting point, and this is only the beginning.

A grade 10 student in Toronto, Ontario, Stephanie is like any other young girl. She loves to laugh, spend time with friends, and works hard in school. Stephanie often finds herself daydreaming, drifting into a place where the unreal makes perfect sense, much more than the conventional view of reality. Writing was her way of communicating this and is the inspiration for her Turning Points essay. She hopes to one day become a teacher, and share her passion for the written word with future generations.
Have you ever been so self-conscious about your body, you didn’t want to go to school? I’m talking so bad, you didn’t even want to go to the mall, or even grocery store. In Canada, over 31% of children are overweight or obese. This was me before I made the decision to change my life forever by transforming my body and mind.

About 3 years ago I was an overweight, lazy, and unmotivated child who would make excuses to avoid anything because I didn’t want to be seen in public. I hated the thought of people seeing me and how I looked. I hated it so much because everyone I saw was in better shape than I was and they weren’t ashamed of their bodies. I couldn’t wear clothes I wanted or dress how I wanted because of my body type. I even went to drastic measures to look slimmer by wearing an extra-tight compression shirt under my clothes. While I looked slightly slimmer in public, I still saw the real overweight boy I was when I took my shirt off.

Eventually, I got so sick and tired of the state I was in and I decided it had to change. I remember seeing an infomercial on TV one night for a fitness DVD program. Everyone on the commercial looked so perfect. It had to work for me! Thinking this, I bought the program. Thinking all my problems were solved, I started with a huge burst of confidence and energy. Boy was I in for a surprise! These workouts were unimaginably hard. I would have aches and pains for a week straight. Everything I did during the day felt even harder than normal because I was so immobile due to the grueling workouts in this program. It was clear to me that this was no longer an option and, unfortunately, I did what any normal person would do, and I quit.

At this point in my life, I had almost lost all hope. I thought if I couldn’t change my body through training, maybe there was something I could do with my diet. Thinking this, my Mom brought me to a nutritionist so I could get a better understanding of a healthy lifestyle. I still remember how shocked I was when I saw the difference between what I actually ate and what I should be eating. I was told my portions sizes were double what a child my age should be consuming. No wonder I was double the size, too! Luckily, the nutritionist gave me tips for making healthier choices. She suggested instead of starches, have whole wheat and instead of candy, have a fruit. At first I was a bit skeptical about what results this would bring. I thought it might just be a waste of my time and I was hesitant to give up the food that I loved and cherished.

After thinking it through one or two or twenty times, I figured I had nothing to lose, so I decided to give it a shot. This is where my life took a turn for the better. The results I got were out of this world, at least to me. I saw a change in my body and my confidence that I never thought were possible. Week by week my clothes started fitting better and were growing slightly looser. My face was less round and more distinguished. My jaw line started to have more character and I was smiling much more than I usually did. Since the day I discovered the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity, I’ve never felt better. In the last 3 years I’ve managed to lose 30 pounds! This sparked a flame inside me that I never imagined would happen. My whole life had changed just by losing weight.
Before I lost weight, I would sit at home and look for excuses to avoid people and activities. My confidence is much higher now. I can now make better decisions, further involve myself with people around me, and live my life how I really want to: comfortably. Now my life has more meaning to it and I'm not imprisoned by my old body and insecurities. I am a new me.

Grade 10 Student, Matt Sorgini lives in Bradford, Ontario and loves to play sports, lift weights, and travel/explore. He currently attends Holy Trinity Catholic High School. He has hopes to one day be accepted to university and complete a Bachelor's or Master's Degree in business and become a successful businessman. Matt's struggle with insecurity when he was younger and his choice to transform himself inspired his Turning Points essay. He continues to practice the same principles he used in transformation right now with ambitions to become the strongest version of himself.
Grâce à lui

Quand je m’imagine à l’âge de 10 ans - qui ne se peigne pas les cheveux, qui porte les vêtements laids et peu flatteurs - je ris parce que c’est mignon et adorable. Quand j’imagine ma personnalité à 10 ans – très naïve et ignorante – je ressens la honte parce que c’est tellement différent de qui je suis aujourd’hui. Je veux remercier la raison pour cela; il a trois ans, il est une boule d’énergie affectueuse. Il m’a montré la chose la plus importante dans la vie : la famille.

Le moment que j’ai su que j’allais avoir un petit frère j’avais 10 ans et j’étais dans la cuisine avec mes parents et ma petite sœur. Après que ma mère nous a dit, la première chose que j’ai mentionné était, « Faites-vous une blague? » Depuis ce moment, tout a dégringolé. Bien sûr elle était sérieuse, mais j’étais trop jeune et naïve pour savoir qu’elle était très blessée par ce que j’ai dit. J’ai regardé mon père qui semblait très peiné et mal à l’aise. Ce n’était pas longtemps avant que j’ai découvert qu’il n’a pas voulu un autre enfant – et pire, il n’était pas le seul.

Malgré la tension évidente dans ma maison, je n’ai pas pensé beaucoup à propos de cela. Je n’étais pas soucieuse avec ma famille, j’étais seulement préoccupée pour moi-même. Finalement, j’ai détecté que mes parents ne se parlaient pas et qu’ils utilisaient ma sœur et moi pour communiquer. Puis, un jour, je suis retournée chez moi après l’école et j’ai trouvé que tout ce qui appartenait à ma mère avait disparu. Mon père nous a dit que ma mère a déménagé dans une autre maison et ma sœur et moi avons pleuré. Enfin, j’ai commencé à m’inquiéter de l’avenir de ma famille.

Pour les prochains quelques mois, ma vie était bouleversée. Durant les jours de semaine, ma sœur et moi sommes restées dans la maison d’une autre femme où ma mère a loué une chambre. Pendant la fin de semaine, nous sommes restées avec mon père dans la maison de mon enfance. Dépressives et tristes, ma sœur et moi avons marché à l’école ensemble, « voyagé » d’une maison jusqu’à l’autre ensemble. Vraiment, on était seules ensemble. Honnêtement, pendant que ma mère travaillait avec un bébé dans son estomac, ma sœur pleurait chaque soir et mon père était malheureux, le plus grand problème pour moi était à propos de mon propre bonheur.

Lentement, tout a commencé à s’éclairer. Mon père a commencé à aider ma mère peu à peu et enfin, ils ont acheté une maison ensemble pour notre famille pour après la naissance du bébé. Évidemment j’étais très contente que la vie redevenait normale. Mais toujours, j’étais inquiète parce que je dois commencer une nouvelle école, faire de nouveaux amis, et cetera.

Sans alarme, un soir, ma mère a perdu ses eaux. Mon père – plein d’angoisse – a conduit ma sœur et moi chez mes grands parents avant d’aller à l’hôpital. Ma sœur et moi attendions sur un canapé et nous nous tenions par la main, inquiétés.

Le lendemain matin, toute ma famille était dans l’hôpital. J’ai tenu mon frère Ryan pour la première fois.

Après, dans ma nouvelle chambre dans ma nouvelle maison, j’ai réalisé quelque chose d’important. Pendant que mes parents parlent dans leur chambre avec Ryan dans leurs bras, pendant que ma sœur dort dans sa chambre, pendant que je lis mon livre préféré, j’ai réalisé que nous sommes une famille. Une famille...
à qui je dois penser en premier, que je dois aider et aimer pleinement. Une famille qui a fait la même chose pour moi pendant toute ma vie.

C’est vrai que Ryan est seulement un bébé. Qu’il crie et dérange les autres voyageurs dans l’avion. Que les gens pensent que je suis sa mère quand nous faisons du shopping. Malgré cela, je l’aime. Grâce à Ryan, j’ai réalisé l’importance de la famille. Les heures quand ma sœur et moi avons attendu ma mère dans l’hôpital, le moment où j’ai tenu Ryan quand il avait seulement quelques heures de vie, l’instant quand j’ai arrêté de lire et vu ma famille ensemble – tout cela m’a changé pour toujours.

Connie is a grade nine student residing in Mississauga, Ontario. She loves to listen to all kinds of genres of music, watch light-hearted comedic films, and travel – which, frankly, she hasn’t done very much of. She is hesitant to write autobiographies, yet has found an affiliation with writing. One day, Connie hopes to work in a job she loves (an occupation yet to be discovered), learn many more languages in addition to Korean, English, and French, and among other things, own a cat.
La volonté de persévérer

Je me souviens le chemin de terre devant nous, et j’ouvre la fenêtre pour voir le plus bleu de tous les ciels. Le jour semblait qu’il ne pouvait pas finir, avec la sensation de la satisfaction répandue dans l’air. Ma famille et moi nous dirigeons vers un orphelinat à la périphérie d’Ndola, une petite ville en Zambie, un pays enclavé d’Afrique australe. J’avais visité seulement quelques semaines en août 2008 pour rencontrer ma parenté éloignée, mais ma mère a insisté que ma sœur et moi visitions « pour voir comment c’est ». En arrière du fourgon, il y avait des tas de cahiers, contre des sacs du mealie-meal, une céréale de base faite de maïs. J’étais un peu compatissant parce que ces enfants n’avaient pas de choses simples que j’utilisais tous les jours.

Soudain, nous sommes entrés dans un portail de bois. J’ai plissé mes yeux, et j’essayais de déchiffrer les mouvements au loin. Quand nous nous sommes rapprochés, les contours des enfants sont devenus clairs. Le fourgon s’est arrêté brusquement sous un stationnement de fortune. Comme je sortais, j’ai remarqué pour la première fois que les enfants jouaient joyeusement; quelques-uns jouaient à chat, des autres jouaient à cache-cache. C’était une ressemblance frappante à la récréation à l’école, où il y avait des visages qui souriaient et riaient partout où je regardais. J’ai senti pour un moment que tout était parfait; que le mal n’existait pas ici.

Une religieuse de la mission locale nous a appelés. Pendant que des bénévoles déchargeaient le fourgon, elle nous a conduit aux bâtiments. Premièrement, nous sommes entrés dans les salles de classes. Tout à coup, les étudiants ont commencé à nous accueillir. Comme nous avons distribué les cahiers et des crayons, la religieuse a expliqué que les étudiants avaient les aspirations de devenir des médecins, des ingénieurs, des avocats, et toutes les autres carrières imaginables. Nous continuons notre chemin et je voyais des étudiants concentrés sur une variété de sujets, de la couture à la musique. Sur leurs visages étaient le regard évident de la détermination, de la réussite.

Après nous sommes allés au logement. C’était là quand les choses ont commencé à dégringoler. Rangée par rangée étaient des lits superposés, à perte de vue. Les affaires étaient rares, sauf pour le nounours de quelques enfants. Cela ne faisait pas de sens. Je me suis tournée à la religieuse, et j’ai demandé la raison pourquoi il y avait tant de lits. Soudainement, elle a commencé à prononcer des mots inconnus. Je me sentais qu’elle parlait une langue étrangère, avec des mots que je ne pouvais pas comprendre. Comme ma maman traduisait, les mots couraient dans ma tête; le VIH et le SIDA, la malaria et l’abus. J’ai commencé à comprendre les mots, au moment où j’ai bien compris la situation. J’ai senti comme si les morceaux d’un puzzle qui était une fois complet étaient maintenant cassés en milliers morceaux. Je ne pouvais pas comprendre comment les visages d’innocence pouvaient voir tellement de choses, et avoir encore la résolution de persévérer. Je regardais par la fenêtre à côté de moi. Les étudiants jouaient toujours au soccer; toujours souriants, toujours riant. À ce moment-là, j’ai réalisé les innombrables opportunités que j’avais au Canada; dans un pays où je savais que mon futur était fiable. Comme nous sortions du bâtiment, j’ai entrepris de prendre le chemin que je savais devoir prendre. Quoi qu’il arrive, je vais continuer pour réussir. Je ferai tout mon possible pour améliorer la vie de ces gens innocents.

Comme le fourgon sortait le portail, j’ai regardé en arrière pour la dernière fois. Là-bas, tous les enfants ont couru après nous, encore portant le même sourire, comme si tout était parfait. J’ai regardé en avant.
Devant nous était le chemin de terre, avec les empreintes du fourgon toujours frais. Dans les yeux du monde, rien n’a changé. Mais pour moi, mes responsabilités se sont transformées. J’ai réalisé que quand nous créons des possibilités pour ces gens innocents, nous nous donnons l’opportunité d’améliorer les peuples partout dans le monde. Pour moi, ça fait toute la différence.

Rushay, a grade nine IB student, lives in Mississauga, Ontario, with his parents and older sister, Trisha. He loves to take on challenges, and has many large achievements, including a second degree Black Belt in Taekwondo, playing piano at the Grade 8 level, and he is on track to becoming a lifeguard. In addition, he loves skating, golf, fencing, as well as learning languages! When he’s not tinkering with computers or writing programs, Rushay enjoys participating in public speaking competitions, and talking about issues that he feels strongly about. Rushay aspires to become a medical professional, so that he can one day provide care and aid to those all around the world.
La pièce manquante

Pendant longtemps, j’étais seule. Eh bien, pas vraiment seule. J’avais mes parents, des amis, des jouets et des animaux, bien sûr. Mais cela ne m’a jamais satisfait. Quelque chose semblait manquer. J’étais toujours à la recherche, mais je n’ai jamais pu vraiment le trouver. Puis, soudain, alors que je regardais deux petits frères construire des châteaux de sable ensemble sur la plage, pendant que j’étais seule, j’ai réalisé que ce qu’il manquait était un frère ou une sœur.

Qu’est-ce que cela signifie avoir un frère ou une sœur, je me demandais. C’est juste un autre membre de la famille, une autre personne avec qui vous construisez des châteaux de sable. Et encore, il y avait quelque chose à propos de la manière dont les deux frères s’entraidaient, qui m’a fait sentir seule. Sans doute, leurs châteaux étaient beaucoup mieux que le mien, tombant en morceaux et manquant de créativité. Et alors une petite version de moi à l’âge de six ans demandait à mes parents : « Donnez-moi une sœur ou un frère ». « Mais tu as beaucoup d’amis, 2 oiseaux, et des jouets, n’est-ce pas déjà assez ? » ils me répondaient. Les années passaient. J’ai croisé les doigts, prié pour quelque miracle et pour moi pour d’«obtenir» la fratrie. Ma mère avait presque quarante ans. J’avais déjà douze ans à l’époque, et je me suis rendue compte que les femmes à cet âge courent un plus grand risque d’avoir une grossesse difficile. Donc j’ai arrêté de poser cette question. Mes oiseaux domestiques sont morts et tout ce que je voulais était alors un chien. L’amour d’un chien me suffirait de plus, je me disais. Bien sûr, les bébés sont mignons, mais aussi les chiots. Un jour ma vie a changé pour toujours. Après ma promenade misérable sous la pluie, je suis entrée dans la maison, tout de suite saluée par mes parents, surexcités, un peu nerveux, mais en général animés de joie. « Nous allons avoir un bébé! Tu auras une petite sœur! » ils m’ont dit, et j’ai sauté de joie et j’ai embrassé les deux, oubliant toute la pluie, la misère, la boue et la solitude. Neuf mois se sont écoulés, et, comme prévu, le jour de naissance est arrivé. Ma mère lui a annoncé « qu’il est temps. » Le moment de ma crise d’angoisse, le premier et seul que j’ai jamais eu, est arrivé. Tout semblait se passer au ralenti. J’ai commencé l’hyperventilation, à m’emballer des choses inutiles dans des sacs au hasard, en courant partout, et en même temps essayant de dépêcher mon père, mais tout en vain. Il semblait, pour mes parents, arriver au moment d’être une chose ordinaire. Une fois enfin dans la voiture, la seule chose qui m’a calmée était une chanson que j’ai chantée pour moi, toute la route à l’hôpital. Les infirmières ont accueilli mes parents immédiatement quand nous sommes arrivés à la maternité, et m’ont dit de m’asseoir dans la salle d’attente. Il me semblait une éternité que j’ai attendu. Nerveusement j’ai marché dans les couloirs de l’hôpital encore toute seule cette fois pour la dernière fois, avant qu’une autre infirmière m’a trouvée et a annoncée que ma mère a donné naissance. J’ai entendu les cris avant même d’entrer dans la salle d’accouchement. Elle était là, minuscule, tremblante et tellement délicate. La petite qui a toujours été absente de ma vie, maintenant trouvée. C’était une fille! Je me suis agenouillée et j’ai tenu ses petites mains. Même après plusieurs semaines à la maison, je ne pouvais pas croire que je n’étais plus seule dans ce monde. Tout à coup, ce n’était pas seulement nous trois, et moi, toute seule. Oui, mes parents et moi avons beaucoup de travail à faire, plus de choses à de nous soucier, mais nous avons aussi obtenu une personne de plus pour être heureux et reconnaissants. Enfin réussi une sœur, un ami et un partenaire.
Le rêve d’avoir une sœur, c’était réalité. D’une certaine manière, les frères et les sœurs ne perdent jamais ce lien spécial qu’ils partagent, et je peux vous promettre, Emilie et moi construirons quelques uns des meilleurs châteaux de sable un jour.

Fifteen-year-old Karina is a grade nine student in Peel District School Board. She lives in Mississauga, enjoys film, art, literature and playing the piano. Although she has been to many countries in the past, Karina hopes to travel more in the future. She is also aspiring to become a doctor and wants to, someday, learn Italian.
Le livre qui a changé ma vie

Je vais toujours me souvenir de mon premier jour à ma nouvelle école en septième année – mon école précédente a été démolie, alors tous mes amis ont changé d’écoles avec moi. Je me rappelle que j’étais une élève stressée, distraite et surtout paresseuse en sixième année. Ce jour là n’était pas trop significant pour les autres. Pour moi, cependant une phrase dite par ma nouvelle enseignante, a marqué le commencement du changement de moi-même.

Le livre “Les sept habitudes des jeunes efficaces”, est un livre que je vous recommande de lire. Il est un excellent livre pour le développement de votre caractère, qui explique l’importance de prendre de l’initiative, et qui peut vous aider à réussir. J’ai pris ces mots (ou les mots similaires) dits par mon enseignante, Mlle Matheson, comme une blague. Est-elle vraiment sérieuse? , j’ai pensé. Mais lorsque le weekend est arrivé, mon père m’a encouragé à le lire.

Ce livre n’était pas ennuyeux, en fait, il était intéressant et amusant. Il m’a enseigné les sept habitudes des jeunes efficacies, mais que l’apprentissage de ses sept habitudes est pas à pas, en ordre. Ce livre m’a aussi enseigné à réfléchir sur mes habitudes déjà établies.

J’ai découvert que la raison que j’étais stressée était parce que mes habitudes de travail était inefficacies. J’étais trop paresseux, je regardais trop de la television, je ne laissais pas assez de temps pour faire mes devoirs et tous mes autres activités en même temps. Be proactive, ou soyez proactive, était la première habitude. Ça veut dire que tu dois prendre de la responsabilité pour les actions et les décisions. J’ai dû faire face à la réalité que c’était ma faute que j’avais autant de pression l’année dernière. Ce livre m’a motive à changer mes manières et de prendre, sérieusement, les leçons ce livre pouvait m’enseigner. En lisant Les Sept Habitudes, je commençais à avoir une mentalité différente.

Commencer avec la fin dans vos pensées était la deuxième habitude. Cette habitude m’a oblige de definir mes objectifs dans ma vie. Qui est-ce que je veux être dans un an? Est-ce que je veux aller à l’université? Ces questions, je devais me poser en planifiant. Mais je n’ai pas encore résolu mon problème de mon manqué en compétences de gestion de temps.

La troisième habitude était “Put first things first”, ou Mettez les premières choses premières. Ça veut dire de faire les tâches les plus importantes en premier, avant de faire d’autres choses. De definir vos objectifs. À la suite, j’ai adopté les compétences organisationnelles, réduire le temps que je regarde la television, et planifier quand je ferai tous mes tâches du jour autour de mes activités parascolaires. Mes notes sont montées et je suis devenue moins stressée. Je m’amusais plus pendant la septième et huitième année. Je suis maintenant travailleuse et diciplinée, mais j’ai du temps pour m’amuser aussi.
Même si mon amélioration m’a autant aidé, j’ai seulement maîtrisé les trois premières habitudes. J’ai encore un long chemin à marcher, et ses habitudes sont apprises pas à pas. Les quatre habitudes finales vont m’enseigner comment améliorer mes relations avec les autres, et résister à la pression des pairs. À partir de maintenant, je dois toujours me renouveler pour être capable de suivre mes habitudes courantes. Tout le monde doit s’améliorer pour se maintenir avec un monde qui change et qui devient plus compétitif. Et moi, je ne vais pas me laisser distancer.

Yan Yan Tran is a Grade 9 student living in Mississauga, Ontario. She loves to read novels and learn new things. Yan Yan has a busy schedule with competitive swimming and piano lessons. She hopes to one day study engineering or the sciences in university, as well as learn multiple new languages and musical instruments.
Une identité dans la transparence

Chaque personne dans ce monde porte un masque. Chaque jour, ce masque est mis en place pour receler nos insécurités, nos secrets et notre honte. Ces masques peuvent être simplement les différentes attitudes, ou les mensonges complexes. C’est la façon de laquelle notre société fonctionne. Moi, je présentais presque un masque pour chaque personne avec qui je parlais. Beaucoup pensent que c’est normal, car les réactions aux personnes différentes varient, mais, sous tous ces masques, j’ai commencé à perdre mon identité. Je ne connaissais plus la personne que je voyais dans le miroir et il m’a fallu beaucoup pour trouver une échappatoire.


Pendant le collège, j’ai construit des masques qui montraient l’intelligence, l’obéissance, l’amitié et un esprit fort, car ces choses étaient les qualités recherchées par les individus qui m’entouraient. Comme ça, il n’y aurait personne que je pouvais décevoir. Un projet que j’ai dû faire en classe d’anglais était un monologue à propos de moi-même. J’ai pris beaucoup de caution quand j’ai écrit cette pièce, car un lapsus de ma part et je risquais la découverte, le moment que quelqu’un dit : « Vraiment? Dit-elle la vérité? » Ce monologue était un des devoirs les plus difficiles que j’avais fait.

Je suis entrée dans une école loin de ma maison pour le lycée et personne ne me connaissait là. J’ai pensé que c’était une chance de recommencer, mais j’avais peur. Si j’enlevais tous mes masques, je n’étais pas sûre qu’il y ait quelque chose là-dessous. Alors, j’ai continué à vivre ma mascarade. Terrifiée que si je m’exposais je ne serais jugée ou que je perdrais tout ce que j’avais, j’ai continué de créer plus de fausses identités. Après quelques mois j’ai pensé que j’avais des amis, mais quand comme expérience, je les avais abandonnés sans leur dire, personne n’a remarqué que je n’étais pas là. C’était d’accord si je n’existaïs pas.

Pendant ce temps, les adolescents à mon église ont planifié une retraite pour la fin de semaine; le thème était la transparence. Comme j’avais réagi au monologue, j’ai eu peur. J’ai hésité d’aller, mais si mes amis allaient, ils m’ont convaincu de participer. Le samedi, c’était d’accord. Le pasteur qui nous accompagnait a parlé de comment la transparence entre les sœurs et les frères spirituels étaient tellement importants. À ce moment, je ne pensais pas à ça. Tout ce qui me concernait était de garder mes masques en place. Je ne voudrais pas être transparente.

Mais, plus je regardais mes relations avec les autres, comme mes amis et même ma famille, je trouvais que c’était tout un grand mensonge. Si je n’étais pas une de mes identités fausses, est-ce que ces personnes m’aimeraient? Alors, qui suis-je? Je ne savais pas.

Le dimanche, j’étais préparée pour un autre jour normal. Le moment que j’ai vu que mes amis que je connaissais pendant longtemps étaient d’accord sans moi, comme mes amis à l’école qui je ne connais que...
quelques mois, ma mascarade était complètement détruite. J’ai décidé de trouver une des conseillères et lui ai parlé de tout. De mes mensonges, de ma solitude, de mes pensées au suicide et que j’étais perdue sans une identité. J’ai enlevé mes masques et je suis devenue transparente. C’était un moment de soulagement, car c’était possible de recommencer enfin.

Oui, je sais que je vais continuer parfois à avoir des moments où je dois utiliser des réactions fausses, ou même mentir. Néanmoins, maintenant je sais que ma vie n’est plus construite de masques et que si je vis une vie transparente, je trouverai un jour ma propre identité.

Beata is a ninth grade student living in Mississauga, Ontario. She enjoys listening to music and playing the tenor saxophone and piano. While she likes swimming and long jumping, Beata also loves learning to speak and write in different languages. With the support of her parents, she speaks Cantonese, English, French, and Mandarin, and is trying her hand at German, Swedish, and Japanese.
Trouver la confiance est comme trouver la fin d’un arc-en-ciel. Ce n’est pas possible de la trouver complètement, parce que nous devons chercher beaucoup dans notre âme, mais j’ai découvert qu’elle peut apporter les grands changements dans nos vies.

Ma première journée scolaire au Canada me montre que j’étais un glaçon en enfer. Quand j’ai essayé de parler, je me suis arrêtée et mes mots étaient avalés par ma peur. Je me sentais très seule et je cherchais avec acharnement quelqu’un à qui parler, bien que ma terreur d’être repoussée me guide dans la direction de la solidarité. Néanmoins, toute ma perception a changé après que j’ai terminé une tâche spéciale.

Le jour où je l’ai reçue, je suis entrée dans l’abîme de la classe de musique avec précaution, où le professeur nous donnait un nouveau projet – une composition. D’abord, j’ai eu peur de l’inconnu atroce, mais je voulais en faire une bonne création. Pourtant, à ce moment, je sentais qu’il alimentait seulement les vagues qui me déchiraient et j’étais la seule personne qui pouvait me sauver.

Je n’ai pas su comment réaliser ce projet, mais je n’ai pas voulu décevoir quelqu’un, surtout moi. Pendant mon moment plus agité, j’ai regardé instinctivement à ma gauche. Je me suis amusée quand j’ai réalisé qu’il neigeait pour la première fois cette année ! Mon cœur s’est rempli de beaucoup de joie quand j’ai vu les petits flocons de neige tomber lentement. Ils sont venus de toutes les directions et ont formé une couverture blanche sur la terre. C’était le plus beau moment, je me suis sentie libre, tout mon corps a été rempli avec beaucoup d’idées créatives qui ont alimenté mon cerveau. J’ai regardé ma feuille de papier et j’y ai couché mes pensées.

Le lendemain, j’étais très excitée de montrer ma création. On devait donner la tâche ce jour-là mais mon professeur n’a rien demandé. J’ai trouvé le courage de lui donner ma composition. Il l’a examinée et son visage s’est illuminé de plaisir. Il a souri et dit :

« Ouah ! Ça c’est très bien ! »

J’étais comblée parce que mon travail a été reconnu.

Bientôt, le concert d’hiver est venu. La première chose qui est apparue a été une présentation qui a compris mon nom et ma composition « La neige ». Les larmes ont rempli mes yeux lentement comme elles ont essayé de couler de la même manière que les rivières sur mes joues. Mon cœur battait avec bonheur en même temps. Mes collègues à côté de moi ont démontré la compassion pour la première fois. Ils m’ont soutenue et cette fois, ils m’ont aidée à échapper les vagues. Quand la présentation s’est finie, une professeure qui a parlé vers le public a demandé que je me lève. J’ai été effrayée de faire ça, mais j’ai cherché ma confiance et je me suis levée fièrement. J’ai reçu la reconnaissance pour mon travail. Même si j’étais comme une aiguille dans une meule de foin, je me sentais comblée, joyeuse et positive, pas effrayée de ce que les autres peuvent penser de moi. J’ai apprécié mon identité vraiment.

Tout a changé après cette journée, par exemple mes accomplissements académiques ont brillé et le plus important, j’ai fait des amitiés qui durent toujours. Elles m’aident dans les moments impossibles et sont mes trésors. Ma mentalité a changé aussi. Je peux résoudre les problèmes plus vite maintenant et mieux comprendre les conceptions. L’abîme de la musique est devenu ma nouvelle maison où j’ai trouvé beaucoup
de mes passe-temps préférés actuels. Cette expérience a été d’or. Je ne sais pas où je serais maintenant si elle ne s’était pas passée. Bien qu’il n’est pas possible d’accomplir la confiance complète, tous doivent la rechercher, parce qu’elle peut ouvrir l’esprit aux chemins peu imaginables.

Fourteen-year-old Milena was born in Romania and came to Canada with her parents in 2010. She is an inquisitive learner, looking to extend her curious mind in numerous areas. Some of her passions include competitive swimming, mathematics, and languages for which she won multiple awards, and, of course, music, which inspired her Turning Points essay. Milena would like to thank her French teacher, Mlle Andrei, her family and friends for supporting her writing efforts throughout this beautiful journey.

Greater Toronto Area, Ontario
Ma passion, ma vie

Comme un individuel mûrissant, c’est difficile de décider qu’est-ce que vous voulez faire avec votre vie. Tant de professions, tant de possibilités. On sait (comme on progresse à travers le lycée), qu’on doit finalement prendre une décision importante. Aussi, on doit prendre une décision sage; on doit choisir une carrière dans laquelle on est fort, une carrière qu’on aime, et une carrière qu’on peut faire pour longtemps. Quelques personnes savent ce qu’ils veulent faire l’un âge très jeune. Quelques personnes n’ont aucune idée et sont forcées dans une occupation. Mais il y a des certaines personnes qui sont nées à faire quelque chose. Je crois que je suis une des telles personnes.

Ma passion était ma passion depuis longtemps. Au début, c’était seulement un intérêt, et je ne pensais pas qu’il se transformerait à une passion. Lentement, j’ai commencé à la prendre plus au sérieux. Cet intérêt est devenu passion, et je ne pouvais pas m’arrêter d’y penser. La réalisation que je veux poursuivre ma passion pour le reste de ma vie était une sensation extraordinaire. Finalement, après les obstacles personnels que j’ai vaincus dans ma vie, je me suis senti que je peux créer une différence dans le monde. À mon avis, choisir votre carrière est plus d’être prospère; c’est choisir une carrière et faire une différence dans les vies des autres.

Beaucoup d’obstacles se sont manifestés dans ma vie qui essayaient de m’arrêter de faire ce que je veux faire. C’est difficile parce que quelques-uns de ces obstacles sont la famille et des amis qui veulent le meilleur pour moi. Mais je crois réellement qu’on réussit le plus quand on adore ce qu’on fait. Si votre cœur n’est pas dans votre travail, vous ne pouvez pas arriver à votre potentiel. Je sais que ma carrière est une passion quand je mets à côté les vœux des autres et me concentre sur ce que je veux faire. Un autre obstacle est qu’il est très difficile à gagner un poste dans cette industrie. Il y a beaucoup de personnes qui veulent un poste, mais très peu de personnes qui en trouvent un.

C’est clair que je ne veux pas encore révéler ma passion au monde alors, je ne dis pas ma passion dans cette dissertation. Je pense que c’est parce que je suis craintif des réactions de ma famille, mes amis et le monde en général. Ce n’est pas juste; tout le monde doit être libre à suivre leurs rêves sans appréhension. Des personnes pensent que je dois être médecin ou technicien puisque je suis intelligent. Néanmoins, l’intelligence n’est pas tout. Il y a beaucoup d’aspects d’une personne : sa créativité, son intelligence, sa constitution athlétique. Je pense que je dois développer de l’estime de moi, et puis je peux dire au monde que c’est ce que je veux faire, et personne ne peut m’arrêter.

Je sais qu’un jour, je pourrai librement poursuivre ma passion, sans appréhension ou peur. Je veux montrer ma passion au monde, et la raison pour laquelle je ne peux pas faire autre chose. Lorsque ce jour arrive, je regarderai à l’arrière au jour que j’ai me suis rendu compte de ma passion. Je crois que c’est important pour les jeunes de savoir qu’ils ne doivent pas arrêter de suivre leurs passions. Il y aura beaucoup d’obstacles, mais c’est important de continuer à suivre les rêves.

Prachir Pasricha is a Grade 9 student living in Mississauga, Ontario. He enjoys playing the piano, reading, listening to music, playing tennis, and swimming. Prachir’s favourite subject is English, and he is open to any career opportunity. He hopes to continue to pursue his love of writing for fun and in contests, and to one day travel the world.


Un jour, je suis restée dans l’école pendant la récréation avec mon enseignant de musique. Je l’aidais quand j’ai entendu quelqu’un dans le gymnase. Une fille jouait de la guitare et chantait. Ses amis chantaient et tapaient des mains. C’était à ce moment que j’ai pensé : je peux jouer de la guitare aussi! Tous mes enseignants de musique ont dit que j’ai beaucoup de talent en musique. Alors, c’est ce que je veux faire!

Pour quelques temps, je ne parle pas de mon envie. Un jour, j’étais assise dans la cuisine avec ma mère.

« Mama, j’ai une idée, mais tu ne ris pas, compris? » j’ai dit, avec hésitation. Elle m’a regardée avec curiosité.

« Qu’est-ce que tu veux maintenant? »

« Je veux apprendre à jouer de la guitare. » J’ai attendu pour la réponse de ma mère. Elle a pensé pour quelques temps.

« Si tu es sérieuse, tu peux apprendre à jouer de la guitare, » elle a finalement répondu. Après ça, je me suis inscrite à Long and McQuade pour les cours. Ici, j’ai rencontré mon prof, Luca Gagliano. Il m’a enseignée tout ce que je connais de la guitare.

J’ai trouvé que c’était plus qu’un hobby, mais je ne l’ai pas reconnu immédiatement. En 7ème année, je suis allée à Camilla. J’ai rencontré ma professeure de musique à l’école, Mme. A. Je pense à elle comme une grande inspiration. Elle m’a aidée pendant deux années quand je jouais de la clarinette dans sa classe. Elle m’a encouragée à jouer de la musique pour les autres personnes. En 8ème année, j’ai joué de la guitare avec ma meilleure amie qui a chanté pour toute l’école dans un concours de talents. Tous les élèves ont applaudi pour nous et mes enseignants étaient très impressionnés. Je ne pouvais pas jouer de la guitare pour le public avant du concours de talents. Maintenant, il n’y a nulle part où je me sens plus à l’aise que derrière de ma guitare. Je l’ai déjà dit, mais je le dis encore : oui, tout le monde est différent, mais c’est à cause de ce que nous faisons. À long terme, ce que nous portons n’est pas important. Nos actions décrivent qui nous sommes. Ce jour-là, quand j’ai écouté la fille dans le gymnase, j’ai découvert ma passion. Je pense que c’est important que tout le monde a une passion, quelque chose qui est plus qu’un passe-temps. Pour moi, quand je suis stressée, ou triste, ou je m’ennuie simplement, je joue de la guitare et je me sens heureuse. L’expression libre est-ce que les personnes cherchent pendant toutes leurs vies. Je suis chanceuse que j’ai trouvé le mien pendant ma
jeunesse. La musique m’a aidé à avoir un esprit ouvert envers le monde et à accepter mes différences. Cette expérience m’a enseigné une leçon précieuse :

« Il ne faut jamais être harcelé au silence. Ne jamais vous laisser être victimisé. Ne jamais accepter une définition de votre vie qui n’est pas à vous, définir vous-même. » – Harvey Fierstein

Srobona is a grade 9 student who loves reading, writing and music. Besides playing the clarinet and guitar, Srobona enjoys riding horses and volunteering in the community. She also enjoys travelling with her family to European countries, like Italy and Switzerland. She would like to thank her French teacher for supporting her in this competition.
Une leçon au barbare

En tant qu’étudiant en Chine, vivre la dissidence n’était pas facile pour moi. Au cours des cinq années à l’école élémentaire, on devenait naturellement obéissant soit aux parents soit aux enseignants - je n’avais pas le droit de m’opposer - c’était le privilège des adultes. La couverture d’autorité m’éclipsait, m’engloutissait et m’asphyxiais au point que je ne pouvais plus voir au-delà du voile de la suprématie.

À la fois, je voulais le changement; je voulais m’échapper à des règles strictes, les punitions sévères et le manque de cordialité.


Ce jour-là, un individu malchanceux a franchi la ligne rouge. Je pouvais me souvenir encore de son visage effrayé quand notre professeur s’est approché de lui : « Où est le cahier? » « Je... j’ai oublié » Il a bégayé timidement. Le silence dans la salle est devenu assourdissant pendant que nous attendions tous nerveusement pour son châtiment. Il n’y avait plus besoin de conversation quand notre professeur a traîné bestialement l’élève par l’oreille pour se tenir en face de la classe, où une tempête de réprimandes dérogatoires l’attendaient : « Barbare! Imbécile ! » L’étudiant avait l’air misérable. Il sanglotait et criait, trop gêné pour regarder ses camarades de classe. Le châtiment le plus sévère de tous est venu plus tard, quand le professeur, furieux, a commencé à frapper l’élève au hasard avec un bâton de mètre. Enfin, l’enseignant a donné un sujet rare de dissertation pour la journée : « Devrait-on punir le barbare ? ».

J’étais furieux : « Barbare? Ce garçon sans défense? »


Kevin was born in China and came to Canada at the age of ten. He is passionate about math and science academically. Kevin is learning Java and C++ and plans to go to the University of Waterloo. He loves the arts, as he has been playing guitar for 4 years and taking art lessons since the age of eleven. In his spare time, Kevin plays badminton and hikes with his family at various provincial parks.
“The key to everything is patience. You get the chicken by hatching the egg – not by smashing it.” – Arnold Glasow

Justin Raczynski
First Place – Grade 11 & 12 (English)
Simcoe Muskoka District Catholic School Board

A Journey Few Will Take

Can you imagine having something called POTS? No, all you recreational drug users, I don’t do pot; I have POTS -- Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome. Standing sends my normal heart rate to post marathon -- in mere minutes. If that isn’t enough, I also have Vasovagal Syncope -- sometimes my blood pressure goes so low I pass out. These complex medical words and a host of medical symptoms plagued my entire childhood and robbed me of my adolescence.

Grab your coat – we’re going to trudge through a path, a path of countless diagnoses and misdiagnoses that have affected my entire life. This thing has no boundaries. It has interrupted tons of school days, hockey and soccer games, ski trips, vacations, and has changed every aspect of my life.

At the tender age of 3, a simple trip to the mall would reveal the first real taste of what was to come. I was in the middle of KFC, when suddenly I stood up, announced I didn’t feel well, and passed out in the cleaning lady’s wash pail. The pail’s germs were the least of the worries that incident foreshadowed.

Fast forward 2 years; it’s 9:05, grade 1. We all stand up from our little desks. “O Canada” resonates -- I don’t feel good. I need to sit down. No, I must stand quietly. My head is spinning. *Thud*. My head connects with the bookcase and all is quiet. I “awake”, my head is throbbing and my mom is in my classroom. The adults all have such serious looks on their faces. I lift my hand to feel the welt swelling above my brow. My mom takes my hand and says we have to go home. I can hardly walk. The next day, I return to school. My friends surround me with limitless questions. I don’t want to talk about it, I just want to pretend it never happened; I don’t like the attention.

These “episodes” replay themselves countless times, yet each circumstance is a little different. Doctors’ visits, numerous hospital admissions, EEGs, EKGs, CT scans, MRIs, ECGs, biopsies; blood, DNA, and chromosome testing; X-rays, emergency visits, IVs, and operations. I remember the little gown the nurse once passed me. I remember thinking, “I’m a boy -- don’t they have pajamas?” I remember the smells: overwhelmingly sterile. I remember feeling so little on the operating table wanting to ask for my mom, yet knowing I needed to be brave; it would soon be over. I awoke in pain. I just want to go home. When can I go home?

Yet, I am one of the lucky ones. If you stroll the halls of Sick Kids, you see the faces of death. IV poles too big for a child to maneuver. Tubes and hoses coming out from all directions, bags of all sizes and colours, and the look on the fretful parents’ faces reveal the situation. The beeping cracks the silence as the machine sounds the end of the infusion. How much more can that little body endure? It is at these times I am thankful my path is not the same.
So many tests and yet no concrete answers; diagnoses and misdiagnoses. For 13 years the medical community is stumped. I figure more than 50 doctors have either examined me or my ever growing medical file. Finally, I met Dr. Guzman, who 5 minutes into the exam, stated that he thought he knew part of what was wrong – and he did. A simple tilt table test showed I had Dysautonomia -- the dysfunction of the autonomic nervous system. Doesn’t sound that bad, does it? Unfortunately, the autonomic nervous system controls so much: temperature, gut function, appetite, exercise tolerance, heat tolerance, fatigue, heart rate, blood pressure; the list goes on…. Believe me at 6 feet 7 inches, when your blood pressure bottoms out, it’s a lot farther to the ground.

Most recently, Adrenal Insufficiency has been added to the mix. Apparently, my pituitary has gone on vacation without me. I am now steroid dependant. Odds are about 1 in 100,000 but my ticket was selected. When most teenagers are breaking curfew, out partying, and staying up way past their bedtimes, my body requires at least 12 hours of sleep per night. I’m definitely not the life of the party!

These past few years, my symptoms have multiplied. I have only attended school for 3 days in almost a year (I won’t be winning the attendance award). My biggest excitement recently was a trip to the hospital in an ambulance. I have also started a Cardiac Rehab program and I’m surrounded by a large group of walkers, wrinkles, and blue hair; I definitely make an impact statement.

So, after years of secrecy, why take off my cloak now? I have come to the conclusion that I need to stand up and make people aware of these illnesses. It has been a long painful journey that I wouldn’t wish on my very worst enemy. I have always felt that my medical concerns were a private thing, something I don’t share with most people. I just want people to take me for who I am, but it is becoming more apparent that staying silent not only doesn’t help me, it is the very thing that keeps others from being diagnosed.

Even a cutting edge hospital like Sick Kids did not know enough about this to make the diagnosis themselves. Others will have my map, the map I used to explore this dungeon of medical conditions I’ve faced. Med students are taught: “when you hear hoof-beats, think horses” -- I’m proof zebras do exist too. Sometimes you need to think outside the box. This journey is one few will take and has taken its toll, but it has made me who I am and realise, as a society, we take too much for granted. It’s the hand I was dealt; it’s up to me what I choose to do with the cards.

Justin is a Grade 12 student who is currently doing study at home in Bradford, Ontario due to ongoing health concerns. Despite the circumstances, Justin has maintained his wit, sense of humour, and positive outlook. He hopes sharing his journey will inspire others, enlighten the medical community, and educate the public. He plans to pursue a career in computers.
The Perfect Nightmare

Everyone has a story. Sometimes it's a sad story that actually changes who they are. It makes them strive to do better and rid themselves of the demons living inside them. It makes one realize that they never knew the harsh realities of life until their parents gave them the boot. What's even worse is trying to fill that empty space in their heart once they've been let down time and time again by dear old dad.

It wasn't always so hard to cope with being the family outcast. Shortly after I met my boyfriend, Jordan, we got our own apartment. My first apartment. MY home. No one could kick me out again and again. No hard ass father figure nagging at me all the time. No more being a victim in my own home. The smell of freedom washing over me was as refreshing as the waves tickling my toes at the beach. I felt like I was floating above everyone else. A young teen with my own apartment! It was going great for the first couple of months. I had fallen irrevocably in love with Jordan. We got along so well and grew to be extremely close. We finished each other's sentences. He was my best friend and we were in love. It wasn't just our relationship that made it so great. The neighborhood we lived in was so nice, peaceful almost. But then came the parties and the excessive drinking and the marijuana and the cocaine...

Having no responsibilities means not having a care in the world. I had an amazing boyfriend by my side. I didn't care if I ate, as long as I could shower, pay rent and afford cigarettes. I felt as if all of the answers to all of life's questions were in the bottom of the bottle of whiskey, or the end of a joint, or a bump of coke. I felt as if all of the years of neglect and wanting attention had been filled by partying all the time. It felt good to have people who came over every day; 'regulars' we called them. But these weren't real friends of mine. They only loved the fact that they were able to have a place to hang out and get high. To them I was so funny and because I barely had enough brain cells to think clearly I let it happen - I was both joke and the punch line. All of the partying had clouded, if not destroyed, my sense of judgment.

I wore my apartment around me like a warm, fuzzy bath robe in the middle of the cold winter. It was my security and what stopped me from giving up on myself. I had no job, no money, no real friends. I had started to turn into my own worst nightmare. I had started to turn into what my dad had predicted I would become -- a drunken loser, "Just like your mom," he would always say. I smoked like a chimney. Drank so much I was drowning. Got more stoned than Amy Winehouse. All of this poison demolished any motivation I had left. I was stuck in a very deep rut, tires spinning -- going nowhere. I started to lose control of my surroundings. The air in our apartment was stale from all of the cigarettes. The smell of marijuana that hung in the air was so heavy that it was more of a stench. We lived off of Jordan's paychecks but that wasn't enough. We started falling behind in our rent, getting served with eviction notices every other month. I dropped out of high school and didn't have any plans on returning. My life had stopped.

Sometimes all it takes is one significant event; others may not see it or feel it. But to you it changes who you are, the choices you make, or who you associate yourself with. It crushes your lungs, clenches your heart tight, so tight that it knocks you down to your knees.

I drank so much that night. But the booze was only the beginning of a long night of unfortunate events that were about to unfold. My life was about to change right before my eyes.
It was Friday night and my life was about to be ripped out from under my feet like a rug. I woke up feeling so nauseous that it hurt to breathe. My head felt like someone had scooped out my brain and filled my head with razor blades. I looked around my bedroom only to find it completely torn apart. The screen to my window had been ripped out of place and bent like a balloon animal. My boyfriend, Jordan, was gone, which immediately filled me with a sense of panic.

I slowly staggered to my feet and dragged myself to the living room. There was a public intoxication ticket on the table with my name on it; “Great,” I thought, “now I have a police record.” On the couch was Jordan, curled up in a ball under a thin blue sheet. A quick inventory of the evidence painted a clear picture of what I had done to him: Blood had crusted on his face and in his nostrils, his back was scraped up and already bruising, glass still embedded in his skin, glittering in the afternoon light - it was bad. A broken glass that had been swept into a pile lay on the floor, mocking me. A towel that had once been pristine white now resembled an angry Jackson Pollock painting. He woke up and stared at me -- but not with love in his eyes. His beautiful ice blue eyes were hollow, almost sunken, repressing memories from last night. He was weary of my every move; like a wounded animal as I walked closer to him. I had done this to him.

I let all of the anger that was bottled up unleash at him in a drunken rage. The one person in the entire world that I loved had become a victim of this creature I had morphed into. All of the years of abuse and neglect from my father erupted from me like a fiery dragon attacking a helpless village. Jordan, the one person that had taken care of me better than my own family, sat before me broken. When everyone turned their backs on me he was there, guiding me through it all. He was my protector. This one person genuinely loved me and I destroyed him. It was right then and there that I knew I had to change. This was not how I wanted to live. I had to get my act together or else this would be the hellish nightmare I would forever call reality.

The best day of your life is when you decide your life is your own. The haunted walls of the past begin to crumble and a new light starts shining through the cracks. No apologies, no regrets or excuses. No one to lean on, rely on, or blame. You alone are responsible for the outcome and quality of your life. When you overcome the challenges that life brings or change bad habits, it's almost as if your life has reached a new beginning. The end is never really the end. This is the day your life really begins.

Natasha lives in Brantford, Ontario, and loves to read, listen to music and participate in outdoor activities with friends. Natasha hopes to attend college in the winter of 2014 and partake in a Recreation Therapy program. She hopes to one day be able to start a program for troubled youth that will enable them to stay on a positive path. The challenges and changes that Natasha faced through her troubled teen years is what inspired her Turning Points essay. She looks forward to the many experiences and opportunities that will come in the future.
“She did what?!” My mother's words rang through my ears as my heart began its agonizing descent into my stomach. Breathe. You have to breathe. Desperate attempts to keep hold of my body proved ineffective against the incessant pull of hardened heart strings, turned chains, as they carried my sanity down. I knew what she did. I was scared. That's why we drove by her house. The cop said to call her mom. I know what she did. I sensed my mother dreading what she had to tell me and I managed to win back consciousness for a moment, as I rattled the chains on my heart, to speak.

“Did she hurt herself?” I asked first, possibly trying to soften the blow of the fact I knew was coming. My real fear and question still remained: “Did she kill herself?” The words burned, each cutting my throat like a serrated edge. They were spoken. They were real. And their response added another thousand pounds to my heart.


As a child I was a prisoner of the glances of strangers, and ignorant of the power of my own voice. I was shy: trapped in a shell that was merely a seed of who I was to become; a seed only ever able to anchor roots in my best friend, Kristina. Through ten years of friendship, she became a part of my family, and I a part of hers. She was my identity. Up until that day, every single stepping stone along the way to self discovery was shared between the two of us. She was my strength and my courage. She always told me that one day she would be gone and I would have to live without her. I just had never pictured it being so soon.

The earth shattered beneath me. My heavy heart was pulling me further with each moment, no matter how frantically I tried not to fall. I had known she was sick. I had known she was in pain. That guilt galvanized the chains of my heart. It felt as if they would have an eternal hold of my spirit, and I fought them as hard as I could; but I was weak. I began losing my fight, and suddenly I wasn’t falling anymore.

Hitting bottom provided a sick, suffocating sense of serenity and comfort. Cold, stiff caresses, pinning me firmly to the damp ground, replaced the excruciating tugging of the chains. I became transfixed in the bottom of this pit and it seemed so easy to just lie there, stare up the immaculate hollow, and immerse myself in the melancholic melody grief and guilt played across the metallic strings of my heart.

I stopped trying to keep hold of my body because I lost all hope that I would ever be more than just that: a body, an empty vessel. In extraordinary despondency I reached upwards: one final attempt to return to the surface. In that desperation I took hold of a solitary warm hand. This hand turned into a comforting embrace, then two, and soon I found my breath again among the inhales and exhales of the friends around me. I felt their life surrounding me, and mine didn’t matter so much anymore. They are everything. I cannot let them fall.

With a passion naïvely fueled by the galvanizing guilt in my heart, I spent the years following Kristina’s death providing counsel to those who approached me in need and occupying myself with everything I could. I became obsessed with being a release for the pain of others, and helping others became the focus of my life. Her suicide triggered something within me that I and those around me viewed as coping, but I know now that it was also a distraction. I flew through the stages of grief, burying my feelings under earth as I climbed...
the walls of the pit, screaming words of guidance to those who confided in me. I screamed from the bottom of this deep rift inside me, but the words flowed from my mouth sincerely and calmly. My body continued to put on a show of strength for those around me. A spectacle so convincing that I myself was blind toward the half of me fighting for dear life to emerge from the clutches of my constricting heart. Only inadvertently aware of this inner battle through the distress I felt when counselors asked me if there was anything else I needed to say; in the ominous weight inside my chest constantly taunting to start tugging again; and in my screaming inner self eroding me from the inside every time I have to think about, or make a decision for, myself. Constant uncertainty. Insecurity.

Anchoring my roots in others is how I’ve survived. Since Kristina’s death I’ve experienced many things that I am extremely grateful for, however, despite my accomplishments, I have been left feeling empty as I’ve never truly allowed my heart to mend. I have neglected my own emotions. I have forgotten how to do things for myself. And I face the world every day in a foreign body. My seed has never had the chance to blossom, but it will, and that is what I am living for.

That moment: the moment when I can finally curl my fingers over the edge of this pit. When I can finally escape this weight and break the chains around my heart. It is in that moment when I will have reached my turning point. I am climbing with everything I have. I am filling this hole inside me so that one day I will be able to anchor my roots within myself: my unchained heart the seed of my soul. I will live with confidence, assurance, and stability. I will grow from the nourishing love of my friends and family. I will blossom with Kristina in my heart. Identified.
Identity. It’s who we are and what makes us what we are. It is a combination of many things, from our genetic code, to our personal experiences, to our upbringing. In Canada, pinpointing your identity can be challenging, considering we lack a sense of unified, well-defined distinctly “Canadian” culture.

Like many of us in our great petri-dish of a multicultural country, I am a mix: half Greek and half Canadian. My father immigrated here from a little village called Rafina in central Greece, and my mother comes from Niagara-On-The-Lake. Being a mix means getting the best of both worlds. It means getting to see life from two different cultural perspectives.

However, whenever anyone asked me where I was from, which is as common as asking a person’s name here in Toronto, I always simply replied that I am Greek. “Well, born here,” I would say, “but of Greek heritage.” -- which is true, but only partially. It was only when people asked if both my parents were Greek that I would have to specify that my mother was from here as well; otherwise I just let them assume that I’m fully Greek. It was not that I did not love my mother, or that side of my family, it just so happened that, when you had to fit in with people from every nook and cranny of the globe, being Greek was way more interesting than being plain old Canadian, and being both felt like being a watered-down version of each.

I got away with Hellenism due to my thick dark hair and strong Athenian brow, but had to often make excuses for my alabaster complexion. You see, Greeks traditionally have an olive skin tone, not a pasty one. “Lack of iron,” I reply a little too quickly. My name is as Greek as they get without adding a Papa- or an –opoulos to it, I speak the language, and even performed traditional Greek dancing. This way I got to be the “Greek Girl” and claim the rich heritage that went along with the title. My inquisitive nature got traced back to Socrates. My flirtatiousness to Helen. My competence in mathematics to Pythagoras. I got to exclaim “Opa!” whenever something fell, and became the go-to-girl for pronouncing complicated scientific terms. I got to be exotic, cultured and, well, different.

At school, I could easily relate to my peers who were also of immigrant descent. We bond by comparing our F. O. B. (fresh off the boat) parents’ accents or their funny experiences in Costco. Occasionally, we would poke fun at the “white kids”, the second or third generation Canadians. How they’re spoiled, how they get away with bad grades, and play their parents like a well-crafted chess game. I knew that the stereotype was not true, at least not for me, but I went along with them nevertheless.

Unfortunately, I began to see myself as the facade I had carefully crafted. Began to believe that I was only Greek, and disdained the Canadian half of me. I began to feel self-conscious if my mother picked me up from Greek school. I began to hate going to visit my maternal side of the family, hated eating ham and mashed potatoes at family gatherings, and was insulted when my friends commented on the fact that I pronounced “probably” as “prawly” like a “hick”. I began to scold my younger sister for refusing feta cheese and tsadziki, calling her a Kanadaiza, a Canadian, with as much venom as if it were the greatest insult in the world. Instead of joking about the Canadian kids, I began to criticize them, and believed the stereotypes. I wanted nothing to do with being Canadian, because, well, nobody really was. There was no culture to claim, nothing to offer.
One day while I was taking the bus home from school I was stopped by a man asking for directions. He told me, in timid, broken English, that he was going to get his citizenship approved. While we waited for the bus he told me about his life in Burundi, how he needed to get his citizenship so that his wife and children could join him here. He spoke of how he could not believe how cold it was here, but also about how grateful he was that he met so many helpful people, from both his native land and from all over the world. As we parted ways, he thanked me once more and said: “I’m glad to finally become one of you!”

When I got on my bus a few minutes later, I felt the distinct sense of pride of being Canadian. It was the feeling I got when we learned about the ancient Greeks in primary school, only amplified. I realized that I had been a complete fool trying to suppress the half of me that had been native to this land but also how futile my efforts had been. I couldn’t change who I was, the history that made up half of my existence, nor did I want to.

“One of you”, the man had said. One of us. I realized how right the man had been. We were all Canadian, each and every one of the people sitting on the bus, no matter where we came from. Being Canadian was not about trying to be different in order to fit in; it was being inclusive and sharing what we had to offer, no matter what it was. Being Canadian was about being yourself, even if that meant being well, Canadian.

As I came to this realization a woman behind me tapped me on the shoulder and complimented my hair. After I had said my thanks, she asked the inevitable question: “What’s your background?”

It was hard to keep the smile from my lips then. So I said, without hesitation, “I’m part Greek, part Canadian.”

Eleni is a grade twelve student from Étienne-Brûlé in Toronto. She’s nuts about Shakespeare, schoolwork and sports and frequently indulges herself with chocolate. She hopes to one day publish her own novel and own a vintage clothing store. She’d like to thank her school, her friends, and especially her family for their continuous support for her many endeavors.
It was April. Wandering through my childish mind was the irony of her death; she was born in April and was going to die in April. Like Shakespeare. She was a radiant woman who had raised nine children, for the most part, as a single mother. In the 1930s and 40s, that could not have been easy. My parents had always talked about her strength, her light heart. She was the kind of woman whose facial expression could say whatever needed to be said. Iva Evelyn Howard was my great-grandmother.

She married and became a mother quite young. She loved all of her children; however, she was never impressed if she caught them in her flower gardens. My aunts and uncles adored her. She didn’t yell often, or spoil them, but raised them to be intelligent women and strong, respectful men. All of my relatives, her children, are so kind, reminding me of the little I knew about her. She expected huge hugs upon arrival. She lived selflessly. Her children, now adults, are reflections of her. It is as if each one of them carries a small part of her in themselves.

In every photograph I’ve seen of her, she is smiling. In later life, there are wrinkles around her squinched eyes, but she always has a full, beautiful smile. All of her children have her eyes. They are gentle and earnest eyes that are a graysish blue with a hint of green, soft and insightful. Years earlier, when I was young, my great grandmother became sick. She suffered three strokes. At this time she was a resident in a nursing home; first floor, to the right. We often visited; I’ll never forget the milky, medicated scent of the home. Her room was decorated with flowers, scattered Christmas cards, family photos and teddy bears that could play pretty tunes. The lights were always dim. She sat in her wheel chair, hunched over and delicate. Thick, floral clothing fell from her small, withering body. Her hands were cold, but so soft; they shook slightly while in my little hands. They became my favourite hands; I would stare at them and wonder what they looked like years ago. Even old and frail, my great grandmother was still living. Death and I had not yet crossed paths.

That April night, my sister and I were in my basement bedroom, giggling about trivial things. When my mother walked in, we adjusted ourselves on the bed. The room grew quiet.

“I’ve got some news,” she said, cross legged and glossy eyed. We looked at each other. “Grandma Howard died this morning.” We knew she was sick, and slowly fading away. But my mind couldn’t comprehend this new reality which struck our whole family. I covered my mouth with my hands to hide my callow smile. As awful as I felt for grinning, I did not know how to react. It didn’t feel real. A tear slid down my mother’s cheek, like a rain drop on a window. Grabbing her in my eleven-year-old arms, I started to cry, too.

Later, I listened to the sound of my shoes kicking on and off the floor while waiting in the crowded church. It was raining outside and the black outfits suited the sombreness of the day. In my head, the melody of those teddy bears in her old room played repeatedly. I held my hands by my side and tried to prepare myself for what lay ahead. Grandma stroked my hair as I walked close behind her in the line to the casket. Soon, it would be my turn, I thought. I ran my finger over the smooth, silver finish of the casket. There she was... eyes closed, still. Her smile was gone.
I looked around. Aunt Violet looked fragile as she caressed her mother's gray and white hair, holding a kleenex to her lips. My older cousins were behind her, rubbing her back and crying, too. Aunt Mary's eyes leaked endless tears. Uncle Bob had his arm around his son and older brother; behind his glasses, I saw that his eyes were red. I had never seen my family like this before. It was suddenly so real. I felt cold when I found my Papa's arms. Overloaded with feelings, I quickly dissolved into tears. He looked at me with those gentle eyes of his, so much like my great-grandmother's; I saw them water up. He pulled out a red handkerchief and handed it to me, I knew he needed it more, but graciously accepted it. Never before had I witnessed him, or any of my family cry. I saw the agony of her absence in the faces of my family. It twisted my insides with ropes of sorrow, wringing out my heart. It was a moment of discovery which felt anguished. My Papa stood by my side on my first rendezvous with death. Grandma came over, put her arm around us and kissed my salty cheek. They understood.

When it was over, they told me that “we all live and we all die,” that sometimes it's not always a bad thing, that it's inevitable. The sight of fresh sorrow left me quiet, hollow, reverent. That April day no longer wanders about in my mind but now, when I think of April, I am reminded that endings can be beginnings.

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Grade 12 student, Drew, lives in Madoc, Ontario. Drew appreciates a good book, relishes writing and loves a good game of rugby. This fall Drew is enrolled in a Child and Youth Worker program in college with the hopes of a career in mental health. She plans to continue writing as every day there is new inspiration. She looks forward to the opportunities that await her.
Your first thought is to deny it, because you feel as if “this will never happen to us”. When it does, you have to just come to terms with it. No one gives you a guide book on how to deal with cancer, everyone just expects you to know how to live with it. The crazy thing is it was like she had a guide book. She knew what to do.”

June 3rd, 2011 -- a date I will never forget. I had gotten in trouble the night before because I had come in past curfew. That night, hateful and ruthless words were tossed, and left a tense feeling drifting amongst my parents and myself, which carried into the morning. I held that anger and frustration throughout the day. I came home to an empty house which was normal, but by the time 6:30 rolled around I was still alone with my thoughts screaming at me to prepare for the worst. I called her phone which felt like a thousand times, so much so I could put in the numbers without looking at the key pad. I sat in complete darkness waiting; the only glow was the neon green numbers on the kitchen stove. 7:28, the phone rang; it was my mom; she told me she was in the hospital; when I asked why, all she said was to come; I grabbed my coat and ran. I didn’t stop the entire way; the wind whipped around my face as my lungs became heavy and grasped for more air. I stepped into the warm hospital, and my face and ears felt as if they were on fire; I hadn’t realized it but tears began to stream down my face when I asked the lady at the front desk where Elizabeth Greenidge was. “Room 278, take the elevator to the second floor and turn left.” As I walked down the white hallway, I felt myself taking smaller and smaller steps trying to delay having to turn to her. I didn’t want to have to face the reality of what I was about to be told. I walked in the room to see my mom hooked up to wires and IV’s; I sat down in a yellow corduroy chair and took hold of her warm hand. The three words no one wants to hear escape from their mother’s mouth, “I have cancer.” I sat there stunned; I started laughing because I didn’t know what else to do; what started as laughter immediately turned into tears. Doctor Roy walked in and I heard the same spiel that would consume voices of many from here on out. “Oh, don’t worry; we’re just around the corner from finding a cure.” Or statements filled with optimism such as, “Let’s hope for the best.” And also the sympathetic, “Oh, I feel so sorry for what you’re going through.”

The entire ride home was silent, no one said a word, I glanced out the window and watched the cars that passed. I didn’t sleep that night, I was angry and confused; bad things weren’t supposed to happen to good people, so why were we the target? Why was she the target? I went to school the next day, only because I couldn’t stand to be in my own house. Sadness lingered in my every word and action. I went from class to class and tuned out everything and everyone. I couldn’t talk, eat, or think. It was as if I was a presence that no one saw, or cared about. I didn’t have a best friend to talk with or anyone I could trust with my deepest secrets. I felt alone.

As the days dragged on, I expected to see signs but my mom looked the same as before I knew she was sick. The telltale signs of cancer that my doctor and TV dramas conditioned me for were missing. There were no sunken eyes, no frail body, and no bones poking out from under thin, crepe-like skin. There were no ghosts in this house, only four fully alive people. This type of cancer is never on TV, the part that consists only of sitting and waiting. My mother has cancer and I was waiting for something to look like it does on TV, so I will know how to act. My mother has cancer and I was preparing the lines I have heard on “Grey’s Anatomy” and “House” because I don’t know what else to do. My younger brother doesn’t understand. The word “cancer” deflects off his shield of young innocence. He continues watching cartoons as if it were the
week before we knew. For him, cancer meant sugary cereals for dinner and as many cookies as he wanted. Cancer means jumping on his bed and not brushing his teeth because no one can tell the child whose mother has cancer to do anything. My mother has cancer and my little brother thinks it is a vacation.”

My mom was always looking at the bright side of things, she always said, “Cancer may have started the fight, but I will finish it.” She is one of the strongest people I have ever met. I know my life will never be the same, but what can you do! You go on living one day at a time, one moment at a time. Remember all the good times, the bad times, and the lessons she is teaching you. I always know we might not have one more Christmas dinner, one more birthday; one more Thanksgiving, but there will always be countless “I Love You’s” to look forward to. You hang on to those things. My mother has cancer, and the sun still rises. Cars still race past our house on their way to work and from, like clockwork. The clock still has the boldness to tick, and keep track of every moment that my mother fights cancer. The world continues even though mine seems to have frozen over in this winter of cancer.”

Tiara is grade 11 student, who enjoys reading and the performing arts. She is involved in various sports and clubs within the community and would like to further her education in the social sciences. Tiara would like to give thanks to her teachers and parents for all the support and encouragement given to success of the Turning Points essay.
I’ll always remember the day my older brother was diagnosed with brain cancer. This changed my whole life. I prayed that the doctors had made some sort of mistake. I knew things like this could happen, but it seemed too unreal. My brother, Joshua, was more than just a brother. He was my best friend and role model. He was young, outgoing and had so many goals in life. We had moments when we fought, but no matter what, we were always there for each other. He watched out for me just like an older brother would.

The next couple of months consisted of daily trips to the hospital after school. He was all I could think about. I spent hours sitting in his room to keep him company. I kept him laughing when it seemed impossible to be happy, but I knew he wanted to be anywhere but that awful hospital bed. That’s when we turned his hospital room into our home.

For a short while, things really started to look up. My family helped him work on small exercises to get his body moving again. He seemed happy and strong. He knew he didn’t have to fight the battle alone. Then, chemotherapy started to change him. It caused him to feel really sick and that’s when things started to change. His body wasn’t getting enough nutrients. Every meal turned into a battle. It was hard for him to eat but each of us took our turns feeding him what he needed. He had hardly any use of his body but then he started to lose his main senses, too. Food started to taste the same and his vision became blurry. Even the most quiet of noises echoed loudly in his head. He battled daily migraines that no drug could stop.

Things took a turn for the worse the day the doctor told us Josh wouldn’t last much longer. In our minds we knew it was only a matter of time but we still weren’t going to give in. Josh’s girlfriend proposed to him on the hospital bed. She wanted to show him how much she was there for him. Josh was filled with joy. The proposal gave him the incentive to not give up. A few weeks later the wedding was held in the small chapel of the hospital. It was the most beautiful wedding I had ever been to. Even though Josh was weak and in a wheelchair, he looked as handsome as ever. When I saw a smile spread across his face I felt happier than ever before. I was proud to be his little sister.

Josh continued to spend his days in a hospital room, just as we continued to always be there. His health wasn’t improving and things seemed to be going downhill a lot faster. I remember holding my tears in as I sat beside his bed. He needed us to be strong for him and I took it upon myself to do this, but every time I stepped outside the door of his hospital room, I would break down in tears. It was the hardest thing to hold myself together. I found myself falling apart more and more during the day. Things started to get really tough for me at school. Classes became more difficult because I couldn’t focus, no matter how hard I tried and I seemed to block everyone else out of my life. I put on a front that made me seem perfectly fine but inside I was dying, too.

Josh decided that he didn’t want to spend his last days in the hospital. After getting permission from the doctors, he was allowed to come home. We made sure there was someone at home to be with him. Thinking back to this, I wish I could have helped him more, could have sat by the edge of his bed just a little while longer.
One Friday after school, I was waiting outside for my dad to pick me up. He was more than an hour late. There was no answer when I called home. After calling my grandpa, I quickly learned that Josh had been rushed to the hospital in an ambulance with my dad. I felt as if my heart had stopped. I needed to get to the hospital right away. My two younger brothers and I found a ride and quickly made our way there. I then found out that earlier that day, Josh was having trouble breathing and he’d started to turn blue. He was gasping for air when my dad tried to help him, but his only option was to call 911.

That evening, Josh passed away. I was standing beside him, holding his hand as he struggled to get his last breath. That’s when I whispered to him, “It’s okay to let go now, Josh. You’re in God’s arms now.” Then the room fell silent. I felt as though my world had been flipped upside down. I felt like giving up and letting myself go, but I knew Josh wouldn’t want that.

I’ve learned that life is so short and we never know how long we’ll be here. We have to learn to treasure the days we are given. Now, I live my life to the fullest, not only for myself, but for my big brother, Josh.

BillySue, from Madoc, Ontario dreams of becoming a performer. She has loved music and stage performance all of her life. BillySue will be furthering her studies at the University of Ottawa next year in theatre and music. During her free time, she enjoys reading, spending time with friends and family, and just getting outside. BillySue’s Turning Points essay is dedicated to the memory of her brother, Joshua.
I can remember the day so clearly. Every moment still rings in my head as if it were just yesterday. I remember waking up that morning, to the worried voice of my mother telling me that my sister’s blood pressure was dropping rapidly. I remember looking around as dozens of doctors filled the hospital room, reading the cardiac monitor. Seeing the look in the eyes of these people, I knew that this was no joke. The life of my older sister, just 17 years old, was coming to an end. I sat beside her looking at how weak and fragile she had become. The once healthy and active girl was dying. It was then I knew how suddenly life can change. Four months was all it took to turn my life upside down.

As her blood pressure stabilized, the doctors slowly started leaving the room. The nurse notified us that each team of doctors was about to hold a meeting concerning my sister. I looked to my mom, who stood by the window of the room, on the phone with my dad, in tears. Then I looked at my sister. She lay there on the bed, still and calm, breathing deeply. Four months ago, we were laughing together, baking together, and sharing secrets with one another.

Being 18 months apart, my sister and I were inseparable; like two peas in a pod that complimented each other. I remember the first week she was admitted to the hospital, she called me telling me how bored she was. She said she felt better and could not wait to come home. I sat there thinking how a young girl, so full of promise and life, could be hit with such a deadly disease; a disease that baffled the doctors and even broke world records with its level of intensity. Macrophage Activation Syndrome: an autoimmune disease where the immune system attacks its own organs. How could it randomly appear and ruin the life of a young girl? Not only hers, but also the lives of all the people she had touched.

My dad finally arrived at the hospital, out of breath with a terrified look in his eyes. He sat next to me and my mother, all three of us in silence thinking of what our next step would be. Finally my dad asked me, “Do you think this is right? Keeping her here to suffer? Trying all sorts of medication hoping one of them will work, when it’s not making a difference?” I told my dad I thought it was time for us to let her go; to let go and let God take over.

The nurse walked in to advise us that the doctors were ready for us. We walked down the hallway towards the meeting room for what felt like the millionth time, joining the 20 doctors surrounding the table. They detailed the various methods they had attempted, and the outcomes each drug had made to the overall progress of curing her illness. My dad asked if there was anything else that could be done to which they replied, “no”. The room was silent. Finally the head doctor spoke. He stated the best option was to switch to palliative care, which would allow her to become as comfortable as possible until her last moment. The four months of battling was coming to an end.

I thought of how much my spiritual life had grown. I had learned to trust in God and leave things in His hands. He saw the innocence and sweetness of my sister’s heart. God thought she was too precious to be living in this world and he wanted her to be with Him. After seeing the amount of suffering my sister endured, I knew if she was able to talk, she would ask us to just stop trying and just allow her to pass away into that everlasting peace of Heaven. We walked back to the room, my parents in tears. I tried to stay bold and strong for them.
A few hours later, her bedside was surrounded by our extended family. My pastor arrived and we all held hands in prayer. Near the end of the prayer, I saw my sister open her eyes widely. She glanced around the room, making eye contact with my pastor, my mom and dad, and finally me. She then began to breathe deeply. She was leaving this world. She was leaving my family. She was leaving me. My mom asked me to sing to my sister. I pulled myself together, wiping away the tears from my eyes. I wanted to make my sister’s last moment on this earth a peaceful and beautiful one. As I started singing, my voice cracked and quivered until finally easing into a soft smooth melody. As I sang, I could see her chest moving slowly up and down as her breathing started slowing down. I spoke my final words to her and kissed her goodbye, leaving the room for my parents to bid farewell.

Silence. Then a breath. Then total silence. She became still. I remember sinking down to the floor and collapsing in tears. My sister had passed away.

About roughly six months has passed and my life has changed dramatically: for the better and for the worse. I still feel this aching pain and emptiness within my heart. Yet, I will spend every moment of my life living in memory of her, following the steps she has set for me. I know she would want me to be a better person. I know she would want me to work to the best of my abilities, and make my parents proud. I miss her smile, her sweet voice echoing through the hallways of our home. I know she is watching over me. I lost my precious sister, but I gained a guardian angel. I will remember the precious memories I spent with her in my life, and I will never forget. I will always remember.
Changes In Life

As I recollect my past, it seems as if it was a blurred vision that I cannot fully remember, but all the while, cannot forget. There are some events that stick to one like a leech, such as a mutilation of a powerful relationship, such as a father walking out of a child’s life, such as a divorce.

Seven years ago, I arrived home on a brisk fall day from my fourteen-hour flight back from India. I went away for a month to attend my aunt’s wedding, although at age nine, the festivities were not something I was interested in; I was more interested in the dogs running loose around the small-congested streets and the open grasslands with plants as high as my neck that I could roll around in. As I walked through the airport, I expected to see my dad, since the last time I saw him was when he waved goodbye to me a month ago at the departure gates. But he was not there. I did not ask why he wasn’t there; I simply got into a cab with my mom and my 14 year-old sister. The roads, cars and bare trees with fallen dry leaves on the ground just seemed casual; I was not thinking that those once blossoming summer leaves on the high branches of the trees had fallen, just as I would. We got out of the cab and reached an unfamiliar house that did not belong to my cousins, friends or anyone I knew at that age. We passed the main doors and walked on the side-path to a door that had cement stairs leading down to a small basement apartment. As I walked towards this house with utmost curiosity and fear burning inside me, the only questions running through my mind were, “Where am I? Why am I not at home? Where is my dad?”

Life seemed to be flying by so fast. My mom, sister and I settled into this apartment and I started attending a different elementary school in a new neighborhood. There were so many changes in such a short time. I felt thrown off guard. My once loud and vigorous self had turned into a faceless and broken child who chose to turn to no one but himself. I remember that there were child counselors at school who would take me to another room before the morning announcements and question me about my feelings towards my dad. Did I miss him? The question alone would make me burst out in tears. Now I realize that these teachers were just trying to counsel me due to my disassembled state. At home, I could not turn to my sister because she had become mature as she bore an adult’s responsibilities on her shoulders. My mom had to work day and night at her factory job to support us. I had deeply felt that I was on my own due to this sudden change of a silent family, a silent mother, a silent heart and all because of a silent divorce. My sister and I didn’t bother to question one another on the events that occurred because we were just children and my mom figured we would mold ourselves with the transitions, although it was harder than she thought. For instance, my marks dropped. I could not focus in class. I felt like breaking down most of the time and my teacher always picked on me for being so quiet and dumb. Once, my teacher blamed me for the scribbles in a novel I was given to read. I merely stood there in front of the class, unable to defend myself because I didn’t know how to speak anymore.

As I survived that year and became accustomed to my family of three, without any questions asked or answers given, I gradually began to create relationships with others at school and my marks started to improve. This gave me that hope and self-confidence that would slowly alter me as a person into somebody that I once remembered I was. About two years later, when I was eleven, my mom made the decision to move out of that cold and gloomy apartment that held those horrible memories of separation and deep struggles. We moved in with my cousins who would ultimately change our lives for the better. Seven years after that summer in India, after all these memories were ripped pages out of a timeworn book, my father...
was now trying to clean off those cobwebs and reassemble those pages that were once attached. However, I always tell him that I will reach out a helping hand to him in his most lonely, weak and old days, but I am committed only to writing my own, new book, each page for those who were there for me.

Most kids, teenagers and adults have to feel the wrath of a divorce even if they are not one hundred percent involved; they feel the separation, pain and transformations during the process as well. So then I ask, why is the word ‘divorce’ undermined in society and why are children left to face these hardships on their own if it commonly occurs in families? I, for one, learned that a bad experience leads to a good outcome, an infringement in a relationship leads to stronger bonds and a broken soul leads to a flourishing spirit. The door that my father closed when he walked out on us made my family into a stronger body, ultimately one body that helps one another emotionally, and physically, to stay strong in this dystopian world.

Grade 11 student, Arsh Sidhu, of Brampton, Ontario, loves to play soccer and basketball, interact with diverse people and learn from new experiences. His main goal is to graduate from a prestigious business school before eventually running his own restaurant franchise. The turning point that inspired this essay is just one in a series of life-changing experiences that Arsh believes will ultimately bring him strength, positivity, and success.
De l’autre côté du monde

Je viens de réaliser que les personnes qui ont tant de choses, eu veulent toujours plus, mais ils ne réalisent jamais qu’il y a tant de gens en dessous d’eux qui n’ont rien.

Ma famille a déménagé au Canada du Pakistan quand j’étais seulement un petit enfant, trop petit pour me souvenir du tout. « C’était pour une vie meilleure » comme mes parents me disaient d’habituellement. J’ai grandi à être une personne qui veut toujours plus. J’enviais les personnes au-dessus de moi et j’essayais continuellement d’avoir plus. Je prenais les nécessités basiques de vie comme l’eau fraîche, les vêtements, la nourriture et l’abri pour acquis. Et je voulais toujours les nouveaux cellulares et vêtements ayant des noms de marque, comme tout le monde autour de moi. J’essayais constamment d’être meilleur que tous les gens au dessus de moi, mais tous les gens en dessous de moi qui n’ont pas la moitié des privilèges que j’ai, tousm’étaient/paraissaient invisible. Pendant ce temps, j’étais un individu très jaloux, cupide qui se plaint toujours de la vie que je vivais.

Cependant, tout a changé quand j’ai voyagé au Pakistan comme une visite à voir mes cousins après huit ans. Pour la plupart, visitant Pakistan était merveilleux, parce qu’au fond de moi-même jesentais la chaleur quand j’étais entouré de tous mes cousins. Pourtant, mon temps au Pakistan était aussi très difficile parce que j’ai vu des choses que je voyais pas normalement au Canada.

Partout où je regardais il y avait des gens déchirés par la pauvreté et la famine. Ces personnes vivaient sous la macabre chaleur de l’été au Pakistan, sans aucune protection au-dessus de leur tête. Ils ‘affrontaient toutes les infections et les maladies eux-mêmes sans l’aide de l’hôpital, sans argent. Même s’il y avait des nombreuxremèdes pour leurs maladies, ils ne pouvaient rien faire à ce sujet et ils devaient regarder leurs vies lentement diminuer, tout en misère et détresse. La vie pour ces individus était tellement plus difficile que la mienne. Ils devaient se battre pour leur vie chaque jour en trouvant des besoins basiques comme la nourriture, l’eau et tous cela je tenais pour acquis, car il était à la paume de ma main. Ces nécessitésde chacun, que je savais au Canada, juste ignorées, étaient la seule chose ces personnes ont désiré. À mes yeux j’ai eu tellement plus qu’eux. J’étais lumineux avec énergie, cependant ces milliers et milliers de gens tout autour de moi n’ont rien.

Ce moment a fait mon cœur s’effondre parce que je me rends compte que toutes les ressources auxquelles j’ai accès sont beaucoup plus précieuses dans le monde. Chaque jour, je me demande comment ces personnes doivent vivre leur vie, comme il est tellement plus difficile pour eux. Puis je me regarde et je me sens terrible et atterré par toutes les choses que j’avais l’habitude de me plaindre. Dans mon cœur je suis terrible parce que je suis triste pour tous ces individuels dans les rues parce que leur vie entière est remplie avec douleur et agonie. À mes yeux, je sais que la vie dans les rues estnt insupportable et je suis blessé à mon cœur parce que je sais qu’il y a tellement de choses dans lavie (qu’il y a en passer à côté de la vie. ) C’est pourquoi je suis venu à reconnaître que la vie que j’ai est un miracle et c’est le même pour tous les gens qui vivent leur vie dans l’inquiétude minimale en comparaison de ces gens dans les rues.

Aller au Pakistan était, sans aucune doute, une révélation pour moi, de retour au Canada j’ai compris maintenant tous les avantages que j’ai. De l’eau fraîche et propre qui est disponible pour moi à tout moment, la nourriture et l’abri toujoursnourriture juste quelques étapes loin de où je suis et l’abri toujours en me...
protégeant de l’extérieur. Ces choses que je ne tiens plus pour acquis plus maintenant, plutôt ils jouent un rôle important dans ma vie. Je regarde maintenant à moi-même et les milliers de gens autour de moi, puis je regarde à ceux dans les rues du monde entier. Ce voyage a certainement fait de moi une personne plus empathique comme je pense à tous les gens autour de moi qui n’ont pas la vie que je fais.

Des millions de gens partout au monde souffrent et pleurent chaque jour, car ils manquent les matériaux fondamentaux de la vie. Des gens âgés en allant de petits enfants aux adultes et personnes âgées sont bloquées dans les rues, tout seul chaque jour. La vie des personnes est normalement écrasée et oubliée par des gens comme moi. Juste parce que ces individus ne font pas partie de nos vies, ne veut pas dire qu’ils n’existent pas. Nous ne pouvons pas simplement ignorer ce problème parce que ces individuels sont humains et comme nous tous ils ont des sentiments humains, des émotions, et une âme.

J’ai appris une leçon importante après mon voyage inoubliable et je crois que tout le monde devrait aussi. Nous devrions toujours regarder aux gens en dessous de nous et nous faisons tout notre possible d’aider ces individuels dans toutes les manières possibles. Soit, par enprêtant une main ou juste penser à ces personnes chaque fois que nous faisons quelque chose. Si nous sommes capables de faire ceci, alors à la fin de la journée, si nous avons fait descendre une larme de nos yeux pour toutes les personnes en dessous de nous, notre monde vadevenir un meilleur endroit.

Asad is an enthusiastic grade 11 student living in Mississauga, Ontario. In his spare time, he loves listening to music, biking, and playing soccer with his friends. He will be attending co-op this summer and working at City Hall and learning about a business environment. He is looking forward to continuing his studies in French and hopefully will visit France one day. Asad would like to thank his French teacher for introducing him to this contest and for supporting his efforts.

Mes camarades de classe nourrissaient mon arrogance directement et indirectement. Encore et encore, ils venaient me parler de leurs problèmes, privés ou académiques, pensant que je pourrais les résoudre. À vrai dire, je ne savais pas souvent la réponse, mais ma fierté était en jeu donc j’inventais. Heureusement, je ne pense pas que les problèmes qui m’étaient apportés étaient sérieux et mes pensées loufoques n’ont pas causé du tort. De plus, ils me laissaient prendre toutes les décisions quand nous travaillions en groupe. Si j’avais raison ou non, ils me suivaient donc je n’ai pas bien développé les compétences d’un bon jugement. Graduellement, j’ai commencé à penser de moi-même comme supérieure aux autres. À posteriori, cette conduite a construit un mur autour de moi et m’empêchait de m’ouvrir aux « êtres inférieurs ».

Il y avait toujours quelques personnes dans ma classe que je n’aimais pas aussi bien que les autres. Je ne les tyrannisais pas, heureusement, tout simplement je les ignorais. Au lieu d’interagir avec eux, je préférais parler avec les élèves plus intelligents, plus comiques, plus appréciés. J’étais raisonnablement populaire en 5ème année. Pendant ce temps, la mode était de communiquer avec des gros mots et se moquer de ses amis. Bien sûr, personne ne voulait faire du mal avec ce qu’ils disaient, c’était pour bien s’amuser. J’avoue, je suivais cette mode aussi car j’étais populaire et ça c’est ce que les gens populaires faisaient. Par conséquent, j’ai cessé à réfléchir à mes mots avant de les dire.

Un jour, ma classe a créé les mosaïques de papier cartonné. J’ai pris le temps de déchirer mon papier en petits morceaux pour faire mon œuvre plus belle. Mes morceaux seront les plus petits, j’ai pensé, mon œuvre sera la meilleure. J’ai regardé le garçon à côté de moi. Il était le plus grand dans la classe, mais il était très silencieux. Je n’aimais pas beaucoup ce garçon, je pensais que j’étais plus intelligente que lui. Chaque fois qu’il s’efforçait avec une question facile, je pensais « Que c’est minable! ». En réalité, il avait un peu de difficulté à l’école parce que l’anglais était sa deuxième langue. Par ailleurs, je pense qu’il était un peu maladroit en raison de son grand corps. Ce jour, il déchirait son papier en morceaux énormes et ça m’agaçait pour quelque raison. Manifestement, son travail n’avait rien à voir avec le mien, mais je n’avais pas un filtre entre ma cervelle et ma bouche. J’ai dit au garçon « Ton œuvre est laide. » À ma surprise, même si cela n’aurait pas dû l’être, il a commencé à pleurer.

Bien sûr, la maîtresse a remarqué l’incident et elle m’a appelé au corridor. C’était la première fois que je m’étais attirée des ennuis donc le chocet la honte m’ont causés à éclater en sanglots. Ma maîtresse m’a demandé pourquoi j’ai provoqué mon camarade de classe aux larmes et je ne savais pas comment répondre. J’ai réalisé que je n’avais pas eu une raison et que ses larmes étaient le produit de ma méchanceté. J’ai été pardonnée avec seulement la promesse de lui demander pardon, probablement parce que je n’avais jamais...
eu un tel incident. J’ai fait ce qu’elle m’a dit mais j’étais mal à l’aise car je pensais que je méritaïs une punition plus sévère.

Après cet événement, j’ai commencé à réfléchir à la façon dont je traitais les autres. Pourquoi faudrait-il me moquer des autres? Est-ce que cela me transforme en meilleure personne? M’aide à me sentir mieux? J’ai réfléchi pendant longtemps et les réponses que j’ai trouvées m’ont redéfini mon état d’esprit. Je me suis rendue compte que traiter les autres avec le respect promouvrà la véritable amitié et le bonheur. J’ai commencé à traiter les autres plus cordialement et essayé vraiment d’apprendre à mieux connaître. Je pense que c’était le bon chemin à suivre parce que maintenant j’ai un groupe d’amis qui me disent quelquefois que je suis « trop gentille ». La petite brute de mon passé est tout juste un souvenir maintenant, mais c’est un souvenir que je garderai pour me rappeler qui je suis aujourd’hui et à quel point j’ai évolué.

Rachel is an academically-inclined grade eleven student from Mississauga, Ontario. Her interests include playing volleyball and badminton and reading novels. Rachel is planning on continuing her French education throughout high school and beyond. For her post-secondary studies, Rachel will be pursuing a career in engineering.
L’institutrice était ma mère

Je me souviendrai toujours la leçon que ma mère m’a enseigné quand j’avais sept ans. Ce n’est pas possible de l’oublier et je m’en souviens encore. Elle détermine qui je suis aujourd’hui et m’a sauvé d’une conception malencontreuse de la vie et de mes sœurs. Je suis très reconnaissant pour cela. Mon expérience a commencé quand ma mère a décidé d’emmener mes deux sœurs et moi au parc, un matin, pendant le printemps au Pakistan.


Ce jour, j’étais détaché comme un concombre, et ma confiance en moi était inébranlable comme un étang qui est isolé par l’environnement, complètement immobile. J’étais sûr que je n’allais pas perdre à mes sœurs. L’idée que mes sœurs allaient me battre m’amusait. Cependant, quand j’ai joué au badminton, je ne pouvais pas marquer un point, ma tête était encerclée par un brouillard. Par conséquence, je suis devenu confus, et j’avais beaucoup de doutes. Je ne comprenais pas. Si j’étais le meilleur, alors, pourquoi perdais-je le jeu? Si je n’étais pas talentueux, alors, était-ce un échec? Toute ma vie, je croyais seulement que les personnes talentueuses étaient prospères dans la vie. Ma sérénité et ma confiance disparaissaient comme une flamme vacillante. Je me noyais dans une mer froide et noire des doutes.

Tout à coup, j’ai vu que mes sœurs étaient souriantes. S’amusaient-elles de mon malheur, créé par mes doutes? Croyaient-elles que j’étais un échec? Pensait-elles que je suis inférieur et, par conséquence, s’amusaient? Je me sentais petit et insignifiant comme une fourmi. Ma fierté ne me permettait pas d’accepter les insultes, et ses actions alimentaient ma rage. Elle déclenchait un sentiment de dégoût et d’angoisse qui, vite, couvrait mon corps entier comme un incendie de forêt qui a commencé par une allumette. Je voulais de la vengeance. Je voulais frapper quelque chose. Toute ma furie, qui s’accumulait en moi, a été libérée dans une explosion et j’ai lancé la raquette au badminton par terre. Le feu s’est éteint, je suis devenu froid, assez froid comme si j’étais frigorifié, parce que j’étais enveloppé par une mer froide de désespoir. Si je n’étais pas talentueux, alors, je ne réussirais jamais. Je serais un échec dans la vie. Je pouvais rien faire, mais me tenir debout dans le vide, cacher ma tête, et pleurer un peu. C’était le moment quand ma mère m’a approché.

Concernée, ma mère a dit, « Ce n’est pas comme tu dois te comporter. » Au moment, je me noyais trop dans ma mer d’angoisse. Je ne pouvais pas l’écouter. Elle a demandé, « Pourquoi, lances-tu la raquette par terre? »

J’ai répondu, « Parce que je déteste jouer au badminton, j’essaie encore et encore, mais je ne peux pas gagner. Je vais laisser tomber ce sport. »

Elle m’a regardé décue, et a dit, « Tu ne peux pas gagner contre tes sœurs parce qu’elles sont plus âgées que toi. Si tu veux gagner, alors tu dois beaucoup améliorer. Tu peux améliorer seulement quand tu pratiques et joue. N’abandonne pas! »
Au moment, je ne la croyais pas. Cependant, j’étais désespéré de nager dans ma mer de désespoir, donc, j’ai décidé de continuer le jeu. Le conseil de ma mère m’a aidé à marquer quelques points. J’ai trouvé une réponse à quelques unes mes questions, et un peu de brouillard s’est levé de mon esprit. La buée s’enlevait et j’ai commencé à voir la lumière de l’extérieur de la mer noire. J’ai réalisé qu’on peut réussir avec du travail acharné, donc, je n’étais pas un échec. Cependant, ma haine de mes sœurs ne disparaissait pas et, par conséquence, je trouvais beaucoup de plaisir quand j’ai marqué un point. J’ai pu voir qu’elles étaient encerclées par le même bouillard. Je voulais les voir souffrir comme moi. Je ne pouvais pas surmonter cette haine parce qu’elle était très fortes.

À la fin, j’ai gagné le jeu. Je pensais que ma vengeance était complète, mais j’étais choqué quand j’ai vu l’air de mes sœurs. Elles ont souri et m’ont félicité. C’était le même sourire, mais j’ai vu le sens vrai du sourire. La buée a enlevé complètement parce que j’ai trouvé la réponse pour toutes mes questions. J’ai réalisé que quand elles ont souri avant, elles ne se moquaient pas de moi. En fait, elles étaient contentes que j’essayaïs et elles voulaient que je m’améliore. Je me sentais froid, mais ce n’était pas un sentiment froid du désespoir ou de la solitude, mais du soulagement et de la sérénité comme si le feu, qui couvrait mon corps, s’est éteint. Tout le temps que je traitais mes sœurs comme des ennemies, elles ne m’ont jamais maltraité. Je ne pouvais pas croire qu’après toutes les difficultés que je leur donnais, elles continuaient à veiller sur moi. J’ai fondue en larmes, mais c’étaient des larmes de joie. Au moment, le noir, qui créait de ma haine dans mon cœur, a disparu. Toute de ma haine de mes sœurs a fini, et j’étais sincèrement content. Par conséquence, j’ai commencé une relation pleine d’amour avec mes sœurs, j’ai perdu mon obsession d’être le meilleur et j’ai clarifié mon idée fausse de comment réussir dans la vie. Avec cette nouvelle attitude positive, j’ai recommencé une nouvelle vie.

Grade 11 Student, Ammar, lives in Mississauga, Ontario, and loves to learn, and play soccer. Some would describe him to be overly passionate about soccer! In 2013, he plans to volunteer as much as possible, and to continue learning French until he can communicate in French fluently. He hopes to become a pharmacist one day. His healthy competitive spirit with his sisters inspired him to write the essay, which he hopes to keep.
Sudbury, Ontario

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Anonymous Donor
As I fall to the ground, my thoughts race through my head. This can’t happen to him, it can’t be true. As I hit the cold hard floor, a tear runs down my face to accept the fact that my Dad, the breadwinner of our family, our protector, has had a heart attack. Seeing him in pain, hearing him trying to talk, hearing him mutter, “Call 911,” in the meekest of voices. How can this be happening to the man that I look up to?

Watching the paramedics, watching my Dad, watching the clock, it felt like an eternity. They take his blood pressure, I wait. Seconds felt like minutes, and minutes like hours. Was he going to be okay?

The ambulance rushes him to the hospital, he is assessed and then the news hits. My heart pounding harder and louder than I have ever felt, as thoughts race through my head. I drift away from it all, into my own world of memories, the good and bad. Fishing came to mind immediately, him letting me reel in the big one. I was so grateful to him for letting me do this, and he was just as proud that I had brought in the big catch. I also thought about some of the fights that we’ve had, and feeling angry with him and now how mad I was at myself for letting those little things matter. I drift back to reality as they say that he will need to stay in the hospital for a while to determine the best course of action for my Dad.

As soon as the opportunity was there, I started with the questions, the feelings pouring out as I think of the images that I saw on cigarette packs, the graphic pictures of hearts and diseases. Is he one of these statistics? I think to the Heart and Stroke information that I have seen in the past, proud that I have been a part of the school fund raising that could now be helping my Dad.

The observations become obvious, they need to do a procedure on his heart. I need to know that my Dad will be okay, that he can do it, that this doctor is the best man for the job. How difficult will this procedure be to put stints in? I get the call that he is in surgery. Silence again, the worry pouring over me. It’s like a fork in the road, it could go as good as gold, or as bad as being lost at sea. Four stints later and he’s doing great.

My Dad is doing great although living with a lot of rules to follow. He’s back to work which means that his heart is on the mend. This also has showed me how much someone really matters when something severe or even worse happens. Always love those who you can’t live without.

David is a 13 year old who lives in Capreol Ontario with his mother, father, sister, grandmother and uncle. In his spare time David likes to hang out with his friends. After completion of high school he plans to attend university with the intention of becoming a doctor.
I’m Not Immune

The phone rang, relentlessly, as the children played together. I was one of those children; innocently playing at my friends’ house, unaware that our joyous laughter was destined to stop. My friend’s mother picked up the phone with a bright, “Hello,” as she gestured for us to take our world of bliss and laughter into a different room. The euphoric wonderland that the three of us had invented was penetrated when I faintly heard from the other room, “I’m sorry, I’ll get him ready.” I was summoned from down the hall and as I walked towards my friend’s mom she sympathetically said, “Your dad called. He said to get ready to leave.” That’s when I started to worry.

Three days later, my life turned upside down and me still trying to make sense of it, I watched him being lowered into the ground. I listened to the priest with a mixture of guilt and other unidentifiable emotions, ripping my soul apart piece by piece. I wish I had gotten to know my grandfather better, had taken more time to hear his stories while he was still alive. But I hadn’t.

As the days went by, I was in a daze with my thoughts scattered throughout the universe. A month had passed and the school year had just begun. I had tackled depression and hurdled over the mountain of death, with a sense of pride. I thought I had been released from darkness’s grasp, but I quickly learned death had other plans for me when I heard my mom muttered with a crack in her voice, “Something happened.”

Once again, loss had pulled me into the abyss of darkness. The room was mute with the aroma of death dancing through the lungs of every man, woman and child in the room. The news shoved me out of reality and away from the world. I wandered like a ghost looking for something to tug me back to life and a moment later I found it. It was my Dad, standing over the man that raised him, with his eyes flooding with tears. That sight raised me from the dead and back into the world of the living. I made my way closer to him and with every step my eyes filled with more tears. He turned and took me in his arms in a warm embrace. Softly, he started to sing, the song flowing from his lips. I held him tight for comfort and never wanted to let go.

Through these events, I realized that I’m going to die, my family is going to die, everyone is going to die, and there’s nothing I can do about it. I realized that I’m not immune to death, that I’m not immune to the world. I realized that one day my dad is going to be lying in a wooden box, and I’ll be standing over him. That single thought changed my life forever.

Spencer was born in Sudbury. Spencer’s home life is very joyful as he has a very loving family including his parents, older brother, and two older sisters. Spencer loves writing and hopes to take college level writing and literature courses in high school. He also loves music, photography, and going to school. Spencer looks forward to the day when he might have a wife and kids of his own. He hopes to continue with his writing career along with the hobby of photography.
A child will always grow and get older. There is no way to stop it. For a child to grow up properly they must develop their character in a loving, caring and encouraging environment. They need a place to learn and adapt and get started on their upcoming journey through life. For me, I always had love and encouragement around me but my ability to learn and adapt hit a turning point when I moved into my house in 2003. In 2003 I moved from a small, non-functional apartment to a full size house in a great neighbourhood. Not only did it change my location - it changed me. It helped me function in a normal space. It taught me good communication and gave me a sense of freedom.

Firstly, living in my new house helped me to function in a normal space as it gave me a helpful introduction on what “living” should be like as it had many living spaces. It had two bathrooms, three bedrooms, a decently sized kitchen, living room, dining room and a number of other important rooms. When we first moved there, I had a large room which I shared with my younger brother. However, not so long after, I moved to a new bedroom that was all my own. With this type of space I now have the choice on how and where I spend my time. I can sit by myself in my room, sit with my brother and talk or sit with my whole family and watch a movie.

Secondly, this move taught me good communication. In this new neighbourhood, I got to know some other kids my age from outside of my school. Having those friends taught me how to effectively talk and be social and adapt to different situations and experiences. I know without question, that if I didn’t have this experience to engage with new people (who became my friends) I wouldn’t be as social as I am now. I know that this will help me as I get older and continue to grow.

Thirdly, moving to my new house gave me a sense of freedom. Instead of being inside small apartments without a backyard or the ability to choose my company, I was now in a house that offers opportunity and freedom. I now have a large backyard and deck. I have a quiet road I can bike down and green spaces I can explore. Most importantly, I can choose to do this exploring by myself or with my friends and family.

In conclusion, I can honestly say that moving houses changed my life. It gave me a sense of freedom that I will always be grateful for. There are lots of choices and detours in life and I am glad my parents decided to take me, my brother and my sister to our new house for I know it was a positive start and helped me be the person I am today.

Alexander is a 14 year old student who lives in Val Caron, Ontario. He lives with both his parents and his two younger siblings. He plays the trombone and the tenor saxophone in his free time. He hopes to learn how to play the piano. Alexander is top of his class in mathematics and he loves writing stories both at school and at home.
“Conscience is the inner voice that warns us that someone may be looking.” – H. L. Mencken

Emily McCarthy
First Place – Grade 9 & 10
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

In God I Trust

You will find your passed loved ones not where they’re buried, but at the place they love most. I still see her there. Running through the green blades of grass. Disappearing then reappearing. I hear her laughing from a distance and smell the clean, pollen-infused air. I’m smiling to myself then suddenly the good memories are gone and painful ones return. Days spent at the Memorial Hospital filled with hoping, praying, watching helplessly as the life slowly drained from her fragile body.

It was December 1st, 2009. My mom was crying, my dad silent. I sat frozen waiting for two simple words that changed everything. “She’s gone.” My beautiful cousin was gone at 24.

A few days later the funeral is held. My aunt hugs me as tight as possible. Crushing me, I feel her arms shaking and I hug her back. Then comes my 6’4” uncle. It is heartbreaking to see him; once so strong, now so weak. I hug him and hear him cry. He doesn’t let go. Neither do I. He clings to me, bringing tears to my eyes. We sit down and listen to touching stories about her life. I find myself crying over a cousin I’ve only met twice. Is it sadness? Grief? Guilt? I think it’s watching everyone around me crumble like a cookie being squeezed in God’s hand.

“When one door closes, another opens.” Many people believe death is the end of life but I believe I came alive when my cousin died. It was her death that helped me believe in God and changed my perspective of my parents, as well as my relationship with them. Her death provided opportunities; it opened a door to being a better person.

“Everything happens for a reason.” This cliché suddenly had new meaning for me. I believe that my cousin was taken for a reason. You see, I have a huge family -- the bigger the family, the bigger the arguments. For five years prior to her death there was no contact within our family. No one was talking, no one would budge. After the tragedy it was amazing to see that, although my family has issues, we all came together to support each other. Is that why God took her? Was he trying to teach us the importance of family through the loss of the most innocent among us? For who could be more innocent than my cousin, Ashley, born with Down Syndrome?

Someone I barely knew became the person I go to today -- my Aunty Joanne. She lost her daughter, and now lives only a few doors down from us. It was the funeral that tightened our bond. We started spending more time together. My aunt is a big believer in God. It was my aunt who started to talk about God around me. After taking her words to heart, I realized that everything she was saying was true. Maybe God took my cousin to bring my aunt into my life so she could help me believe in Him. Maybe He has a purpose for me.

After watching my aunt lose her daughter, it gave me an inside view on what parents go through. I see what it’s done to her. Seeing the way my Aunty Joanne still cries over her daughter, three years later, makes me treat my parents differently. I never want them to go through that. I never want them to question anything
about me or experience guilt if something happens to me. Since I’ve realized this, I’ve made an effort to be closer to them. I tell both my parents that I love them whenever I can; this way they know for sure.

Was my cousin Ashley a part of God’s plan? Am I? Only time will tell. Until then I will never question if He is real or not. In my eyes, this is too much to be a coincidence. I owe it all to her - Ashley. All I can do now is take comfort in the fact that she was taken from us for a reason; her suffering is over and that is she probably sitting next to God, with gold wings, eating all the cupcakes she can handle.

Emily is an intelligent fifteen year old student who is in grade 10. She was born in Sudbury, Ontario and has lived there for her whole life. Emily loves reading and hopes to attend medical school someday. She would like to thank her amazing English teacher and her brother for all their support and help throughout this competition. She would also like to thank her two cousins for inspiring her. This essay was written in memory of both.
I remember the first time I saw her. Short blond hair, blue eyes, and she wore a dazzling smile on her face. Her name is Shawna and I know her now as my step mom. Unlike the wicked step mothers in movies, Shawna is very caring. She's the one that makes our lunches, cooks our meals, and drives me to my dance lessons. She comes to all of my dance competitions to help me get ready and cheers for me in the audience.

The relationship I have with Shawna isn’t the strongest though. We get angry at each other easily. We fight and argue. Sometimes we don’t even speak to one another. It's something that's always bothered me -- the silence. When we don’t speak because of an argument or fight, the silence seems to eat away at my heart, leaving an indescribable emptiness. Not knowing her thoughts and feelings drives me crazy! Why couldn’t we just get along?

It had been a great summer. We spent most of our time outside camping and swimming. Now I was back at school, spending my time on homework and dance. I was at a new school and couldn’t see myself making any friends, not to mention getting lost trying to find my classes. But these were the least of my problems.

I finished my night of dance and came out to find Shawna as usual. But this time I saw no dazzling smile... she was crying. The blood drained from my face just at the sight of her. Her eyes were filled with sadness and worry. What’s happening? I got ready to leave as fast as I could and a couple of minutes later we were in the car on our way home.

Silence. I was afraid to ask, yet I was curious. Just then she spoke. “I have cancer,” she says. I feel my heart sink, unable to breathe, speak, or swallow, as if I were drowning, grasping for air. “What kind of cancer?” I manage to mumble. “I have melanoma cancer... Remember that spot on my back? I have to have surgery to get it removed and I probably won’t be working for a while,” she says. I hold in my tears and try to be strong. No words are said the rest of the way home. The silence doesn’t bother me this time. I look at her face and know all her thoughts and feelings -- sadness, worry, and fear. The last words of the night escape my mouth with no troubles. “I love you,” I say.

I sat on my bed for a long time, tired and exhausted, but I knew there was no point in trying to sleep. Any time we had argued seemed pointless now. I thought of all the times I got angry. What if I lost her? The thought of never seeing her again, or suffering with cancer made my stomach twist. I turned off the lights and stared up at the ceiling. Memories filled my head as I slowly fell asleep.
Two surgeries, a chest x-ray, many ultrasounds and a lymph node mapping later, she is cancer free. She still has to go to the cancer centre every three months for a full body inspection, blood work and scans. We now choose to live each day as if it is our last. I can’t believe it took my stepmom’s getting cancer to see the importance of that. Now any silence is filled with smiles and laughter. I am so glad that I have her in my life. Our family will never be the same. We’re closer than we’ve ever been. I learned the hard way to “live each day as if it was my last.”

Trehnae lives with her father, stepmother, seven year old sister and four year old brother. At school she enjoys art and math classes. Dancing is a huge part of her life, her favourite dancing styles are ballet and hip hop. She likes to help out in the community, she attends church and she helps to teach dance. Her future plans include training to be an orthodontist. Trehnae would like to thank her family, teachers and friends for supporting her writing efforts.
I remember it like it was yesterday; watching him play was hypnotic. I was enthralled by the sound, the way his left hand flew up and down the neck as if he had done this a thousand times before, which he had. The way my dad’s knee fit into the curve of the peanut-shaped guitar was fascinating. He looked so happy, closing his eyes, with a faint grin on his face as if playing the guitar allowed him to feel the music. “My dad’s so cool,” thought my six year old self. The lacquered, mirror-like finish of the acoustic guitar reflected the light from our basement, so much that I had to put my hand up to cover my eyes.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“That’s the lighting!” said my dad as he strummed the guitar and raised his right hand as if proposing a toast with the guitar pick he calls “the Goblet of Rock”.

“How can I try?” I asked, so intrigued.

My dad handed me his guitar and I rested it on my knee just like he did, but the guitar was too big for my tiny body. I followed my dad’s example and rested my left hand on the strings on the neck of the guitar. I pressed down on the strings and they felt sharp under my fingers, but it didn’t hurt. I eventually got used to the feeling of them and I then took the guitar pick in my right hand and strummed as hard as I could, creating an echo in my basement. I could feel the vibration of the sound coming out of the guitar against my rib cage. I continued doing what I saw my dad do; I moved my left hand up and down the neck of the guitar, pressing down on each string in the different frets while my right hand strummed simultaneously. Playing those first magic notes, wow, did it ever sound awful!

“You’re a natural!” Dad said.

Even though I had no idea what I was playing or what sound each string would make, it made sense. It was at that moment, I realized my passion for playing guitar.

Soon after, I started taking lessons, learning scales, chord progressions, and different guitar techniques. I will never stop learning. Playing guitar is my passion. Playing great guitar, is about more than playing riffs or licks or playing that perfect note at the perfect pitch; it’s about showing your emotions through musical terms. When I started playing guitar I would try to learn songs, concerned about playing every note right. I would practise for hours on end making sure that each note sounded perfect.

But it took years to realize that being a great guitarist doesn’t only require you to play each note right, it also requires the musical expression to come from inside you. To channel what’s in your soul into the guitar. I started to let my hand move freely and finding I could feel each note and not worry about what my hands were doing. Doing this allowed me to play true guitar and share true musical expression. Is this what my dad meant by “the lightning”?
All the scales, chord progression, technique, and hard work were useful but now I understand that they provided me with the right tools I need to show my emotions. My journey through guitar will never end and my ability to explore is just beginning.

Alyssa is an outgoing grade 9 student who lives in Sudbury, Ontario. She is well known by her friends for her artistic abilities: drawing, acting, dancing, writing and playing music. She enjoys doing all these activities in her down time. She especially loves playing the guitar which inspired her Turning Point essay. In the future, she plans to attend university to study the Arts and to enhance her creative ability.
Not many people recall things that happened to them when they were younger. Not the teachers they’ve had, the friends they met or the friends they lost. Although I was young at the time, this memory is still as terribly vivid in my mind as it was the day it first happened.

I remember the day his warm dirty hands cruelly crawled along my skin. Who would’ve thought that a six year old boy, covered in gritty playground sand, was capable of this much? I sure didn’t. He was my friend, classmate, and someone I totally underestimated. I’ll have to thank him one day.

The day he violated my young delicate body was the day that my world came crashing down. “Don’t tell anyone or else,” he threatened. You’re probably thinking that a six year old little boy isn’t capable of much, but I believed he was capable of a lot of hurt and heartache.

As if the first time wasn’t bad enough, it continued. The horrible feeling I had when he’d shoved his grimy hands down my tights, remains clear and painful in my mind. I was confused, scared and felt guilty. I’ve never been a good liar, and when my mom would ask how my day went, the encounters I experienced during school would replay in my mind, and I’d just say, “Good,” with a smile.

Even though it wasn’t my fault, I was terrified to tell my mom. The way he touched me hurt me so badly, emotionally and physically. My young body wasn’t ready for forceful fingers in such delicate places. Neither my mind nor my heart was ready to tell my mom.

I’d cry every night. What I can’t comprehend is how teachers didn’t notice him touch my body at recess or drop his pencils under the table so he had an excuse to bite me under my dress. I loathed him. To make matters worse, he lived across the street from me, and still does. When would it stop? Why couldn’t he realize he was stealing my innocence? Did I deserve this?

The things he forced me to do were painful and embarrassing. I still remember his commands, sending shivers down my spine. He was my monster in the closet. But there was no closet. He was with me all day long, sitting near me in class, playing in the yard at recess. Each day, I would go to school fearful, expecting the worst and hoping for the best.

“Mom, a boy in my class is touching me down there.” I finally confessed. I was sick of the pain in my stomach, the pain in my mind and the guilt and fear. I was hoping she’d help. My mom phoned Children’s Aid but even though they spoke to him and his family, it continued to happen. As the years slowly dragged on, my six year old self grew into a young girl who learned to say no. I wasn’t scared of him anymore. It was my body and he had no right to violate me.

He finally stopped touching me, but he stole my childhood. I’ll have to thank him one day.

As time went on, it seemed to me that every boy in my class talked about sex. The thought sickened me. I didn’t feel safe around them. The way boys talked about and looked at girls… I felt worthless. I wanted to be treated better, to feel confident and worthy. I found my light at the end of the tunnel when I enrolled at an all girl’s school. No disgusting boys, and no more pressure to have sex. Happiness, confidence, true love. Finally.
I have discovered a love for girls. I’d always looked at girls. I think they’re beautiful, so nice and respectful. Some girls have broken my heart, but I have finally found the love and respect I’ve been searching for in a beautiful, wonderful girl. We’re in love and I hope she’ll be mine forever. She accepts my past, faults, flaws and opinions about sex. She is the most amazing person I’ve ever met and I hope one day she’ll be my wife. I’ll have to thank him one day.
An Inspirational Teacher

When people hear the word “teacher”, school is the first thing that comes to mind. But what most do not realize is that we are surrounded by many teachers everywhere we go. Coaches, parents, guardians and tutors can all be considered teachers. They all teach you things and inspire you in some way. When I hear this word I think of one person only and her name is Cristina.

Back in my first days of gymnastics, I had loads of fun. I was very happy but I was not quite satisfied. One thing was missing. I needed a bigger challenge. I was tired of the simple moves which we repeated over and over again. I decided to move up to the competitive group. Finally the day to sign up for the next year’s classes came, but I was scared. I felt guilty for abandoning my coach, I was afraid that the competitive group would be too hard, I was afraid that all the fun would be gone. My mother was getting impatient. She and my family kept pressuring me to make up my mind. I simply could not. Then I met Cristina, one of the competitive coaches. She told me that I would be fine; she said that if competitive was not for me I could simply switch back. Her encouraging words helped me make my decision. I soon discovered that competitive was fun, the moves were not too hard, and I did not miss my previous coach since I had entered a big gymnastics family filled with “Gym Love”. All of this because of Cristina.

Cristina helped me through times of frustration. Times I just wanted to give up. She made it all better. One day I went to practice thinking that it was going to be just a typical practice: stretch a little, practice leaps, jumps and body movements, work out a bit and then move on to routines. Little did I know nothing was the same. Nothing would ever be the same again. Cristina advised us that the reason she had not been herself lately, was because she had cancer. Cristina, my hero and my inspiration had cancer?

Days went by and Cristina fought the cancer with all her might. She came to visit us as much as she could, but it was hard with all the treatments. We often chatted on Facebook but it was not the same. Even though she was sick, she would bake cookies for the children in the hospital, and give to the poor. She was so wonderful. During the last practice she attended, she made us write the word “Strong” on our hands. She said it was to remind us to be strong in life and in gymnastics, to never give up, and always be the best we can be. The very last time I saw this incredible woman was in her own house. She invited my gym friends and me over to decorate cupcakes. What a laugh!

Every day we thought of Cristina and her cupcake party. But then it came. I remember the horrible day like it was yesterday. I was in the middle of a routine and one of my coaches got a phone call. She ran down the hallway bawling her eyes out! Afterward, her sister joined her. All of a sudden my father and my friend’s mother showed up! Soon enough everyone in my group knew but me. They were all crying. I walked up to my father, curious, but something inside me already knew that Cristina had passed. I could not believe it. I was in denial, I was frozen! A rock! It was hard to cry because it just did not feel real.
On this day I learned not to take life for granted, to listen to the lessons Cristina taught me and to appreciate the people around me. This wonderful woman changed my life! This woman changed many people’s lives and this woman stayed incredibly STRONG! She will always be in my heart and will always be my inspiration!

Grade 9 student Maxine Bérubé currently lives in Lively, Ontario. She loves to sing, dance, write and express herself artistically. Maxine enjoys traveling very much, especially with her two sisters, Dominique and Alexie, and her parents, Patrick and Ginette. In 2011 she traveled to Lausanne, Switzerland for the 14th World Gymnastrada with her gymnastics club (Sampo Rhythmic Gymnastics Club). Although she enjoys traveling, Maxine would much rather be at her cottage on the French River, boating, cliff jumping and exploring. Maxine, comes from a French Catholic school board. It was quite an adjustment to go from all French classes to mostly English. It may be different, but she would not choose any other school. She plans to continue her studies at Marymount Academy and to eventually become an interior designer.
Have you ever felt hopeless, like whatever you or anyone tried to do wouldn’t help, and you were just stuck? That is how I felt at my old elementary school. There, I thought my teachers believed that I wasn’t smart. Whenever the teachers would try to help me, they got frustrated because I just didn’t understand what they were teaching. They never gave me a chance. They put me in a special program that was supposed to help me but all it did was break down my confidence and give more ammunition to the bullies.

The kids in my class would always taunt and tease me. I didn’t understand why they were so mean to me; I never did anything wrong and I always tried to be nice to them. It just broke my heart. The things they said were so hurtful. People don’t seem to realize how powerful words are and how they affect people. I would lie in bed at night thinking of all the things that they said to me that day and eventually I believed them to be true.

I felt so alone, I didn’t have any real friends that would stick up for me, and the kids in my class just watched me suffer. My parents went into the school a number of times to talk to my teachers and the principal but no one really did anything. It made me think that they just didn’t care. I just wanted to die. It was just too much for me to handle, all the pain and suffering that I felt was unbearable. I absolutely hated school and I dreaded having to go there. I came home crying almost every day. My parents felt helpless, as though they had failed me because they saw me in distress and there was no one to help.

Whenever I thought things were getting better, suddenly they would take a turn for the worse. It seemed like there was always an obstacle and I just couldn’t keep up. My parents and I knew that I needed to change schools; but I didn’t know where to go. Then one day my class was called down to the library for a presentation by an all girls’ school called “Academy”. When we got there, I saw a few girls in their uniforms; they started to talk about how wonderful “Academy” was, how it was a family, and how great the teachers were. They were trying to entice the girls in our grade six class to attend their school in grade seven. I was hooked. When I got home that night I was so excited, I told my parents about the school and that I wanted to apply to become a Regal at “Academy”.

When I received word that “Academy” wanted me to attend an interview I was so thrilled. My mom went with me to the interview and later I was called into the Vice-Principal’s office where she informed us that I was accepted into “Academy”. I almost cried, I had the biggest smile on my face, I was grinning from ear to ear. I couldn’t wait to attend “Academy” for a fresh start with new kids and teachers.

On the morning of my first day at my new school, I had no idea that it would completely change my life. When I came home from that first day at school I felt like a new person, like I had been given a second chance. It was a new beginning. In no time at all I was laughing with friends walking through the halls, and my teachers were unbelievable. When I asked for help they were eager and never once did they make me feel like I was “stupid”. The relationship I made with one teacher in particular will follow me through the rest of my life. I finally had the confidence that I never had before. For once in my life I felt strong, I could be myself and no one would judge me. I was free to be me!
Emily is completing Grade 9 at Marymount Academy. She lives in Lively, Ontario with her parents. Emily’s first passion is dance, with art, as a close second. She is very goal-oriented and getting a good education is important to her. Emily has aspirations of becoming a high school teacher to help make a difference in the lives of young people.
Love So Rare

“Good things come to those who wait”; this is very much the saying of my family’s life.

My family consists of my loving mom (who loves us more than anything), my very small teacup chihuahua (Aboo), and then there’s my adorable brother named Owen. We’re a very special family and people often wonder what I mean by this. They often ask, “What makes your family any different than mine or anybody else’s?” The answer to this question is that we hold a love so rare, but very real. We are all together due to a miracle. We believe that God knew we were right for each other so He brought us together. My mom was a big factor in saving my brother’s life, mine as well, and without her I honestly don’t know where we would have ended up. I am forever thankful to my mom for choosing my brother and I to be a part of her family.

I met my mom when I was four and have been with her ever since. I vaguely remember the day I met my brother. I was six then, and I came home from school on a normal day, not expecting anything different. Boy, was I wrong! When I walked into my house I saw a random little boy in my kitchen. He had the biggest and cutest brown eyes, and was very small even at the age of two. We had something huge in common: before I met my mom, I lived with two awful people who called themselves my “parents”. My brother had been in the same boat. The difference between my brother and I was that he was rescued from his situation sooner than I. I’m happy for that.

My brother and I had been through a lot even though we were so young. When I think of the things his biological parents did to him, it really fills me with rage and I get tears in my eyes. The rage that I feel is difficult to extinguish. What kind of person would stick a screaming and crying baby into a closet or put him into a pot of boiling water? And that’s not all they did; they did a lot worse things than that. If you just read that sentence and didn’t feel anything then you’re as mad as the people who did this.

Due to stupid choices that they made even before he was born, my brother has difficult things that he has to deal with. It is a given fact that when you drink or do drugs when you’re pregnant the baby will most likely be harmed and this is exactly what happened. My brother has many different disabilities that are hard for him to handle, but although he faces all these hardships he is the probably the happiest kid you could ever meet.

My mom and I care about my brother so much, we want the best for him and we want him to live a life without problems or judgments. This is very hard because there are things inside his head that are hard to fight, and it’s very sad that he has to deal with this because of somebody’s stupid actions. When I see my brother fighting all the odds that are against him I see how strong he really is and when you have a strong family right on your heels you could say you’re invincible. We may not be blood related but our love is stronger than families who are, and this is because we were meant for each other.

Every single day we fight hard to stay together and when I see this determination in both my brother’s and my mom’s eyes I know I can conquer anything. When I saw someone so small fighting for a life that he so badly wanted, that in itself was my turning point.
ife, such a simple thing, yet its meaning is unclear. The question is thrown around from person to person, in the hopes of finding the “right” definition. Some say “Life is a game and playing it would be living”. Others differ, saying, “Life is the fragments of time in which moments are formed, moments that define our life”. I define life as knowing how to get by.

This frame of mind was most likely developed in Guyana, South America, sandwiched between Venezuela, Brazil and Suriname, where I spent the first seven years of my life. There, such thinking was needed on a daily basis. The year 2011 marks the beginning of my turning point, when I visited my homeland Guyana, a heaven on earth, after immigrating to Canada, six years prior. I still recall the smell of exotic fruits and the tropical breeze that carried it through my hair. Even though I had left at age seven, I somehow knew this was not foreign soil, but home. Making my way through the airport I remember my father telling me to take off my jewelry and that I will see very different things, but I never gave much thought to it other than “airport procedure”.

Walking through the streets of Guyana I then came to understand my father’s words. At that moment I had changed my perspective of Guyana, my point of view on Life altered. The beauties of my coastal land didn’t mesmerize me for long as I began to notice traits, often synonymous with developing countries. Inadequacy of basic infrastructures, improper roads, and uncleanliness of public facilities was a definite red flag, not to mention inappropriate or uneducated lingo. Narrow dirt roads lined with locals as far as my eyes could see, children in tattered clothes and dilapidated houses were my first sight of what was supposed to be a tropical paradise. Thoughts of pity were going through my head; I realized this is where I would have grown up if it wasn’t for Canada.

Breathtaking images of palm trees and agricultural land I had seen from the airplane now seemed far from memory. What I now encountered sent shivers down my spine and words alluded me. I was now looking poverty dead in the face, and it had me locked in a stare that was almost impossible to break, as we headed further into the city towards my relatives’ home. I knew it was the beginning of what was to come but unsure if I could handle it. As the days went on, the contrast between Canada and Guyana became more blatant. Limited access to comprehensive healthcare and high levels of illiteracy was evident. “Let’s go shopping” my cousin suggested and I willingly agreed, little did I know how different the shopping experience would be. Somewhere deep in the back of my head I was expecting a shopping centre but that was not the case here. What I faced was a crowded street, both sides lined with rowdy locals and pickpockets; all vying for the attention of shoppers: “FRUIT FA SALE” and “Get ‘ya fresh vegetables”, they bellowed. It was total chaos. Even though I was among the confusion one thing was clear, the standard of living was much lower and the evolution of life was way behind, but neither sorrow, distress nor embarrassment clouded their faces. The poverty I witnessed, in Guyana has awakened in me a profound desire to achieve much more than the basic elements of survival in life. This better quality of life will not be wasted. Everyday Guyanese children suffer; I will use these precious resources to better my future and my country. I will be forever grateful to my parents and Canada for providing me with a “second chance” in life.
Movement in G Major

Freedom has eluded the human race for innumerable years. Too often humans have dreamt of her touch, only succeeding in locking themselves in their minds. Freedom has taunted humankind forever it seems, always twirling just out of our reach. She hides deep in the Earth, soars brilliantly through the sky, and even lies sprawled amid the ruins of war. Humans have a need to be free, etched deep in our soul, and yet freedom escapes most of us even while at our fingertips. Artists, in my opinion, do not have such troubles. They constantly test their limits, effortlessly drawing her from the depths of their souls. Even I catch glimpses of freedom. My sightings began when I started to dance, and I can tell you this: she is beautiful.

Though it is hard to believe now, I was once the most painfully shy girl at school. I had a few friends, but probably only because they felt sorry for me. I spent my recesses by myself, either with my nose in a book or lost in my own fantasy world, and the hours after school were not much different. I was a very quiet girl, often fading into the background of group conversations and mumbling whenever I had to respond. When asked to speak in class I constantly failed to put my thoughts into words, and I had a genuine fear of expressing myself. I was afraid, you see. I was fearful that people would laugh if I told them my ideas or musings. I had formed a shell around myself, hiding from the world. Just recently, while helping me to apply for university, my father told me, “We (my mother and him) were very worried about you. We knew we had to get you into a social environment, and fast.” Luckily for me, my parents chose to sign me up for dance when I was seven years old.

Being enrolled in my first dance class at Sudbury School of Dance introduced me to a woman named Denise, who taught me to be proud. She is an absolutely wonderful woman, my ballet teacher of ten years now, and once I stepped foot in her studio, I was instantly family. That first year of dance was what began to fracture my shell, but it wasn’t until my first performance when it really cracked. I was terrified. For that first year recital, I had to perform a ballet piece. It was short, probably no more than two minutes at the most, and yet to me it was the most gargantuan project that I had ever faced. It had taken almost four months of preparation to choreograph and memorize the piece, and the number of steps I needed to remember was daunting. I worried that I would forget the steps and freeze onstage. Then it was my turn to perform, and I had no chance to be afraid or to worry or even to think. All I had time for was the movement. I forgot that I was supposed to be terrified. I forgot that there was an entire theatre watching my every move. I forgot about my fear of self-expression. I simply danced. It was wonderful.

It is difficult to describe the feeling of dance to someone who has never taken a dance class before. Believe me when I say that I have tried and failed to explain this verbally to multiple people on many occasions. Hopefully, this change of medium will allow me to properly express exactly what performing instills in me, and the utter joy that dancing brings every time I step onstage. Perhaps writing will allow me to explain
the amazing happiness, the serene calm, and the absolute wonder that fills me. The beautiful, astounding, marvellous, and complete freedom that simple movement bestows never ceases to amaze and delight me. The stage is mine to command; to do with as I see fit. The audience is mine and mine alone, and it is up to me and my movement to astound and entrance them. My dancing tells stories of loneliness and camaraderie, of love and heartbreak, and of tragedy and joy. Then, once the performance is over, the most amazing thing happens. The audience applauds. They clap for both me and my movement, and the emotions it brings to light. The feeling that I have let them see freedom, even for a moment, is astounding.

This was the beginning of my transformation, a metamorphosis, if you will. My shell began to splinter and break around me. After all, if I could dance in front of a full theatre audience, why could I not do other things? What was so terrifying about giving a winning speech to a panel of judges? Why not act out some of Shakespeare’s more dramatic death scenes in class? There was nothing to stop me from entering the play, or joining the art club, or trying my hand at the flute. I formed unbreakable bonds with my family and friends, branching out into the community in search of new experiences. I am now seventeen years old, in my last year of high school, and I can honestly say that I am the happiest I have ever been.

Dance is the one thing that I cannot live without. It is the one thing that pulls me out of my body and allows me to breathe. Dancing conjures a feeling of peace deep within my soul, whether it is during “turns around the back” in my modern class, or during an allegro exercise in ballet. The music may be in four-four or nine-eight time, the tempo may be 200 beats per minute or only 60, or there may in fact be no music at all, but none of that matters. As long as I am dancing, and as long as I embrace that peace within, I am happy. I am truly and only myself. I see freedom, and she is beautiful.

Grade 12 student Emily lives in Sudbury, Ontario She loves to write as much as she loves to dance, and she hopes to continue writing. Emily has succeeded academically throughout her high school career, and she plans to attend university in the fall to study accounting. She is a member of the senior concert band, playing flute and piccolo. She looks forward to new experiences in the future.
The Pursuit of Happiness

“The real hopeless victims of mental illness are to be found among those who appear to be most normal”

– Aldous Huxley.

Every single one of us will be forced to go through certain events throughout our lifetime that are made to challenge us. I used to think that it was these events that would shape who we are as people and who we become in the future. However, over the past year I have learned that it’s the manner in which you choose to deal with these events that truly shapes who you are.

I’ve never had a bad life. I have a roof over my head, food on the table, a loving family, friends, and good grades. Some might describe that as a good and “normal” life. Even still, the most “normal” people can develop mental illness. From the beginning of September 2011 to the end of October 2011, my dad had stopped talking to me due to a family conflict. This resulted in his telling me he never wanted to see me. So for two months there was no contact between us, and for two months I became very sad. I began isolating myself from my family and friends. I would try to act normal by putting on a smile and laughing, but it felt like I was putting on a show and I couldn’t stop thinking about how sad I was. My mom didn’t know what was going on with me and so we would fight a lot which only made things worse. One night I was sitting at the kitchen table with my mom. I had so much running through my head that I was having a hard time focusing. For about three days prior I had spent a lot of time reading about depression until I basically self-diagnosed myself. It was this night that I finally broke down and explained everything I had been feeling to my mom. I told her that I thought I was depressed and that I wanted to visit my doctor. Sure enough, a few weeks later my doctor diagnosed me with anxiety and seasonal depression. I felt relieved to finally know what was wrong with me; but, I was also scared because I still didn’t feel like myself. I felt like this meant there was something wrong with who I was. It took me a while to figure out that having anxiety and seasonal depression did not define me, but it was simply a small part of who I am. Once I realized this, I learned to rebuild my relationships, become more focused, and learned how to ultimately make myself happy.

I found rebuilding my relationships to be kind of difficult. I was scared to open up to my friends and family because I didn’t want them to treat me any different. I just wanted them to accept me and understand why I had pushed them away. I wanted things to return back to normal. I finally decided that the best way to fix things was to just talk about it. It was what I was the most afraid of but I had to do it. I started by talking with my mom and she helped me fix things with my dad again. She explained everything to him and he agreed to start seeing me again which made me happy. The rest of my family found out through my mom and I had a small conversation with my aunt and grandma. They simply explained that they were there for me if I needed to talk, which I really appreciated. Next I apologized to my friends for how I had been acting and for ignoring them. I only told two of my closest friends everything, and they were both very attentive the entire time and also very supportive.

Becoming focused and getting back on track with my school work was the next step. For the two months that I was unknowingly depressed, I always did my homework but I never gave it 100% and so my marks weren’t as high as they could have been. Once I figured out what had been going on with me, I learned how to deal with it a little better and learned how to become focused again. I studied harder and got caught up
in my school work. I managed to raise my grades slightly but not much. This upset me a little but I reminded myself that I was trying and that was all that mattered.

After getting back on track I decided that making myself happy should be my number one priority. I started going out with my friends again and spending more time with my family. I tried to do more things that made me happy like reading more, eating healthier, drinking more tea and having “lazy days” when they were needed. My trip to Europe during the March break of 2012 was the biggest event influencing my happiness. I fought through my anxiety of leaving my mom and taking an airplane for the first time. I almost backed out of the trip right there but with the support and reassurance of my friends and family I still went. It was during this week that I met a lot of new people and visited a handful of beautiful countries. This was definitely the best experience of my life and I’m glad I chose to go.

Mental illness is a very real issue. I never thought that I would be the one to become depressed or have anxiety, but I was and I have worked hard over the past year to get to where I am today. I still have to face daily challenges that my anxiety and depression bring on, but I have learned how to deal with it in my own way. Although it may still be hard sometimes, I believe it’s important to stay positive!

Grade 12 student, Dana lives in Capreol and she loves to read, blog and spend time with friends. In the fall, Dana will be attending the University of Ottawa to study psychology. In the future, Dana hopes to be able to help youth with mental illness live happier lives.
A Cupful of Possibilities

“In a place, half a world away, the people have very little and yet, they have so much.” – Brenda Stankiewicz

We all see those commercials, with the starving and disease-ridden children, the sorrowful lives of the unlucky, and the imperfect lives of the poor, asking for just so many pennies a day, for a chance to save a child. When we see those commercials, we often change the channel, disregarding the pleas without giving them a second thought, as had I. In July of 2009, my family and I were graced with the opportunity of a lifetime, changing my perspective on life, and my relationships with others. Life is like a cup full of possibilities, waiting for us to partake in it.

Along with six of the seven people in my family, I traveled to the small village of Boma N’gombe in Tanzania. There, we worked for three weeks with the people of Boma and ten other volunteers from across Canada and the United States. We volunteered in various locations, including elementary schools, secondary schools and orphanages. These buildings offered dirt floors, rough cement walls and hosted three or four children per desk. As we toured the village, the people’s houses consisted of four cement walls with openings for a door and windows, and nothing but dirt as flooring.

My sister, Elizabeth, and I volunteered at the Kichijo orphanage, working with children aged 8 months to 19 years. There, we taught various lessons in English. The children learned shapes, colours, and other essential knowledge. Together, we helped with the daily care of the children, including the distribution of meals, brushing of teeth, and keeping them entertained.

We estimated around sixty children living in the orphanage in the care of Mama Lucy. They often slept four to a bed, used a sand pile as their bathroom, and had no running water. Their meals consisted of two meals each day: one meal was an overly watered porridge, the other a bland corn paste called ugali. When the younger ones had “accidents” they had to remain in those same clothes for the day as they had no spares. The children walked around with tattered, worn clothing, and either damaged shoes or, sometimes, no shoes at all. And yet, the children were always smiling, playing and willing to share what little they did have.

As I stepped onto the orphanage’s grounds that first day, I felt a rush of anxiety, not knowing what to expect. The anxiety quickly dissipated as I was welcomed by the open arms of the children. Almost immediately, the children were laughing, screaming and playing with us as though we had known them for their whole lives. They were excited to meet new people, learn new things and have new experiences. The children were always so eager to learn and expressed happiness to have the opportunity. They lived as a community and offered one another the help, support, and friendship they needed.

For breakfast every day, the children’s steaming hot bland porridge was served in a small green plastic cup. The children would sit in their desks, talk amongst themselves and savor their meal. More than once, I remember these little people would cheerfully offer me a sip, which I would politely decline as I knew they needed it more than I. I was astonished to see how willing they were to share what they had, even though they had so little. The children, who seemed to have nothing, lived as though they had everything.
Although it was my job to teach them, I believe that no lesson I could have taught could have been greater than the lesson they taught me: to always be grateful for what I had and to make the most out of everything. Even though the children had no possessions, no clothes and no clean water, they still always found a reason to smile. Perhaps this was a result of relying on one another rather than material items to bring them happiness. There, true joy is not found in possessions, but in the relationships with the people around them. Regardless of having nothing, to me, they had everything: each other, love, and happiness.

A replica of the green plastic cup used for porridge every morning was given to me as a gift from someone who also volunteered at the Kichijo orphanage. This cup now sits on my bedside table as a reminder of my time spent in Tanzania. This cup represents the children, always laughing, giggling and playing. It reminds me to always look for the good in the bad, to make the most out of everything, and to be grateful for what I have. This is a cup full of possibilities. When I look at this cup, I see the sunshine on a rainy day, a teardrop turn into laughter, and although it lies empty, I see it full of memories. It reminds me to be content with what I have and to place greater value on the people in my life.

In Boma, the land is dry because of drought. Here, we complain because the rain won’t stop.

There we were welcomed with open arms. Here, we are afraid of strangers.

There, people are eager to help. Here, we ask, “What is in it for me?”

There, my green cup is a cup full of possibility. Here it is an empty vessel.

In Boma N’gombe, people live with very little, and yet, they have taught me so much.

Born and raised in Sudbury, Ontario, sixteen year old Ali is the youngest of five children. She is a very dedicated and accomplished figure skater, as she has recently qualified for the All Ontario Championships. She continues to remain passionate about sport, hoping to improve in every way possible. Her trip to Tanzania has inspired her love of travel and has made her eager to discover everything the world has to offer. The year after next, Ali plans to achieve her post-secondary education by studying abroad in the United Kingdom or Northern Spain.
Fixing the Girl in the Mirror

If you were to look at me, you would see an average looking girl who is generally smiling. However, if you looked deeper, you would see someone completely different. You would see a girl whose insecurities follow her every thought and action, a girl who worries about being where she isn’t wanted, a girl who stays awake at night suffocating in every detail of every day. I can’t look in the mirror without hating who stares back at me, but after all, appearances are deceiving.

I cannot pinpoint the exact moment I began to feel like I was worth nothing, but I know that one day about two years ago, I realized it had been a while since I had been truly happy. The good days started to trickle to a stop and it became harder and harder to smile. There’s only so long you can paint on a fake smile before you run out of paint; there’s only so long you can put on a happy facade before the cracks start to show. Yet, no one noticed the cracks. It is kind of funny how you can be surrounded by people and no one notices that inside you’re breaking. It is said high school is the best years of your life. I for one, seriously hope that is not true. If this is the highlight of my life, then I quit.

This past year, it felt like all my thoughts and self-hatred were crushing me. They followed me around on the good days, always lurking in the shadows. On the bad days, they clouded my mind. They would whisper in my ear “you’re not good enough, no one likes you, why would they? You have nothing to offer.” I began to feel like Humpty Dumpty from the nursery rhyme. I was broken and no one could put me back together. No one even noticed enough to try. Not only was I broken, I was invisible.

I began to wonder about myself and my value in the world. If I were to drop off the face of the planet without a trace, would anyone even notice I was gone? The answer I found was a depressing no, no one would notice. If I was such a waste of space, then what was I doing here? Days like those were the days that that bottle of pills looked very inviting. The only thing that made me think twice was the thought of my parents and the rest of my family. I found that a coping strategy, listing off a list of people who would miss me. The list seemed short, but it was something. It showed that there were at least a couple of people who would notice I was gone.

Occasionally I would try to confide in a friend how I felt; after all, these thoughts were not healthy and could not stay bottled up. Instead of finding someone to talk to, I was met with comments like “I think everyone feels like they don’t matter, don’t worry”. Once again, I was alone. So what does that say about the world we live in? It says that seemingly normal teenage girls feel like they don’t matter. If I go through life believing that my voice and my thoughts don’t matter, and the person next to me thinks this as well, then who is left to speak out and make their voice heard? This made me stop and think about what I was doing to myself if I don’t experience everyday as it comes, if I feel like I’m alone, I’ll push people away until I truly am alone. Then what kind of future will I have?

You can tell me every day to let go of the negative and live for the positive, but I won’t listen. No matter how often you tell me, I won’t believe you until I learn that for myself, and I am trying to learn that lesson. I have been since the day I picked up that bottle and seriously considered how easy it would be to go to sleep. Forever. That’s when I realized how serious I was letting my thoughts get. I’ve realized I need to make a change, that I cannot carry on letting every insecurity, worry or doubt guide my steps. I should be able to look into the mirror and see someone who is worth the effort, who is not cracked and broken.
I have now reached a crossroads. I can continue to allow these worries and insecurities choke me, or I can push them away and breathe easier. Sure, the answer seems easy, but I know carrying it out will be a struggle. I have to start by learning to love myself on the good days and the bad days, and that, in itself, is a long battle. I have to believe that I’m worth something to somebody. Instead of focusing on the past and what I could have done differently, I must think to the future. I will leave this town behind me and move on. I will attend university, make friends, and grow into the person I was meant to be. Sure, I’ll continue to have bad days where I’ll feel completely and utterly alone, but I can move past them. I can fix the girl in the mirror so that someday my reflection is somebody that I’m happy to see in the morning. It’s time to put me back together, and I don’t need the King’s men or anybody else.
Logan Foucault  
Honourable Mention – Grade 11 & 12  
Sudbury Catholic District School Board  

The Point That My Life Changed Direction

Throughout life, every person will endure struggle and events that will make or break them. Just as Frederick Douglass said, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.” As humans, we have the ability to work around the events that could hinder our progression towards a larger goal. It could be anything from a diagnosis of a condition, to the death of a close family member or loved one. In the end, it shapes who we are and who we will become in the future. These events can be regarded as the chisel that crafts the status of our life. I will begin to tell you about the turning point in my life, and how since then, everything has changed.

My name is Logan. Ever since I can remember I have been distracted by the simplest of things. I was never able to keep full attention on any subject or activity. School was one of the most difficult things because of the constant distraction of friends, or the habit of day dreaming about what I could do the moment I left class. In junior kindergarten, the teacher constantly suggested to my parents that I should be tested, because I could not stay focused to complete a simple task. In grade three, when EQAO testing occurred, I scored abnormally high. I was then asked to go to the school board office at age 11, to go through more testing about my intelligence. Again, I scored above average, and was admitted to the enrichment program. On the EQAO results, it was mentioned that I may have scored higher if I wasn’t so distracted by everything around me. As school continued, I was constantly underachieving. I was expected to achieve higher grades but I was performing much lower than was expected based on what the test results indicated. All the way into grade ten in high school, I still showed no interest in school. I could not bear to sit in a classroom for six hours no matter how interested I was in the subject (such as science or history). At the beginning of grade eleven, I finally decided to get tested.

After a long awaited appointment with my doctor, I was admitted to see a pediatrician in Minnow Lake. I sat in the office and waited at least 45 minutes for my appointment. It was not the wait that made the scenario awkward, or even odd. It was the fact that I was the only client in the office that was over the age of four. I was surrounded by children and their parents who were equally as confused as the secretary was as to why I was in the office. Once the awkward and quiet wait ended, I saw the doctor; she went over results, tests and some of the records that my family had kept since junior kindergarten. She came to the conclusion that I had A. D. D or Attention Deficit Disorder. She gave me a prescription for 25mg of Adderall XR. This is an amphetamine that helps keep me and others with this disorder more focused. There are minimal side effects to the drug, but since it is an amphetamine, it keeps me awake in the morning. It can help me stay awake in my first period classes because some mornings are difficult for me to stay awake.

Since I began taking Adderall, everything has changed for me. I always took a great interest in science, but never had the interest to study it, or pay attention in school. But now, that has changed; I have been able to achieve a high 80% average, meeting my potential to achieve. My whole perspective has changed since the tests and the diagnosis. My friend group has changed dramatically; I hang out with people now that I share real interests and with whom I can relate. My friends from my childhood and even my new peers at school have noticed and commented on the changes that I have gone through. Positive changes have occurred for me, and this is the type of change that I wanted to notice in my education. With the grades that I have acquired from these dramatic changes I now have plans to go into Chemical Engineering. I am passionate about both Chemistry, and Physics. They are the two main strands of science that I hold the most
interest in. School has become an easy task now that I can actually concentrate on the lessons at hand. Without knowing that I could achieve so much greater than what I originally was, I don’t think that I would be able to even finish this essay on time, let alone take any interest in it.

After writing a full essay solely on myself, I feel conceited. Sure it was supposed to be just about an event that happened to me, but it just feels odd. It feels odd that the largest meaningful event that has happened to me is about me, and not someone in my life who has immense importance to me. The diagnosis that occurred now one year ago has changed my life in an utmost significant way. I feel triumphed in the event that has drastically molded my life, and how I overcame it. This experience is the main, most recent and relevant ordeal of which I have been through. Since this, my whole world has opened up, “Change brings opportunity” – Nido Qubein. The quote that was just stated is a direct reference to my life. The opportunity has arisen, and I have claimed it. This was my life changing experience, about how a simple test changed everything in my life.

Logan is a seventeen year old grade 12 student. He enjoys working out and being social. Logan also enjoys reading fantasy and post apocalyptic books. His favourite books include the Hunger Games and the Artemis Fowl series. In the future Logan hopes to attend Laurentian University to take Chemical Engineering. Logan encourages others to always read because it gives one a vast vocabulary and builds one’s creativity.
In 2007, my family began to crumble as my life was flipped upside down. It was on February 11th, when my mother first met him. Since that moment I knew my life would never be the same because my sister and I were on our own. My mother became a completely different person around him; her life began to evolve around nothing but herself, her relationship, alcohol, and drugs. Although my mother was caught up in her own life, she was all I was able to think about.

After a few weeks of knowing this man, my mother insisted that he move in with us because she claimed to be in love with him. From that point on things spiraled out of control. My mother spent all hours at the bar and came home intoxicated almost every night. Unfortunately, that was not the worst of it all. One night at around three in the morning my mother stumbled in with him and I was awoken by screaming and loud bangs which were followed by the noise of shattering glass. I was terrified as it continued for several more minutes, until eventually everything stopped. At that very moment it was silent and dark and I could feel my body becoming over whelmed with so much emotion and heartache. I began to cry and I couldn’t stop, knowing he laid hands on my mother and I couldn’t do anything to stop it. I laid in the dark until morning arrived. Even after the sun rose I remained on my bed thinking about everything that just occurred and how within those few minutes my childhood had changed forever and possibly may continue to change.

Each night I was afraid to go to bed in fear that he may harm my mother again, but to my surprise nothing ever happened for a long while. That is until the one night. The night I will never forget simply because it was the night I thought I lost my mother forever. It was a normal Saturday night; he and my mother came home from the bar intoxicated and it was late, but this time I was there to see it all. He started shouting at my mother which eventually escalated into his flipping the glass coffee table and ripping the television out of the wall unit. It went silent and then for the first time my mother shouted back. The look on his face at that very moment is something I can never forget. Anger, hatred, and disapproval was written all over his face. It all happened so quickly after that. My mother ran to her room and shut the door behind her. He ran after her and punched the door shattering his knuckles. The door then swung open and my mother was lying on the bed, that is until he flipped the bed completely on top of her. I shouted at my mother, but each time there was no response. I got on my knees and tried with all my might to lift the bed off her but it was hopeless I was too weak. He shouted at me to get off the floor and said my mother was faking it for attention. I ignored what he said and continued shouting for my mother's response. After about 10 minutes my mother regained consciousness and made her way out from under the bed. What happened next is what left me speechless! They crawled into bed like nothing even happened.

For the next couple of weeks the abuse continued as each night passed. Eventually the abuse was not only toward my mother, but my sister as well. I became scared to wake up each morning, wondering if it would be mine, my sister’s, or my mother’s last day on earth. I soon became so fed up with watching my family fall apart, that I told my mother it was either me or him, and that’s when I heard the words that tore me apart. My mother chose “him”. To know that my mother chose a man so disrespectful left me with many mixed emotions. I immediately packed my belongings and called my father to come for me.

I did not talk to my mother for months after that until December 2009 when I got a call from her saying was admitted to the hospital for attempted suicide. After being admitted to the hospital she decided to also
admit herself to the Algoma Centre to seek help for her depression. When she was released she discovered that all her belongings were sold in a yard sale, and my mother was forced to basically start her life all over again on her own.

This whole experience has shaped the person I am today in so many ways. It also plays a huge role in why I live my life the way I do. The fact that my mother completely lost all sight of who she was, along with all of her lifetime belongings because of a man makes me determined to live my life depending on no one but myself. Also, I have refused to associate myself with anyone involved with drugs or alcohol simply because I have seen what it is capable of doing. Finally, I cherish my family and all that I am blessed with because I saw firsthand how fast everything can be taken away from me.

Jaime is a grade 11 student who lives in Hamner, Ontario. She has been on the Honour Roll since grade 9. She enjoys writing. After secondary school Jaime hopes to work with autistic children.
Enough

Everyone has that voice inside their head that can tell them who they are. This voice can define you, or you can define it. It's your call. I have decided to rule my own thoughts and take back control in my life. Mind you, that isn't how it always was. She told me how to succeed; she told me failure wasn’t an option. I listened to her because she was cunning, mesmerizing, and she told me how to get everything I thought I wanted. It was not long before she was controlling me. She was the very mechanism of my being.

I first became acquainted with her in ninth grade. I had studied hard for a test and was fairly confident. Pleased with myself, I went to bed. I was almost asleep when I heard her voice for the first time. Really? She questioned, are you giving up? This is high school. You need to step up your game. What she said made sense; I had to try harder if I wanted good grades. I stayed up and continued to study for a few more hours. When I got the test back, I had received 100%. Stick with me and you’ll continue to succeed. Stick with me because I know you better than anyone else. I realized the power of this voice and, from that day forward, I never questioned her. I gave in to her every command.

She would constantly challenge me: do you really think that’s good enough? She broke me until I had little control over my own thoughts. Her thoughts were my thoughts; all her ideas were mine. All of my success belonged to her. I became just a piece in her mind game, and I was coming up short. The cost? My self-worth.

Before last year, she had never challenged me about the way I looked. It had always been academic with us. Still, there I was, staring at myself in my mirror, and she arose. Wow, you are getting fat! Sure, I wasn’t at my thinnest, but I wasn’t fat. She disagreed. Cue the calorie counting, restrictive eating and meal skipping. I was sucked into a whirlwind. Once you’re in, it’s almost impossible to get out. Going out with friends became a challenge. I became afraid to eat with them. When one of my friends asked if I’d like to go out, the voice and I weighed the pros and cons, determining that I had enough self-control so that, even if the question came up, I could pleasantly decline. However, when asked if I wanted to eat, I made the conscious decision to go against her and ate. After I was finished, I stared down at my plate. Her voice swelled in my head. What have you done? Her voice was all consuming and I couldn’t follow the conversation. Well, there is something you could do... I excused myself to go to the washroom. Once I was there, I chose a stall and waited until I was alone. I bent down and stuck my finger down my throat, and waited, tried again and waited. Nothing was happening. Why wasn’t anything happening? Great, I couldn’t even have a problem right. I began to cry, knowing her silent disappointment was worse than her words. I picked myself up and made myself presentable before my extended absence would be noted. I rejoined my friend when the voice started again: Did you really think I’d let you get away with that? You are more of a failure than I thought.

Within the last year my insecurities escalated. I was so stressed I’d make myself sick and my anxiety became crippling. Summer brought a whole new set of challenges. I was pushing myself, stressed to the max and under constant pressure from my instructors and you know who. As our first performance had been mediocre, our instructor told us that we had to try harder, to put everything we had into it. The problem was, I already had been. I put everything into everything I did. She was continuously telling me I just wasn’t good enough. If that’s trying your hardest, then why are you still failing? She awoke again, with a feeling all too familiar.
I remember the first time I had a panic attack. I was at volleyball tryouts. I went mostly for fun, not concerned with making the team. She, though, was completely against it. You’re just going to embarrass yourself, so why do you even bother trying? As the tryouts intensified, I became more and more stressed, missed more and more balls. Suddenly, I was shaking and sweating, crying and gasping for air as if I had just run a marathon. I was worried about what was happening to me. Why was my body doing this to me? And why was she laughing at me? These were the questions I would ask myself over and over in the coming years.

So there I was, shaking, crying, and gasping. People began to circle and someone told me to calm down. Believe me, I would if I could. After a little while, there were some people who were able to calm me down. Do you know why? Because they cared. I was worth their time and I was enough for them. I had always been enough for them. If I was enough for them, couldn’t I be enough for myself?

It has been a very hard road to recovery, and my journey is by no means complete. I still worry too much, stress about everything and think twice before I eat anything, but it’s a start. I am not perfect and I’m okay with that. She still talks to me daily, but I have the power to control my own life now. With the help of the people who mean the world to me, and a little faith, I’ll make it through stronger than I ever was. I am enough, I am worth it, and maybe, just maybe, one day she will agree.
The Beauty of Diligence

The day I walked into that room full of screaming children I thought to myself, “What did I get myself into?” I had been dancing for eleven years at this point in my life and was finally given the opportunity to teach these young children how to dance. I had countless hours of training and worked so hard to get rewarded for what I thought would be the “dream job.” However, the sight of little ballerinas running and rolling all over the dance studio was not welcoming. As the year progressed, I learned not only how I seemed to make such an impact on their lives, but, I was their role model. I ended up falling in love with teaching dance and was given not only one but nine classes the following year that I was responsible for teaching. When I walked into class on September 15th feeling as confident as a hawk’s flight, I immediately noticed that something was different. A beautiful blond girl was sitting patiently awaiting my arrival. I noticed medical tubes hiding under her bodysuit. Her name was Olivia. She was six years old and she had chronic kidney disease also known as CKD.

Throughout the next week, I researched CKD and learned that a medical bag controls Olivia’s kidneys. Also, she has brittle bones, cramped muscles and suffers extreme fatigue and dehydration. All these symptoms are everything a dancer should not have. As days continued, every time I walked into that class I knew that Olivia was determined to be a dancer and I was just the individual to help her no matter what troubles came our way. I taught Olivia every Saturday morning in a small class of only eight students. The first few weeks were rough because she didn’t have much energy. I’d teach the class several new steps and specifically instructed her to work on one move in particular throughout the rest of the week. I could always see that determination in her eyes.

As the year progressed, Olivia came to dance prepared. She had practiced each step given as much as her body allowed her to. Not only had she improved immensely but, I had even forgotten that she suffered with chronic kidney disease. However, often enough I could hear her sweet little tone in the hallway complaining to her mother about all the pain in her legs and the wave of fatigue that overcame her body. But, each week when she walked into my classroom, Olivia was more ready to succeed than any other student in the room. Olivia loved to dance and exercise was highly recommended for the young child. Olivia will always have that special place in my heart and she proved to me that you can accomplish anything that you possibly set your mind to.

On the last Saturday in January, Olivia did not show up for her regular class for the first time all year. I found this strange due to her continuous commitment. However, the thought slipped my mind as she probably just had the flu like most children at that time of year. The next Saturday came around and there was still no sight of Olivia. I was later informed that she was at Sick Kids Hospital and had been utterly ill. When I heard the news, my heart instantly dropped. I knew there was nothing that I could do so I continued preparing my dancers for the spring recital that occurred at the end of May.

A few weeks passed and one Saturday morning I unexpectedly heard Olivia’s cheerful voice in the hallway. To my surprise she was back on her feet and ready to dance. It was so close to recital time and she had catching up to do that seemed nearly impossible. But, Olivia was ready for the challenge and ready to come in extra hours to practice and give it all she had.
Olivia committed herself and learned the entire routine within days, despite her disability. This girl was a fighter. She stood out among the rest due to her incredible personality and drive to succeed. I feel as though her CKD really shaped her personality. Her confidence level was beyond anyone else I had ever met. They day of the recital approached and as a first year dancer Olivia and all her classmates were nervous to hit the spotlight. When I heard their music play, I cued the dancers on stage and could see their beaming smiles. The routine was fabulous and the crowd roared. As all the dancers skipped offstage, Olivia ran into my arms. She gave me a hug that felt so sincere. She tapped on my belly asking me to crouch so that she could tell me a “secret”. I bent over towards Olivia and she whispered in my ear “I did it!”

Olivia was only six years old and made such a large impact on my life. She had chronic kidney disease which makes her exhausted and sore all of the time. Olivia made me realize that we as individuals cannot take advantage of our bodies. We don’t realize how incredible humans truly are. Olivia’s story struck a turning point in my life. A young six year old girl proved to me that I can do whatever I set my mind to. Olivia was truly a superstar and I feel honored to have had such an impact on her life. Hence, she has had such an impact on my life as well.

Shanna is a senior student living in Hamner. She has a passion for dance and piano. She teaches dance at her studio. This love of dance inspired her Turning Points essay. Shanna is preparing to start a new adventure this fall at university in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She is excited to take in all that life has to offer out East!
Tragedy into Triumph

I believe that life is a book. Each page represents a different day in the story. Books portray an adventure that can help you escape from reality but the reality of this book could not be escaped. I had become familiar with a story that captured my thoughts, emotions and everything I was.

September 14th, 2011 was the day that my life changed forever. I found out my best friend, who’s helped me through some of life’s hardest battles, had a battle herself far greater than any of mine... cancer. I remember staring blankly at the lighting on the screen of my phone, trying to process the words that came through behind it: “I have cancer. I didn’t want you to know.” It suddenly hit me as tears streamed down my face in abundance. I had no idea of the future months of pain that would come. I sat there in the corner of what seemed to be a cold, dark room, trying to figure out what all of this meant. No thoughts would come to my head other than just one: “Cancer. Why her? Why, my best friend of all people?” It was like that moment when you’re reading a book and you just can’t set it down because you fear the ending, so you keep reading.

I had just received the most shocking news of my life and I was sworn to secrecy. How could I possibly bear this news alone? A numb disbelief followed me everywhere. I wanted to rush ahead and read the very last page to prepare myself for the worst. Instead I lived each day with a flickering faith and a shallow hope. Despite my agony, I had to be the binding on the book that held our lives together, and not let the story become unraveled. The hardest part was keeping the book a secret.

It’s hard to live in the moment when your constant thought is the possibility of living the rest of your life without your best friend -- a thought that no 15 year old should have to embrace. My once fairly normal teenage life took a drastic turn and I no longer felt like I could be a teenager while living in this situation. I felt like anything to do with my life, whether happy or sad, was irrelevant in comparison to her tragic circumstances. Teenage girls talk about everything from their boyfriend to their hair, yet I traded that all in to become a 24 hour counselor. I wanted to be there for her and sympathize with her, but really I didn’t understand any of it myself. For the next year, I put my biography on the shelf and picked up hers knowing that I would eventually get back to mine.

The greatest book of all, the Bible, taught me that God will never give you more than you can handle, but I was sure He had made a mistake. God is the author of our lives so I thought if I bargained with Him, she would be healed. When I didn’t see healing come, I closed the chapter on that area of my life temporarily. Growing up in church, I never considered the possibility of living life without God. He and I were now at opposite ends of the library and I felt very disconnected and alone. My faith used to comfort and strengthen me, but now it was only causing confusion and anger.

A smile can hide some of life’s greatest battles. My cover, would be false advertising for what my book was really about. I longed for someone to see through the fiction of my story to the truth. I felt so trapped and alone in my double life. Teenager by day, therapist by night. At school I tried not to let on that I was facing any significant issues, but, at home, my family saw the raw truth of my pain, stress, anxiety and my spiral into depression. They never quite adjusted to this drastic change in my demeanor. The person they’ve always known was now anxious, sad and preoccupied with “the big C”. “C” used to stand for Christmas, my favourite time of year, but now it was replaced by Cancer: my biggest source of fear. This year, the two collided.
Three days before Christmas, my best friend needed life-threatening surgery. I dreaded Christmas becoming an annual reminder of her death. Just before Christmas, she turned 16 and we celebrated it like it might be her last. It was very hard to “celebrate” someone’s sweet 16 under such pretences. She never ended up getting the surgery and we made it through Christmas.

A few weeks later, she got into a car accident on her way to my birthday. A series of tragic events occurred after that, worsening my stress and depression. The worst was watching her slowly deteriorate. There aren’t many resources out there that help you deal with this kind of situation, especially for teens.

My need for someone to see through my pain, to pick up the book and read it, was met. It was time for my story to be read and edited by those closest to me. At a life-changing event, my friends reached out to me and gave me fresh hope and faith. From then on, I allowed others to carry me and help put the fragmented pieces of my soul back together. Their love was God’s hand extended to me allowing me to heal and reconnect. The safety of their acceptance, gave me the courage to face the future. I realized it was no longer her story or my story, but our story appropriately titled, “Tragedy to Triumph.” As she slowly regained her health, the big “C” gained a new meaning for me. It now stands for courage and confidence. To believe that, I am stronger now than I ever thought possible.

Born and raised in Sudbury, Ontario, sixteen year old Brooklyn loves to read, write and she is an active member of the community. For two years, she was a leader at a course called Divorce Care for Kids. Brooklyn’s favourite sport is competitive swimming, often excelling in the backstroke. She is currently taking her National Life Guarding award in hopes of opening her own business this summer teaching swimming to children with special needs. Her life-long passion is to attend university to study psychology specializing in Post Traumatic Stress Disorders amongst children and teenagers.
Saskatchewan

“Associate with men of good quality, if you esteem your reputation, for it is better to be alone than in bad company.” – George Washington

As the Turning Points program continues to expand across Canada, we were delighted to have the province of Saskatchewan join us!

Thank you to teacher, Agnes Plourde-Doran, for implementing the program and for involving the students of St. Mary’s School in Estevan this year. They received their awards on June 24th at the graduation ceremony.

Thank you to our generous anonymous donor.
“Three things in human life are important. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. The third is to be kind.” – Henry James

Shelby Hagel
First Place – Grade 7 & 8
Roman Catholic Separate School Division #140

Oh, That Flood That Year!

I wasn’t alone that day.

In the year 2011 my life changed forever. Rainstorm after rainstorm just kept coming. There are three houses on my farm. My cousin, Nicole, lives in one house. My grandma and grandpa live in a house across from Nicole, and I live with my mom, dad, and brother, Cole, in front of my grandma and grandpa’s house.

Every morning when I woke up I would look out the window and I’d see a little more water creeping closer to the house. So, we built a dyke. One night, when I was asleep, at four in the morning our dyke broke. All of the water came into our yard; my family had to wake up and start sandbagging until very late at night. We would start early in the morning, and go until late at night for weeks. Eventually we had a trench built so all of the water would drain. It has been two years since then and most of the water is still there.

One of my horses was walking in the water and her hoof got caught in barb wire. Half of her hoof was cut off. We had no way of getting to her. So we had to hook a tractor to a trailer and get her in the trailer to pull her out. We rushed her to Stoughton; they put a cast on her and her hoof became infected. Then we rushed her back, and for six months we had to give her a shot of penicillin and change the bandages every day. My horse is still recovering from this traumatic experience.

This flood has changed my life because when the flood came we had to put many hours in sandbagging. This experience has changed my view of floods in terms of how they can destroy people’s homes, harm animals, and cause extreme stress. Before this flood I never knew how much it could hurt to have experienced a flood. When I watched the news of others in the world dealing with flooding I would think, “That’s no big deal,” but now when I think about it I see how it could truly destroy a family. This has been a very dramatic experience and it is still haunting me to this day. My family has lost our free time, as we have to work to keep the water away and still restore things back to normal.

Because of that flood my family and I are closer than ever. Many of my friends, family, and neighbors came to help us that year. There is nothing better than knowing that when worse comes to worst, people still have your back.

I am a Grade 8 student. I live on a farm near Estevan, Sk with my family in the fall will be starting high school. I love riding horses and playing with my animals. I have a part time job at a pet motel. I love hanging out with my friends. One day I hope to go to university after high school to become a veterinarian. I love nature.
Appreciating My New Home

Home is where your family is.

In the middle of the summer, my dad and I were working on recovering our roof that was leaking. My dad got a message on his cell phone. He quickly checked his phone and asked me to read the message and it said, “Canadian Government Looking for More Immigrants who are willing to do hard, heavy duty work (Welders Required).” I asked him what he thought about the message and he responded saying he felt things were okay in the Ukraine and there was no point in moving. The strange thought that came into my mind was that my dad is a welder so I asked myself, “What if my family and I actually did move to Canada? How would my life change from that point?”

After a few months, during dinner one night, my parents started asking my brother and I how things were going at school and eventually our conversation got to the point where they were asking us if we were okay to move to Canada. We all decided that it was a good choice to move to Canada because there are more opportunities for all of us to succeed in our life. My parents started the document process and that’s when I knew that we were going to move to Canada. After a year we got accepted so, of course, I was excited, but at the same time I started to think about missing all of my friends that I had spent most of my childhood with, as well as my family that took care of me when I was just a baby. When we flew to our destination I was really tired so I wasn’t really paying attention to all of the new cool things that are way different from my home town country which is the Ukraine.

When we actually arrived to our final destination, we were in Estevan, Saskatchewan, Canada. My parents’ first impression of Canada was that the land here was so flat. Now I know that Saskatchewan is a part of the prairies, and most of the land is farmland. After my first year of living in Canada we finally had our first family trip which was to Calgary, Alberta, and that’s when our minds changed about the life we were living in Canada.

After a few years of living here I think my personality and behavior have changed. If my family hadn’t moved my whole life could have been so different and even dangerous. Why dangerous? Well, that’s because I think people in Ukraine are acting more selfish, and they will do almost anything for money, which is scary. While I was living here I recognized that people wish all the best for others instead of being selfish. I want to be more like this. I love living in Canada. After moving here, I appreciate life more. My family and I appreciate one another more. I am so thankful each day that I have the opportunities that Canada enables me to have.

Pavlo Drozd moved from Ukraine all the way to Canada when he was in grade 6. Pavlo really enjoys spending time in the outdoors. In grade 8 Pavlo showed a lot of improvement in his English.
Cyber, Cruel, And Uncalled For

“I am who I am today because of the choice I made yesterday.” – Eleanor Roosevelt

Getting bullied had always been one of my fears in life. We learn, see and hear about bullies, but I had always been lucky enough for it not to happen to me. Standing up for others is what I always had done in the past. I never thought I would be a victim of such public humiliation online, otherwise known as cyber bullying.

This year, I was bullied through a social networking site, Twitter. Twitter is the site that all kids my age visit frequently throughout the day. This was the last place I would want to be humiliated; in front of both people I know very well and people I may have not met yet.

I will not use her real name; instead I will call her Elizabeth. Elizabeth had been tweeting insulting comments to me over a span of a few months. She tweeted about me often. Some days she suggested I should kill myself, I should die, I was ugly, and most days the tweets were just simply mean and disrespectful comments towards me.

I decided to pretend it did not bother me when my friends and classmates would ask what those tweets were about. Then one day I realized that maybe this was not right. I should say something. When talking about it in class to my close friends while in the computer lab, my teacher overheard our conversations. After my classmates told her about the tweets, she talked to me privately. I was bothered by Elizabeth’s tweets; it was changing what people thought about me, and I wanted Elizabeth to stop.

The police were then involved. My teacher had all the tweets about me printed and we showed the police officer. I told him everything, from what Elizabeth said to how I feel. My classmates blocked her account, which meant they couldn’t see any of her tweets. One of my friends even tweeted her to tell her to stop, and that they had told their teacher about it. Her account was then suspended. I was happy about this. Now I wouldn’t feel embarrassed every day. She eventually returned to Twitter and apologized to me.

Even though I was bullied, I still felt cared for by my classmates. They supported me, and stood up for me against Elizabeth and her comments. They noticed what she was doing was not right. My friends convinced me I did not deserve that. I want to help others realize not to let anyone tell you that you are not good enough the way you are because everyone has a special gift they bring to this world. You don’t know how amazing I feel now, not to be bullied every day. I feel like I am not the center of attention and I can just be myself.
Back To Health, Just Like That

I thought that March 22, 2012 was going to be like every other day, but was I ever wrong! I had a doctor’s appointment at noon where I jokingly said to my mother, “What would you do if I broke a bone before our trip?” She laughed and said, “Sucks to be you, I guess.” -- statements we both have regretted since.

When I got back to school we were playing football. I was going for the touch down when Girald (a guy in my class) and I collided. There was a cracking sound and I couldn’t feel my leg. My friend, Josh, went running to the school to get a teacher. I swear he got there in three seconds flat. The teacher, on the other hand, seemed to take about five minutes to get to me. The ambulance was called immediately!

While waiting for the ambulance to come Mr. Famulak moved me so he could get Girald out from underneath me to make sure he was ok. We now know that moving me could have killed me because of the main artery in the thigh. Once the ambulance got to the school they loaded me up and took me to the hospital. I had x-rays done to confirm that I had a spiral fracture of the right femur. The surgeon was called in Regina and I was transported there by ambulance and scheduled for surgery.

While I was in surgery my surgeon, Dr. Rodwan, took more x-rays that showed that I had actually broken my femur in four places. The surgeon explained to my parents that this was a very serious situation and that he would do his best to save my leg. The surgery took four hours to complete. When I woke up I was told I had a foot long metal plate with twenty-eight screws in my leg. I was on heavy duty pain medications. The surgeon explained that I had lost a lot of blood and would need a transfusion. Dr. Rodwan explained I would need to have a second surgery to remove all the hardware.

The hospital stay was awful. I didn’t want to be there. The food was terrible and the nurses kept wanting me to eat. I would pretend to be asleep to avoid talking to them. Physiotherapy was extremely painful. After seven days in the hospital I finally got to go home.

I was at home for three months before I went back to school and was able to walk again with crutches. Daily physiotherapy was tough but I did it.

I am extremely thankful to God, my surgeon, physiotherapist and especially my Mom. This made me realize that she will always be there for me and be by my side no matter what. I couldn’t have done it without all of them and that is why I am back to normal today. This experience is one that I wouldn’t wish on anyone, but it changed my life!
When I was younger, my uncle and I were very close. He was the most kindhearted person I had ever met. I haven’t ever heard him yell and he never did anything to hurt anybody’s feelings. This man impacted my entire family. He made us want to be better people.

My uncle had been diagnosed with cancer for a long time. He was such a fighter. It was impossible to even tell that he was sick. Most people would have been scared or furious at God. Cancer brought my uncle even closer to Him. My uncle always had a positive attitude that could convince you that everything would be okay.

One afternoon, my mother told me some news that I thought could never happen. My uncle had become very ill. He only had a few months to live. I was speechless. How could something so awful happen to such a caring man? I was hoping that I was just having a terrible nightmare, but sadly, it was reality.

It didn’t seem to bother my uncle. He was so brave. My family and I prayed every single day for him. There wasn’t a day that we forgot to. God was our only hope now.

A few weeks later, my dad drove down to see him. He was in the hospital and he was a lot weaker than usual. I talked to him on the phone and started crying my eyes out. His words were barely coming out of his mouth. Cancer had got the best of him. He wasn’t destined to live, but I had that sliver of hope left. At that moment, I realized that a person’s life can be taken at any given moment.

My best friend, Lanelle, and I had just finished basketball practice at 9:00 p. m. My dad was parked at the front door to pick us up. We got into the vehicle and I looked at him. I instantly knew that there was something wrong from the look in his eye. We dropped off Lanelle and drove the rest of the way home in silence. He didn’t have the nerve to tell me, but I knew what was coming. I walked into the house and saw my mother crying. That was never good. She told me that my uncle had passed away. All I could do was cry. How could this happen? My uncle didn’t deserve that. It didn’t seem fair at all. I told myself over and over that he was in a better place. Maybe God needed him more up there than we needed him here.

This was a huge turning point in my life. This tragedy taught me to value my friends and family, because one day, they might not be here anymore. You shouldn’t ever lose faith in God. He always makes the right decision. This was not the end for my uncle. It was a new beginning.
The cop says to the driver, “Paper.” and the driver says back, “Scissors, I win.” Then he drove off.

This day was just a normal day. It may not be a normal day for you, but for me it was just a normal day. I woke up, ate, got a ride to school with my mom and I am here on my normal day. But one day it wasn’t so normal; let me tell you about the first day it wasn’t a normal day.

Today was just an ordinary day but something happened that wasn’t supposed to happen -- something that had never happened before! I was at school when my teacher asked me if I wanted to help cut out shapes of paper. Now usually she would ask the students with better cutting skills to help her. Feeling doubtful I said okay, but in my mind I wasn’t sure why she was asking me.

As we were cutting these shapes out I realized that I had been too hard on myself and then I realized that, “Hey, I didn’t have too bad of cutting skills.” I decided to take every opportunity I could get. Now I was the guy being asked to help cut things out!

It may seem funny and weird that cutting shapes with scissors has changed my life but that’s the thing. You can’t expect to be amazing at something before you even try. The key is to just try something new and then you will feel what I am feeling. The feeling is overwhelming empowerment, that I can and will try whatever life throws at me.

This changed my life because I was now not just shoved off if somebody was asked to cut something, I was SUGGESTED. My life is now better because if I can cut through paper I can do anything I put my mind to, even if it seems impossible. This moment changed what I thought about every situation I would come to. No longer would I think or say, “You guys go ahead; I can’t do that,” and just not make an attempt to try and simply give up. I can try new things now because of this one experience!

So today was just a normal day but I tried something new today. I swam. I am not a swimmer, but I might call myself one soon. That day with my teacher when I started to cut shapes out was not just a normal day, it has changed every day that has followed into days filled with new challenges that continue to make me an even better person.
Peyton Holt
Honourable Mention – Grade 7 & 8
Roman Catholic Separate School Division #140

My Hearing Loss

“Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.” – Oscar Wilde

I had a big turning point in my life, it all started when I was a toddler. When I was about two years old, I had a lot of ear infections. My mom and dad took me to the hospital and the doctors decided they were going to put me to sleep and put tubes in my ears. After the first set of tubes the doctor said they have to put another set of tubes in my ears, so I went in to get another set and they said that if I get one more set they are going to have to do hearing tests on me. Eventually I got to the point where I had to get hearing tests and then they said your daughter is deaf in her left ear.

That moment when I heard that I was deaf I knew my life would change. I knew that people would make fun of me and that people might judge me because I was half-deaf. I put all that aside and gained courage from thinking that my story could be worse I could be completely deaf. After I found out I was deaf I had to go get my first hearing aid, I remember that when I went to the hearing clinic they asked me what color of mold would you like in your hearing aid to be, I said, “I would like a lime green please”, and the lady went and made the mold to fit in my ear, a few weeks later it came in.

I remember going to school and everyone asking me, “What’s in your ear?” I would always say, “A hearing aid,” and then people would always bug me and say rude stuff about it. I remember I would get so embarrassed from what people said that I wouldn’t even wear it to school or I would just take it out. I gained self-confidence from getting to know more people my age with hearing aids and hearing how they dealt with it.

There was one boy in my class named Ben; he gave me courage to not listen to what anybody said. Ben was deaf and to talk to him you had to use sign language, I saw how Ben got made fun of and how he just ignored it and didn’t let it bother him. I took from what I saw happen to him and told myself to just ignore what people say. Ever since I met Ben I have realized that I am half-deaf and I can’t help it and I don’t let the things people say get to me. I am now going to start giving courage to other people who have hearing aids and are the same age as me and who went through the same thing I did.
“Every day may not be good, but there’s something good in every day” – Unknown

“W

e Day” is a day of inspiration, motivation, change, empowerment, and youth. It’s a day for young people to come to change the world, together as one or as individuals. It’s more than just one day of celebration and inspiration. We Day is youth leading local and global change. This is where thousands come to participate in exploring a variety of social issues. It brings together a generation of youth to be engaged in changing the world through an annual event. This is the place where my turning point began.

It was February 27th, 2013. As my school’s charter bus pulled into the Credit Union Centre, I realized many other people had come to sustain the inspiration, excitement and energy from We Day. This year was the first We Day Saskatchewan. It was fuelled by the desire for change, and the hope that the world can be a better place like any other We Day. Many performers and speakers joined the day of celebration and inspiration. For instance, Marc and Craig Kielburger, Mia Farrow, and Hedley were all there to make a movement. Unfortunately these amazing people were not the spark that led to my turning point. This spark was Molly Burke.

At We Day, Molly Burke had shared an inspirational story about her turning point. Molly was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa when she was four years old. This caused her to lose her sense of sight. Molly lost her vision at the age of fourteen. Her blindness led to her getting bullied by others, especially her best friends. Molly’s friends started walking her down a huge hill and into a forest near their school. Once they made it into the woods, one of the eight girls asked to see Molly’s crutches. But before she could answer, they were ripped away. They then smashed the crutches against the tree and broke them. That’s when Molly’s best friends all started laughing and ran away to class together, leaving her alone and helpless on the ground. Molly was alone, in a forest. She couldn’t see. She couldn’t walk. The eight girls had taken her crutches and her backpack. Molly had nothing and no one.

Quickly, Molly turned everyone’s mood around. She told us about her present and her future. Over the years, as Molly’s vision has deteriorated, her confidence and optimism have strengthened. Molly brings audiences a uniquely young and current perspective on issues many of them face each day. She shares her story in the hope of influencing the young. Although she still encounters bullies and will have to continue adapting her life to her vision, Molly remains positive. As she says, you are not alone, you can get through it and it does get better. She had taught me that any challenge in life, whether it’s bullying, mental illness or a loss of vision, can be overcome.

Thirteen year old Van lives in Estevan, Saskatchewan with her parents, Long and Loan, and her older sister, Vi. On the date of February 27, 2013, Van and many others attended the first ever We Day Saskatchewan. There she saw many speakers and performers, especially the inspirational Molly Burke. Molly helped inspire her Turning Points Essay. Van looks forward to entering more competitions, similar to this one.
Perseverance, the Key to Success

“If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.”

It was a day that will remain vivid in my mind forever -- the day I stepped on the ice for the first time in full equipment. I felt my freshly sharpened skates dig into the ice as I took my first strides. I couldn’t have been happier to be where I was at that very moment because my life’s turning point began…

I walked into the dressing room before practice and I instantly saw my friend, Allie. She was getting dressed so confidently. I could feel my palms sweating and my heart beating, faster and faster. I looked to my right and there was a girl named Megan. She looked like a really nice girl, but I didn’t know her. At this moment I felt alone, like I was the only one in the room that was panicking so much I almost forgot how to put my equipment on. I was in a trance when Allie poked my shoulder and said, “Michaella, what’s with your pants?” I looked down at my pants, and noticed that I had put them on backwards. I was so embarrassed. I immediately tore them off and put them on the right way. I felt as if everyone was staring at me even though they were all minding their own business. I tied my skates as tight as I could, put my helmet on, and ran out onto the ice.

Once I felt my skates dig into the ice, I felt happiness come over me. It felt like everything that happened in the dressing room didn’t mean anything anymore. I was out there doing what I loved. I may not have been the best player out there that year, but I was determined. I loved hockey and I was determined to get better. I worked hard all the time and then my first goal came. My team was very happy for me! Before I knew it, my second goal came and then my third and my fourth. After my first season, I knew that this was what I wanted to do, forever. As I moved up into Peewee and then Bantam, I got better and better. My phenomenal coaches along the way kept my dream going. To this day, I would rather play hockey more than anything else.

This was a huge turning point in my life because not only has it changed my life, but it will continue to change my life for many years to come. As I grow up every day, my passion for hockey grows stronger. As an individual, I am able to take on more challenges. It has been a practical journey, but also an emotional one. Practical, because I have enriched my skills to play higher level hockey when the time comes. The emotional ups and down of winning and losing with my team has built my strength and has made me more determined. With all these thoughts in mind, I look forward to future games playing the sport I love…. HOCKEY!
We would like to sincerely thank all of our judges for their time and support of the Turning Points essay contest. Tier One judges are comprised of Faculty of Education teacher candidates from seven universities, authors and retired educators. Tier Two judges volunteer from the professional communities.

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The Conception-Trinity Retired Teachers Association and the Salt Water Writing Circle


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Judi Symes, Teacher Trainer ............................................................................. The Learning Partnership
Participating Schools

We would like to recognize the involvement of the following schools in the Turning Points program:

**Anglophone South School District, Saint John, New Brunswick**
- Fundy High School
- Fundy Shores School
- Hampton High School
- Moncton High School
- Rothesay High School
- St. Malachey’s Memorial High School
- St. Stephen High School
- Simonds High School
- Sir James Dunn Academy

**Anglophone West School District, Fredericton, New Brunswick**
- Cambridge-Narrows Community School
- Canterbury High School
- Carleton North High School
- Central New Brunswick Academy
- Chipman Forest Avenue School
- Fredericton High School
- Hartland Community School
- Harvey High School
- John Caldwell School
- Leo Hayes High School
- McAdam High School
- Minto Memorial High School
- Nackawic High School
- Oromocto High School
- Saint Mary’s Academy
- Southern Victoria High School
- Stanley High School
- Tobique Valley High School
- Woodstock High School

**Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board**
- St. John’s College School
- Assumption College School

**Calgary Catholic School District**
- Bishop Kidd Junior High School
- Bishop McNally High School
- Blessed John XXIII School
- Christ the King School
- Ecole Madeleine d’Houet
- Father Scollen School
- Holy Cross School
- Light of Christ School
- Our Lady Queen of Peace School
- St. Cyril School
- St. Gregory School
- St. Joseph School
- St. Martha School
- St. Rose of Lima School

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- École Secondaire Étienne-Brûlé

**Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board**
- Ascension of Our Lord Secondary School
- Cardinal Ambrozic Secondary School
- St. Augustine Secondary School
- St. Charles Garnier School
- St. Kevin School
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- Baccalieu Collegiate
- Balbo Elementary
- Baltimore School Composite
- Beaconsfield Junior High School
- Bishop White School
- Catalina Elementary School
- Christ the King School
- Clarenville Middle School
- Cowan Heights Elementary School
- Crescent Collegiate
- Donald C. Jamieson Academy
- Dunne Memorial Academy
- Fatima Academy
- Fortune Bay Academy

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Frank Roberts Junior High School
Heritage Collegiate
Holy Cross Junior High School
Holy Name of Mary Academy
Holy Redeemer Elementary School
Holy Trinity High School
John Caldwell School
Lake Academy
Laval High School
Leary's Brook Junior High School
Matthew Elementary School
McDonald Drive Junior High School
Mobile Central High School
Mount Pearl Intermediate School
Persalvic Elementary School
Random Island Academy
Roncalli Central High School
Sacred Heart Academy
St. Catherine's Academy
St. Edward's Elementary School
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St. John Bosco School
St. Joseph's Academy
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St. Kevin's Junior High School
St. Lawrence Academy
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St. Mark's All Grade School
St. Michael's Regional High School
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Northview Heights Secondary School
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York Region District School Board
Castlemore Public School
Crosby Heights Public School
Herbert H. Carnegie Public School
Parkland Public School
Richmond Hill High School
Sir William Mulock Secondary School
In Appreciation

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• the thousands of students who share their compelling stories
• the judges who choose the winners from so many exemplary stories
• the administrative and support staff from our participating partner school boards who have given of their time to support this program
• our supporters of the Turning Points program – The Calgary Foundation; Ontario Ministry of Education; Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board (NPAAMB); and a very generous anonymous donor for their ongoing commitment to publicly funded education, and for working with us to encourage young people to express themselves and their experiences through writing.

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• Tony Stack, Assistant Director of Programs, Eastern School District, Newfoundland and Labrador
• Dr. Kimberly Lentes, Course Leader, University of Calgary, AB
• Dr. Catherine Burwell, Course Leader, University of Calgary, AB
Notes:
A student reads her award-winning essay at one of The Learning Partnership’s 2013 Turning Points Award Celebrations.