



# Les essais gagnants 2017 Award Winning Essays 2017



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**The Learning Partnership** is a national charity dedicated to enhancing publicly funded education to prepare students in Canada for a globally connected world by building partnerships between government, education and business. We do this through innovative student programs, executive leadership for educators, knowledge mobilization and policy, tribute celebrations of excellence, and collaborations across Canada. Since 1993, more than 6.9 million students have participated in The Learning Partnership's programs.

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**Marni Angus**  
National Program Manager  
The Learning Partnership

## A Message from National Program Manager

*“Everyone and everything that shows up in our life is a reflection of something that is happening inside of us.”*

– Alan Cohen

*As British playwright David Hare says, “the act of writing is the act of discovering what you believe.”*

*The pages of this anthology are filled with a range of stories written by students that highlight a significant event – a turning point – that has changed the trajectory of their lives. The stories are insightful, thought provoking and inspirational.*

*Students in Grades 6 through 12 have demonstrated courage, resiliency and character through their essay submissions – and we are proud of each and every one of them for opening up and sharing their story. This year, more than 18,000 students from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador submitted an essay in English or French.*

*On behalf of The Learning Partnership, we thank all students who participated in this year’s program. It truly takes courage to share such personal accounts and we are impressed by the incredible fearlessness you have demonstrated.*

*We also give special thanks to the many judges, teachers and partners whose time, dedication and contributions continue to make Turning Points possible. To our hard-working staff members, it is your passion and efforts that make Turning Points such an impactful and successful program across the country.*

*We thank you and we feel privileged to work with you. Reading all of these stories gives us at The Learning Partnership great confidence in the future of our country.*

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

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# Alberta Winners' Essays

## GRADE 6

**Angelica Dungca**

First Place – Grade 6  
Calgary Catholic School District

## A Pine Tree Painting

**A**rt class was always my favourite because we didn't have homework and I'd always been fascinated by art. It was an average day, mid fall, and the sun was shining high and reflecting on the window in art class. We sat down at our usual tables, eager to work on a project our teacher had promised we'd work on. As we were settling down she announced that we were having a special guest!

Her name was Veronica Funk. She was a professional artist who was going to work with us on a project. Veronica came in and introduced herself, then later explained what we were going to do. First each of us had to pick a picture of a tree and make thumbnail sketches of it in our sketchbooks. After that, everyone was to sketch their tree on a canvas. Next we needed to add the plaster for the texture of our tree and had to paint the canvas and add the patterns in the background and we'd be finished.

The next art class everyone started sketching on their canvases. I was doing tons of erasing on my canvas. I didn't like my sketches and I wanted to give up and restart. Veronica was going around the room and when she went past my canvas she saw that it was blank. She asked what was wrong and I told her how I didn't like my sketch and wanted to restart. She told me about how this also happens to her. She said all I needed was patience and lots of practice. She shared some tips and helped me finish my pine tree painting.

This was my turning point. I realized that it's important to have patience and to not give up too quickly because then you can complete more things. I learned that with the right people to guide you, you can achieve anything. It's amazing how that small tip from Veronica has changed how I approach things. I always try to give things a bit more time and patience and not give up as easily as I used to.

---

*Angelica Dungca loves reading, writing and playing volleyball. She is a dedicated and hardworking student and loves to ask questions and participate. Angelica is very artistic, a skill that has helped form her writing. Angelica is kind, outgoing and a helper to all.*

---

**Halen Pogson**

Second Place – Grade 6  
Calgary Catholic School District

## My Grandpa and the Dimes

**W**hen I was 4 years old my grandpa in Nova Scotia sadly passed away from cancer. We called him Poppy but his real name was Brian James. Then we heard about a story from my grandma's friend that said, "After you lose a family member, or friend, you'll start to find dimes. This is a sign that your loved one who passed away is always looking out for you." So we started to be more aware. We found LOTS of dimes, tons of them, and I knew he was watching because all of them were shiny and new, not old rusty dimes.

I have some stories about the dimes. Here's the best one: One year after my grandpa died, my Nanny came from Nova Scotia to visit us. When my mum was a young girl their house burnt down. The one thing that was saved was her graduation ring but somehow it was misplaced. Years later my nanny and mum were cleaning our basement and found a ziploc bag with the graduation ring in it. Guess what was inside? A new dime! There was a screw nail inside the bag too. Surprisingly, grandpa was a carpenter, a man of all trades. I just knew he was looking out for us.

Another time, my sister, Mom, and I went to Costco to get a new membership card. Before that, we had the Terry Fox run at school. My sister and I both ran for our grandpa who died of cancer. But my sister needed help spelling Poppy so her teacher wrote it down. My sister kept the paper in her jacket pocket. When we went to Costco she dropped the paper that said "Poppy" and guess what was beside it? A SHINY DIME!!!!

That's when I had my turning point. Those two important things changed my life. It taught me to believe in heaven, God and my loved ones who passed away. It taught me to believe there's always someone with you to help you. I moved forward to always believe in things that may not be real.

---

*Halen Pogson is an outgoing, cheerful and hardworking student who puts a great deal of effort into his work. Halen is an avid hockey player, golfer and artist and enjoys spending time with his sister and parents. He has a great sense of humor and a wonderful, genuine personality.*

---

**Nova Moffatt**

Third Place – Grade 6  
Calgary Catholic School District

## My Brother

**I** don't really remember a time when my brother wasn't with me, by my side, laughing at my crummy jokes, playing video games with me, sharing memories. I can't even faintly imagine a time when those memories will stop; the feeling of comfort that feels so normal, the thing that brings so much joy into my life, such an average everyday thing. I remember the moment my brother came into my life.

It was a chilly March day in 2009, in our old, cramped, stuffy apartment. I woke up to the sound of a baby crying. I thought to myself, what is that awful noise? It came again and again, the loud, piercing, splitting noise of a baby crying its little heart out.

At that moment I knew my baby brother had arrived. My mom had said I was getting a brother.

"Now you'll have even more toys to play with," she'd said each day. That and "Be extra nice to your new brother."

But now, now I knew.

I knew my loneliness was cured. I would be whole. I would always have a shoulder to cry on, always have the comfort of a friend. That feeling is a feeling that will always be in my heart.

This feeling of responsibility made me feel grown up and in authority. But I also had another feeling, a selfish, childish feeling. I realized I wouldn't always have centre stage. I wouldn't always be the middle of conversation and that everything was no longer all mine. I'd have to share and cope with disappointment. I didn't like that feeling very much. It made me feel even younger than he was.

I ran to my mother and there he was, his cute baby face smiling at me from the comfort of our mother's arms. The peaceful moment of pin-drop silence lasted about one second. Then his hawk-like cry came back and mom was hushing my brother ... rocking him ... giving him milk ... from a baby bottle.

---

*Nova Moffatt is an avid reader which has contributed to his excellent writing abilities. He also likes to draw, play video games, and hang out with his friends. Nova is kind, funny, a strong leader, and someone who tries his best while working to learn from his mistakes.*

---

## GRADE 7/8

### Sydney Knight

First Place – Grade 8  
Calgary Catholic School District

# Her

I used to hate myself. I used to avoid looking in the mirror because I didn't like the person who stared back at me. I cried myself to slumber for a little over year. Some days I prayed not to wake up the following morning. I was screaming for help but no one ever took the time to listen; I was so afraid and I could never build up enough courage to ask for it.

I hadn't told anyone about this because I was afraid that my parents would put me through years of therapy and force tiny colourful pills down my throat and that's exactly why I never did. I thought that I could deal with these powerful emotions on my own but I couldn't. All of my insecurities just became more and more present and everything I detested about myself could suddenly be listed in under a minute, but then something transpired.

On January 12th, 2016 I woke and for the first time with a smile on my face. I sang for the first time in what seemed like forever and I danced for the first time in what seemed like even longer. For a year I hid

under blankets and behind closed doors, I had listened to the saddest music one could probably ever find and stalked instagram pages filled with depressing quotes that I thought explained my situation for hours and hours on end but that glorious day changed everything. That was the day that I turned on the radio and found the songs that made me feel good. That was the day I viewed my insecurities as my strengths, the day I viewed my thick thighs as a blessing and the day that I saw my chubby cheeks as adorable. For the first time, everything was all right.

That was the day I let someone in. I let a girl with eyes bluer than the sky on a perfect summer's day and hair that looked like perfect strings of gold, break down the barriers that I used to keep my demons in and I was right to do so because that girl is now my best friend. I love her more than anyone could ever know because I've told her everything that I hated about myself and she somehow twisted my words to help me view all of those pesky insecurities as my strengths and my imperfections as my superpowers. She is my rock, the one who I can call when I need a shoulder to cry on.

It's been a little over a year since the day that changed everything and I've finally realized why that day had such an impact on my life. I still feel these things, I can still look at my body and pick apart what I don't like about myself, I still cry, I still listen to my sad music, and I still think things that can bring the happiest people to tears.

But, because someone believed in me, I can now trust people, I don't feel like I have to hide in fear of getting judged. I can wear shorts with confidence and I'm certainly not afraid to be myself in front of everyone. I've never been happier and I'm so thankful for my best friend because she's never left my side and she's always believed in me even when I couldn't believe in myself. I'm proud to say that I haven't viewed the world the same since.

---

*Sydney Knight enjoys reading, watching Netflix and spending time with her friends. She is involved in drama and has a beautiful singing voice.*

---

### Nicole Caetano

Second Place – Grade 8  
Calgary Catholic School District

## Paper and Ink

**A** corrupt city. A city that - despite its flaws - I love. The city of São Paulo, a metropolis of streets and smog. People crawl through alleyways and creep through sidewalks, all clothed in neat little debonair suits, wielding their suitcases like medieval shields as they trudge their way to work. With all the crowded, full avenues, it'd be a miracle to make it across the city without any sort of delay. This story isn't about the busy living conditions I was exposed to as a kid, though. This is about that one puny comic book store huddled among a jumble of pawn shops that I was as devoted to visiting as a junkie is to his dealer.

My dad introduced me to the world of literature, something brandishing infinite possibilities, endless plots. He led me to the store. It had no door. A door would've been fairly useless, in the store's defence. Considering how there was no doorway, or even a wall to cloak the front of the store, I asked my dad why this was. "So the giants can pick up their favourite comic books without causing any serious damage." He replied simply; a sweet lie that got my six-year-old imagination fired up. After a couple of minutes' debate on the rights of giants, we stepped inside.

Countless aisles, stocked with comic books!

Left, right, everywhere you looked, practically bursting with colour and pleasing imagery! My dad let me skim through each and every book, knowing that there would soon be a series to sate my curiosity. It was amazing! I made my way through the labyrinth of words and flashing titles, before finding something that piqued my interest – a small, beaten up comic book. This was “A turma da Monica”. This was the sight that would trigger my love - no, my addiction - for literature! It cost two dollars - the best two dollars I've ever begged from my dad. I was at the store every Friday, accompanied by my dad. We took the same routes to a point where every turn felt natural; every avenue we passed was soon branded in my memory. Every week, I'd choose another issue, and every week, I'd grow more absorbed in this series. How could such a childish comic book manage to creep its way into my heart? For the same reason I first found a comic book series centered on a girl with comically enlarged teeth, wearing a vibrant red dress appealing. Its simplicity was intoxicating, and yet, it managed to enrapture me! Comic book plots I read seven years ago still cling to my brain, resurfacing in my sea of thoughts occasionally to bring back the glorious nostalgia of the past. The ability to invent an entirely new world, a primitive or complex universe with your own restrictions and laws of physics, science, and religion is a wonderful gift. Someday, I will write something too, and I know just how the tale will start.

A corrupt city. A city that - despite its flaws - our heroine loves.

---

*Nicole Caetano is a talented writer, and loves to express herself through all forms of art. She is very involved in the school's art and drama departments and has aspirations of one day penning her own comic book.*

---

**Jesse Cermlj**

Third Place – Grade 7  
Calgary Board of Education

## Memories Waiting to be Made

**H**ave you ever had a flashback of a moment that made you want to give anything just to re-live it? The great thing about memories is that we can make them whatever we want them to be and they will stay with us almost indefinitely. Unfortunately, bad memories are made quite frequently and we would give anything to forget them. Memories can be painful, sorrowful, unsatisfactory, and stressful. But they can also be the best things in our lives.

As we grow older, through our lives we must continually sort through our material belongings. We have to decide what is important enough to hang on to as a keepsake and we must part with items and throw them away. These personal items can be a strong link to our past. These items can also tell a story of where we came from. Items and photos will survive us even after we have passed on.

Agitated, rushing, irrational, I was clearing out my bedroom, once again. Organizing and cleaning was one of my favourite things to do in my free time. Regrettably, whenever I decluttered, I would always throw out important or special items. I felt suffocated if my living space wasn't clear. Photos, drawings, and school projects would often make their way to the recycling bin. Never realizing that I might want to recall the items someday, I continued rejecting an abundance of things.

The darkness from the night sky spilled through the window and covered my room by the time I was finished organizing. As I closed the last drawer in my dresser, my father walked in. A huge smile danced upon his mouth as he set an old shoebox on my bed. Curious, I lifted the lid of the box, uncovering something I had never seen before. What lay before me were pictures of my dad and his family in Croatia, before the war.

I had seen almost all of my mother's pictures, and the ones she took of us as well. But I had only ever seen one of my father's photographs from his past - the faded picture of my grandmother and my dad as a child, sitting in a park. The special picture sat in a small wooden frame on top of the mantle of the fireplace. But now, in front of my eyes were at least 50 pictures, developed from film - old class pictures, my grandparents, my great grandparents, and my father's friends. I felt ecstatic as I sifted through the crinkled pictures, realizing what my father looked like at my age.

Immediately, I realized that one day, I would want to go back and look at the photos that I took and the items that I collected. I wouldn't care if the photos and items were unorganized or messy, I would be too focused on the giddy feeling of remembering something. Life wasn't meant to be too organized. Making memories and new friends is what life is all about. What is the point of life if you don't have anything to look back on? If my dad could still have time to save photos and memories even when he had to move countries because of the war, then I can also try. Sometimes the things we think are ugly, turn beautiful later in our lives.

The turning point I experienced was cherishing the small things and making as many memories as possible. This was through the box of photos that my dad showed me. It made me realize that even though I don't like some of the photos of myself right now, I should keep them because they are a moment in time, captured. Who knows, I may want to show them to my daughter one day. I realize now that being neat and organized plays a role in life. It's also good to 'travel light' but it's more important to hang on to pictures and personal objects from the past. My father taught me an important lesson, and I will continue to pass it down to my children as well.

---

*Jesse Cermlj loves animals and hopes to own many of her own. Science is her favourite subject and winning the science fair helped her realize she could do anything that she put her mind to. Being an author is her dream job and she hopes others can read her stories.*

---

## GRADE 9/10

**Sarah Knude**

First Place – Grade 9  
Calgary Catholic School District

# Two Seconds

**T**he brain. The most important part of the body. Our brain runs everything for us. It allows us to move, communicate, see, feel, smell, hear, but most significantly, to formulate thoughts. Our intellect makes every human being an individual. Our brain, or more specifically our thoughts, create our opinions, our expressions, and our deepest fears. Our thoughts can change everything in a very short period, two seconds. Two seconds that can forever change the way we see the world.

I have many thoughts about my younger self. I never stood out. I blended in. I found my way through life by acting like everyone else, by being normal, refusing to be myself. I held the reins of life carefully, but never seized them, too afraid of the comments of society trying to break me down. I always worried about

what others thought of me but I never thought about myself. This all changed after a backcountry camping trip with some of my family's friends.

The birds' constant chirping, the repetitive rain drops, and the howling of the wind violently shook me awake. I, concerned about my awful hair, picked out some clothes that weren't brown from the dirt that surrounded me. I got up and dragged myself across the dull campsite. Eating the soggy oatmeal, I chatted with family friends who had forced me to come on the awful trip. We decided that we would walk around the lake, then hike up to another lake.

About a quarter of the way around the lake, I asked if I could take a different route with my father. I was so tired of the constant pestering from my family's friends, that I pulled myself into an endless void of self-doubt. The further I got from them, the lighter I felt. The weight lifted off my shoulders. As we climbed, a feeling of confidence overcame me. The constant pester of my family friends was gone. I felt that there was nothing to stop me, there was no way to fail. The void became a stepping stone, and yet, my hair, my shoes, everything, looked so, so dull.

When we reached the top of the mountain, the view was brighter, more colourful and more beautiful than I had ever seen. The trees, smaller than my fingernail, the lakes, so blue, so clean, so clear, and yet so small. I saw something that I had not seen for the longest time - snow. Sitting next to a patch of snow, I saw that there was nothing on this earth that could ever stop me. In two seconds, I realized that one little thing would not be the end of the world; my life would not end because of one little imperfection. My hair was no longer important. One dead tree does not look dead among a forest of lively ones.

As we descended from the mountain top, the feeling of confidence and the feeling of self-respect did not leave me. I was still as light as a feather. Going back to the campsite did not bother me.

The charming sound of birds chirping, rain dripping off the colossal trees and the wind tenderly blowing was about the best way to wake up in the morning. My hair was no longer concerning me, my clothing was fine and nothing seemed to bother me. The world seemed so clear and so bright. Dull was no longer a word in my dictionary. My faults and imperfections were something that made me who I am.

That day I learned so much from something so little. Life is not perfect. There are mountains to conquer, trees to climb, and trails to explore that never seem to end. Things can go wrong along the way, ankles can break, and friendships can fail, but in the end, everything, every fault, every imperfection is beautiful. I didn't care that I was different. I didn't care that my hair was red, or that I was not popular. It was no longer an issue. After all, it's just our thought.

---

*Sarah Knude enjoys playing and coaching soccer, volunteering, and reading. She hopes to become a financial manager in the future.*

---

### Max Braun

Second Place – Grade 9  
Calgary Catholic School District

## A New Perspective

“Come on! That's a terrible call! Open your eyes!” Profane accusations echoed through the cold arena. Dry air nipped at the skin, while the foul words rung in our ears. Overpowering the slicing of skates, slashing of sticks, and the excited vibe of the parents and players, a loud uproar of rage flamed on. Faces scowled, fists tightened and barbaric words littered the ice. Abuse no person should receive burned and boiled, spewing all over the officials like lava, incinerating everything in its path. Pressure

cracked officials on the ice, causing them to shut down and accept their oncoming mental and verbal abuse. This behavior leached itself to the greatest game on ice, sucking the fun out of it. All of this anger mocked, degraded, and scarred the officials. With no thought for the stress the referees were under, the relentless detestation grew, causing even more damage. The abuse officials receive used to be supported by me, until I gained their perspective.

At twelve years old, unknowing of the time, energy, and commitment I would have to invest, I began a course to become a hockey official. Behind this bold move was an overconfident, arrogant, and cocky attitude. The course began. A full agonizing day sitting in a small, hot classroom studying the rules of refereeing. As if I wasn't already worn out, the clinic required the class to participate in an on-ice session, which sapped the last bit of energy I had saved. Exhausted, I began to write my exam, my mind was blank, my memory faded, forgetting the material we had studied earlier in the day. I handed in the exam and waited for the results. Pressure and anxiety filled the silent classroom; no one spoke while the instructors marked the exams. With the last stroke of a pen the final test was marked. Slowly the pressure in the room dissipated and my heart rate normalized, I had passed. Although I was excited I had no idea that the hardest part of officiating was yet to come. This tough day made me rethink my decision to become a referee, and to question the bold attitude I once displayed.

Doubt filled my mind, as I stepped onto the ice to officiate for the first time. Slowly easing into the rhythm of the game, my nerves calmed, and I was feeling confident. But without warning, loud uproarious outburst spewed hate, like molten lava all over the ice, melting me to my core, the game wasn't finished, but I was ready to quit. Painful, harsh words pierced my ears, and the agony never stopped. The last shrieking whistle was music to my ears, it ceased the out-pour of anger and hate. Constant abuse and anger I had once spewed was now being directed at me. There I was, a thirteen year old kid, being attacked and humiliated for no justifiable reason. Deep reflection about my actions made me realize that I needed to change.

My first few ref games passed and I recognized that the stress, pressure, and abuse that I felt, I had also made other people in my position go through. I had degraded people who were only there to support and structure the game. Then, like a ton of bricks, it hit me. I had gained a new perspective, a point of view that I previously ignored, vilified, and showed no compassion for.

Compassion evolved into sympathy. Acting with sympathy allowed me to recognize the fact that others were struggling, but it wasn't enough. There was more. More I could feel. More I could do. Scouring through my mind I found what I was truly striving for, empathy. Empathy is what I had gained, it allowed me to see both sides of situations, and act accordingly. Playing hockey now is different, stepping onto the ice I no longer become enraged with the ref, knowing the abuse, hate, and anger they endure. My experience officiating has allowed me to forgive and help others in everyday scenarios. I not only put myself in other people's shoes, but I walk in them. Being an official has not only changed how I act, it has given me a new perspective on life.

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*Max Braun enjoys playing hockey, playing badminton and piano. He always strives to achieve high marks in school. Additionally, Max loves to spend time with his family, pets, and friends.*

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## Taylor Channell

Third Place – Grade 9  
Calgary Catholic School District

# Perfectionist

“A single event can awaken within us a stranger totally unknown to us. To live is to be slowly born.”  
– Antoine De Saint-Exupéry.

When I was younger I always worried about the monsters under my bed, but they weren't the ones who held me back from being happy. I used to be able to run down the sidewalk with a toothy grin on my face, eyes crinkling at the sides. I found happiness in spending time with my friends at nearby parks or by playing in the fields.

One day, my parents started noticing a few things about my behaviour that were different from how other kids acted. I had more routines than anyone else and I liked organization and symmetry. Everything needed to be perfect at all times, because if something was out of place I'd freak out and put in an endless amount of effort to fix the problem that, in reality, wasn't much of a problem at all. I found difficulty in relating to others because they never acted like I did. When I was eight I figured out that the real monster was not under my bed, but in my head.

The journey began when I was called into my parents' bedroom one night. The conversation started like any other, asking how my day went and what I did all day before we finally addressed the initial reason I was called into the room. My mother's breathy exhale filled the quiet room and she gave me a small, weak smile before she began to speak.

“Sweetie, daddy and I talked and we want you to go to the doctor's this Friday.” At first I was confused. What was wrong with me?

“Taylor, do you know what OCD is?” I furrowed my eyebrows and shook my head from side to side. My parents explained what it was, what it meant, and then they told me that they thought I had OCD, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. As an eight year old, hearing I had a disorder that I hadn't heard of before was a big deal and my first instinct was to cry. I didn't want to go to therapy, who would? Therapy was going to be a constant reminder that I was different.

Eventually, it was Friday and I went to therapy. They confirmed my parents' assumption about my having OCD and from then on I had a session every Friday and it became a weekly routine for me. I began to enjoy going to therapy after a while because it helped me calm down and relax. My therapist taught me breathing techniques and told me to draw something called the “What If” monster. This was the monster that puts all the negative thoughts in my head.

As I got older, the anxiety got worse. I soon realized that on my way to school I would have to get through a labyrinth of cracks in the ground. Then came the compulsive counting. I had to do everything four times for something to be perfect. I started to dread going to sleep every night because I couldn't lie down until I had gone to the bathroom, got myself a glass of water, locked each door four times, kissed each parent goodnight four times, and said “I love you” to each of them. I also couldn't spend money because when I did I would have a panic attack. When you have a panic attack it feels like your brain is trying to make out twenty different voices at once, each statement invalidating the previous sentence. You can't breathe and the worst part is, sometimes you don't even know why you are having it. The only thing that you can do to stop a panic attack is try to breathe slowly and calmly, which is highly difficult to do.

I realize now that I've always been a perfectionist, I've always craved perfection. I like to focus on what needs to be improved rather than what I've already accomplished to achieve perfection. Now, when I look back to when I was first diagnosed I don't get as upset about the things I haven't yet perfected and I'm proud of how much I've improved. I sleep with the lights off every once in awhile and sometimes I ignore compulsions. My diagnosis has taught me what OCD truly is. It isn't just organization and symmetry, that's only part of it. OCD is not being able to function properly without distractions towards the smallest things.

People use OCD as an adjective to describe being organized but OCD is not an adjective, it is so much more complex than that. I am a perfectionist and OCD is the monster that holds me back.

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*Taylor Channell enjoys playing soccer, piano, tenor saxophone, and other creative activities such as drawing, sketching, and painting.*

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## GRADE 11/12

**Nicole Sparling**

First Place – Grade 12  
Calgary Catholic School District

# From the Ashes

I don't cry. People call me steely, cool, or detached, but none of these descriptions are accurate. My lack of tears can simply be chalked up to a time when I shed too many. Have you ever seen the inert figure of your younger sibling, lying on the floor, twitching? I have, and it is a moment that I will never be able to forget, one that will forever be burned in my mind. My mother, sitting beside him, crying; my dad dialing 911, trying to stay in control; my grandparents hovering at the edges of my tear-blurred vision, wondering whether they'd still have a grandson by the time the paramedics arrived. He was a frail bird being carried out on a stretcher, but everyone knew that this break was far greater than just a wing.

Now and then, I recall new details from that night. The roughness of the wood on my bare feet, the burn of the bulbs against my tired eyes, the sound of my mom waking me up, her tone of voice enough to tell me that something was wrong. Cameron had a grand-mal seizure clocking in at 45 minutes, the average being 5 minutes, making his one of the longest recorded. At the hospital, my parents were told that there were two likely outcomes: either Cameron would wake up in a vegetative state, or he would never wake up again. Horror was the dominant emotion. Cameron with so many plans - an architect, an astronaut, an archaeologist, but, most importantly, a dancer. And now? Now they were saying that, not only would he not dance, but that he would not stir. That my last view of my baby brother would be the EMTs ripping off his favourite monkey pyjamas, a bird stripped of its colourful plume.

There had been complications with Cameron in the past - from his birth via Caesarean to his most recent concussion, but none were this drastic. I was scared. I knew that if he died, a part of me would die with him. And then, as quickly as he plummeted, he rose again, a phoenix bursting from the ashes. He made a full recovery, able to move and speak, free of brain damage. I remember wondering at the fact that the tears that had sliced their salty lines into our faces but days ago were now like the rain following a drought. I had never been so happy to cry. The miracle of a human's range of emotions amazed me, and it was in that moment that I hoped that the only time tears came to me would be in moments of unwavering joy.

Even with Cameron's recuperation, the doctor's were still dubious when it came to his dance career. Cameron had been Irish Dancing for 4 years, and this would be the first year that he was in the

Championship level and able to compete at the World Championships. Because of the seizure's effect on his brain function, his balance was severely affected and the doctors feared that he could injure himself more if he continued dance. Despite this, Cameron returned to dance after a few months and resumed his training.

After just two months back at dance, Cameron had a second seizure. While it was less drastic, it still led to him being diagnosed with epilepsy and put on daily medication. To Cameron, however, this was simply an obstacle. After a few weeks, he resumed his dancing, unwilling to give up on his shot at being a champion. Five months following his second seizure, Cameron competed at his first World's Irish Dance Championships, and placed 17<sup>th</sup> out of nearly 50 dancers. When he danced, he was an eagle, soaring with a power that surpassed anything expected of nature. I cried that day, and, true to my hope, my tears were ones of pride and awe, appreciation manifesting itself in a way that I could not ignore.

I vividly remember Cameron and I getting into a screaming match about who got to use a toy next when I was 7. I recall the fury that I felt toward him, anger that was quickly replaced by a rush of fear as he threatened to tell our mom that I had called him "a big meanie". I have one piece of advice for everyone: appreciate those moments in your life. Sometimes I think of what my life would be like if the doctor's prophecy to my parents had come true that night. There would be no fights over the bathroom, no arguments over what to watch on TV, no big grins and inside jokes, no one to talk to after disagreements with my parents. Every little thing, all the frustrations and the moments of joy, those would all be lost. My brother inspires me through his dedication to dance, his incredible achievement in the face of adversity, and his unwavering optimism despite difficulties. He teaches me every day that, no matter the challenges, we are all capable of greatness, sometimes we just have to work a little harder for it. From him, I learned the importance of appreciating every opportunity and every person in my life. Because of him, I learned gratitude, perseverance, and, most importantly, love.

There are moments in everyone's lives that define a relationship. Sometimes, these moments cause cracks and rifts. Other times, they bring two people closer than before. Cameron's seizure led to a renewed appreciation and a conscious choice to reflect upon how fortunate and blessed we are. Someone was watching over us. A lot can happen in 45 minutes - a car ride, a test, a birth, a death. Our 45 minutes? They ended in a miracle.

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*Nicole Sparling enjoys public speaking and activism. She is also a competitive Irish Dancer. In her spare time, she runs a personal blog where she writes about issues and topics that she views as important. Nicole plans to study International Business after high school, and hopes to pursue a career in law or business.*

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### Jenna Richardson

Second Place – Grade 12  
Calgary Catholic School District

## Confusion into Clarity

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.” - Leo Buscaglia

Imagine waking up ready for a new day when you realize something is “off”. Your mind sinks into a blurry haze as if an impenetrable fog has descended, spiralling your brain into a cyclone of confusion. As you gaze upon your environment you find yourself lost and alone in an unfamiliar setting. It's as though your mind has been erased, your past memories a distant fantasy. As the day proceeds an endless stream of new faces speak to you as if you have known each other your whole lives, but their words are foreign.

Frustration and confusion quickly thicken, boiling through your veins as you feel lost, completely alone in a world different from what was once yours. You are a puppet, people controlling the plot of the play that is your life, and yet you are told it is true. One minute reassuring you everything is going to be all right and then they are gone, the room quiet once again.

How would you feel if you were told you had to endure this every day? Lost, irritated, depressed, anxious? This is just a glimpse of the reality for an estimated 564,000 Canadians living with dementia today.

Ever since I was little, I have realized that no matter where you turn, there is always an individual in need of help. Most importantly, no matter how big or small the deed, one can always make a difference if they open their heart and put in the effort. Over time, this spark ignited into a passion dedicated to giving back to my community. Amidst looking for opportunities, I stumbled upon a local long term care facility that houses residents suffering from mid to advanced stages of dementia.

Vividly, I remember the first evening I was scheduled to volunteer, my stomach churned with butterflies as I entered the building unaware of what to expect. Not to mention my very limited knowledge of what individuals living with dementia endured, restraining my mind to be very cognizant of every word I spoke. Despite my immense effort that evening, I struggled to keep continuous meaningful conversations with many of the residents. Rather than comprehending that the value of my visit couldn't be based off the merit of a conversation, I was trying to help specifically through seeing the people as dementia residents, when really, I needed to look past the curtain of their diagnosis and dig a trench into the individual that stood before me, in order to unveil the river of their true character. It wasn't until I learned how to accept chaos and emphasize my compassion that I realized I had made all the difference for a brief moment in their day. After all, it isn't until you find yourself truly immersed in another person that you are able to grant them a moment of escape into their own definitive world, where old memories are scattered like pictures in a scrapbook waiting to be reminisced upon.

Though I can't say my time spent volunteering has been free of obstacles, it certainly has profoundly impacted my life. Each visit, I am inspired by how resilient the residents are, bearing their own inimitable stories just waiting to be unlocked. Despite the barriers they face, it is truly humbling how welcome they make me feel.

Lorraine is one of those people. Simply being around her makes you feel better, as her smile radiates a passionate sense of kindness that draws you in like a warm hug. No matter her day, she embraces everyone as a dear friend, despite in reality we are strangers. Her incredibly thoughtful and genuine nature is exuded in how she gets emotionally involved in every conversation, opening my heart in appreciation of the people in my life. What is most remarkable to witness from both her and other residents is when they are able to remember a glimpse of a memory that has been buried away. The immense joy and pride they feel of their recollection is truly incredible as though they are little kids on Christmas morning opening a new gift.

Despite the heartwarming experiences, seeing first hand the effects of one's deteriorating mind is truly tragic, akin to slowly watching someone drown, with no rescue. Rooms become race tracks as residents wander aimlessly taking laps, occasionally stopping you in exasperation in search of their "true" home. Mealtimes aren't any easier as food is sent flying in a refusal to eat, unable to enjoy meals because of a diminished sense of taste. That's why although they won't remember it, giving these people a brief moment of entertainment and escape is such a rewarding opportunity to be a part of.

It is obvious that the struggle of the people I met thus far have instilled greater meaning in my life, opening my eyes to understand the beauty of compassion. Oftentimes, when faced with individuals whom exhibit disabilities, one feels sympathetic and acts in a reserved manner, however this shouldn't be the case. Just because someone has difficulty articulating, or their state of mind appears lost in an endless void, doesn't mean their inner being is gone. Volunteering has taught me you can't label someone for what they have, but see them for their spirit and who they truly are. Instead, you have to transition from your mind to the heart, as compassion cannot be calculated, but rather felt and shared. Sometimes all it takes is for us to meet the eyes of another to let them know that they aren't invisible. Accompanying these seniors has

cleared my vision to embrace a life of kindness and understanding. Because of them, I know true love is born from understanding, where simply a smile, question, or one's presence can make all the difference.

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*Jenna Richardson loves to seek new adventures, volunteer and live an active lifestyle. She is a dancer, and competes in the school field hockey, and cross-country running teams. Jenna will be attending the University of Alberta, majoring in Physiology and Developmental Biology, and aspires to become a pediatrician.*

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### Mark Taroma

Third Place – Grade 12  
Calgary Catholic School District

## Missing Pieces

Everyone should have a father figure in his or her life, someone to let you know when you are in the wrong as well as encourage you and teach you the proper way to do things. When a person does not have this, they may not realize how much they are missing out on. I was born on April 5th, 1999, in the capital city of the Philippines, Manila. The only blood related male in the delivery room was my Uncle Jack. It is usually a tradition for everyone to leave the delivery room, except for the father. Of course that would be difficult for my father, seeing as he left before I was born.

Growing up in Manila, people would often allude to the fact that I looked different. I was taller than other kids my age, yet my nose was not as large as anyone else's. People would tell me I looked like my dad. I was only three at the time and did not realize my parent situation was unlike any of my peers at the time. My mother was in Canada working hard, while my father was absent in my life. I had a whole extended family to love and support me, and while I wasn't unhappy, my life felt like I was missing a piece of the whole.

Eventually my mother flew me to Canada. Going into elementary school, the fact that I had no father became more and more apparent. I would hear friends playing in their first Little League game, with their father as the coach. I never played organized sports as a young child. I never had my dad teach me how to throw a baseball; I never had my dad take me to my first hockey game. I thought that perhaps a father was not completely necessary to a fulfilling childhood, perhaps a mother is all I needed, but it was difficult not to wonder how my life would be different had my father stayed around. Would I still be living in Canada, or would I be living in the Philippines? If a father figure is necessary in one's life to be successful, I never realized it until I had one in my life.

When a person goes through an extended part of their life having very little idea of any talents, they may start to feel like maybe they have nothing to offer at all. Fortunately, my mother met a man, a photographer. It was a serendipitous turn of events; her decision to have a family portrait taken took us from a family of two to a family of three. The missing piece had been found. He did all sorts of photography, weddings, sports, and at one point he even worked as a photographer for a few professional sports teams. This man is my stepfather. We had an immediate connection that I could not compare to any other family member. He was interested in my life and he would answer any questions I had about anything I could possibly think of. Even if he didn't know the answer, he would go out of his way to give me a response. He was the first person, other than my mother, who cared this much.

I found the things he did intriguing. His interests were different from my other family members and he exposed me to new ideas and experiences. I learned almost everything I know about graphic arts and the use of Photoshop from him. He helped me discover a lot of interests I'm good at today. He became that role model who encouraged me and directed me. He taught me to draw, paint, take pictures, and most

importantly, he taught me how to create art on a computer using Photoshop. In essence, he provided me with everything I needed to discover the talents I had. He did not just expose me to new interests and new experiences, he taught me to uncover and develop my own talents. Because of him I would like to become a graphic artist in my future and I am well on my way to making that a reality.

It is hard to imagine what I would be good at today if my mother decided against having a family photo taken on that particular day. I believe it is possible to go through life and make yourself into something successful without a father figure, but I also know now that a father figure can potentially play a large part in someone's life. I could not imagine my life without my stepfather, but I'm glad I don't have to because I now I have that missing piece in my life.

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*Mark Taroma is planning to pursue a career in graphic design. He spends much of his time working on programs like Photoshop, allowing him to combine his interests in computers and arts.*

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# Manitoba Winners' Essays

## GRADE 6

### Madelyn Warkentine

First Place – Grade 6  
Pembina Trails School Division

## The Gift to Happiness

**F**or the past two years or so, I haven't been myself. I have been worried, sad, and at times, I've been angry. I was always a nervous child, who would cry at night for reasons that didn't matter. Things only got worse. I lost myself in feelings, emotions and most of all, my thoughts. I felt like nobody understood how uptight I got over the littlest things...but I was wrong, and that was clear to me after an ordinary day at school.

"Okay, I'm almost done your gift," I was told for days. It was no special occasion, it wasn't Christmas or my birthday. I was already grateful at the fact that I was getting a gift, even if I didn't know what it was. One of my best friends was the one giving me the present and she was the type of girl who always had a smile on her face and she would cheer you on no matter what you're doing. I was truly lucky to have her as a best friend.

In the span of two days, she came to school with the largest smile I had ever seen. "I brought your present," she said, with a smile across her face. "You know, you really didn't have to-..." I started but she replied with four simple words: "But I wanted to." She handed me a white plastic bag. "Here," she said. I slowly took the bag out of her hands. I opened it. I could feel my eyes fill with tears. It was a box full of encouraging quotes. Quotes that would help me when times were tough.

That was my turning point. Through everything there was happiness, even if I didn't see it before. I now know others are not the only ones who can make me feel bad, but it's their impact which leaves the final decision to me: Is this going to affect me? Now this question passes my mind whenever someone says something that could possibly make me feel worse about myself. My eyes are now opened wider to more happiness and a bright future.

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*Madelyn Warkentine enjoys writing as well as dancing in her spare time.*

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**Sasha Tebel**

Second Place – Grade 6  
Pembina Trails School Division

## Drowned in Thoughts

I wish, I wish I could change everything. I looked out of the window, high above the clouds and mountains. It was too late...I am crying inside but smiling on the outside. I am on my way to another unknown place for the 9<sup>th</sup> time in my young life...

When I was younger my parents moved a lot looking for a perfect place to live. I saw a lot of my friends disappear from my life. Every year I was turning colder because I didn't want to lose somebody again, my friends kept disappearing. I was drowned into depression, my thoughts and feelings were an ocean that I couldn't escape from.

One day my parents told me that we were moving, this time to Canada. I had never left the Ukraine before. When I got the news I didn't care because I was already used to moving. At the time, not caring was the biggest mistake I have ever made in my life.

Just like that I was on a plane. I sat on my seat and heard my parents talking about a war, a war had started in my country. Then it hit me, this is why we left Ukraine. I did everything wrong, I didn't care about my friends in the Ukraine, I didn't say goodbye properly and now I could never see my friends again. I wish I could at least say goodbye and hug people that were in my life.

From the ocean I found an island called Canada, full of life, and I swam there. This is where my new beginning started. I promised myself that I will never let myself be closed off to my friends and family, I will be open and show my emotions, because everything can disappear in one blink.

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*Sasha Tebel was born in Ukraine. In her spare time, Sasha likes to read mystery novels and sketch the world around her. Once finished grade school, Sasha aspires to be a fashion designer or artist.*

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**Carissa Clabertt**

Third Place – Grade 6  
Pembina Trails School Division

## Precious Time

I heard once that if you live to be eighty your heart will have beat about three billion times. Before you turn eighty you don't blink three billion times, you don't eat three billion meals and you don't cry three billion tears. Yet there's your heart, doing its job 24-7. When you're watching T.V., when you're brushing your teeth, your heart never takes a break. That's what makes it so scary. You never know when your heart is going to stop.

I was walking home from school, thinking about my hockey game later that night. I looked up and stopped dead in my tracks. Parked in my driveway were two vehicles. That meant both of my parents were home and that almost never happens. My heart started to race and my head started to spin. Dread washed over me like a tidal wave crashing down on the earth. I knew what had happened before anyone had the chance to tell me.

"Grandma passed away", the words felt like knives stabbing through my heart. Then they started to echo around my head. I collapsed on the couch sobbing, my parents' arms around me.

She had taken a bad fall that caused a seizure and had been in the hospital ever since. She was taken from us that afternoon by pneumonia, a lung infection that most could overcome but my grandma, being weak, unfortunately couldn't.

It's shocking how fast things can change. One minute someone you love is with you, the next their not. It happens faster than a heartbeat.

Whenever I think of my grandma I only have one wish. That is to spend more time with her. Time is precious. Spending that time with the ones you love is one of the most important things you can do. Sometimes you only realize it when it's already too late. I try to spend time with the people I care about as often as I can. I will forever miss my grandma and cherish the memories that we shared together because they were precious.

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*Carissa Clabertt is passionate about playing hockey and loves to write and read in her spare time. Carissa's favourite book series is Harry Potter.*

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## GRADE 7/8

**Krishnpriya Singh**

First Place – Grade 8  
Pembina Trails School Division

# Adapting to my Pain

**A**daptation is a part of life. Dogs, cats, fish, for them, adapting is easy. They say it's the same for humans. But is it? It doesn't feel that way. Sometimes all I can do is smile, hold back my tears, and pretend I'm okay. But I'm not okay. I am breaking inside. And that, my friends, is the worst kind of pain. Smiling, just to stop the tears from falling.

Once upon a time, I was the perfect girl. Smart, cheerful, bright; an all-around great person. I continue to be this girl, of course, but parts of me broke about a year ago. Whispers bounced around my home, whispers that weren't there before. I didn't think much of it. Little did I know, everything in my calm, composed household was about to fall to pieces.

After the whispers came the coughs. Then the ragged breathing. I lay awake at night, wondering what on earth was going on. Those coughs were my dad's. Let me be very clear here: my dad is very simply the best dad there is. Corny, but very true for me. My family is my everything, and my parents are my role models. My little sister brought mounds of joy to my life. I loved my father to death. Strange words.

It was midnight when the news came. My white knuckles tightly grasped the untouched glass of water before me. It was only me and my mom at home. Her eyes were red and bloodshot from the tears that never seemed to vanish. I wanted to run, far, far away and never come back. "Krishnu," she began. Stop. I didn't want to hear it. "Your father is sick." No. No, please. "He has cancer," she whispered, barely audible.

My world collapsed. Those three words took my life and turned it upside down. Before anything else could happen, she lightly grazed my hand. "It is curable. It will take time, but it will go and never come back," she spoke softly. What could I do? I nodded quietly and left. My vision blurred. I threw myself into my bed and wept. I wept for my heartbroken mother, my beautiful little sister, and everyone who had to live with the suffering of this disease that has taken over our lives.

All of this took a toll on me. I hated myself. I was a selfish brat. Ugly. Fat. Dumb. These words raged inside me like a storm. I was done.

Slowly, my father healed. I healed with him. My broken heart pieced itself back together with love and support. It suddenly hit me. All the pain and struggle I was putting myself to, it wasn't worth it. Realizing I was angry with myself for no good reason was my moment. I understood my hate and pain. And I realized nothing would be the same. I will still flinch every time hear the word cancer. But it will pass. And that's all I can hope for.

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*Krishnpriya Singh enjoys reading, watercolours and swimming. Her absolute favourite subject is math. Krishnpriya found the narrative writing process very rewarding.*

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**Kira Penner**

Second Place – Grade 8  
Pembina Trails School Division

## A Restored Mindset

**C**hallenge; a situation that tests someone's abilities.

Life is full of challenges. Challenges that hit when you least expect them. You can look at these challenges and give up or you can choose to have a good attitude and look on the bright side.

On October 29, 2013, I faced an unexpected challenge. My friends and I were walking to a track practice after school, talking about our days and laughing at each other's jokes. We were about half way to our practice when my parents pulled up beside us. They asked me to get in the car. Not knowing why, I agreed. My sister was already in the car and as I got in, I could tell there was an uneasy feeling lingering. I sat in silence the whole way home not daring to ask what was going on.

We got home and unpacked our lunches like everything was normal but I knew it was not. No one said a word. After half an hour my dad asked us to come to the living room. My sister and I sat down. She glanced at me with her usual worried half smile. "We got an unfortunate call today," my dad told us. "Your mom....." he hesitated. "She has cancer....." There was a long pause. No one moved. No one spoke. It was as if time was frozen. We all just looked at each other in shock.

At that moment in time, I realized that I needed to start looking on the bright side of every challenge I face. Among all of the horrible news, there were many blessings. We decided to spend more time together as a family, and never take each other for granted. We started to understand each other better because we listened willingly.

Christmas that year was tough. After long weeks of chemotherapy, my mom was exhausted and so were we. Little did I know that Christmas would hold the biggest blessing of them all. My mom wrote me a book. This book was filled with her hopes and wishes for me. This gift made me realize that I could get through this diagnosis, even if my mom could not.

Over the next few years my mom got sicker and sicker. After many visits to the hospital, the news got worse. The cancer had spread from her cervix to her spine, lungs, and lymph nodes. On July 30, 2015 she was admitted to the palliative care floor at Riverview Hospital. On August 21, 2015 her fight ended, she was set free.

This experience has taught me to expect the unexpected and that no matter how tragic the event is, I need to change my perspective. With this strategy I know I can get through anything life throws at me.

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*Kira Penner has high expectations of herself both academically and athletically. Kira has a strong sense of justice and values her family and friends deeply.*

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### Jorja Harakal

Third Place – Grade 7  
Pembina Trails School Division

## Standing Up for Cherry Boy

I walk a steady pace down the hall towards the main entrance with Tony on my tail. "I'm, uh, just gonna go to the water fountain" Tony mumbles. I watch as he squeezes through a crowd of grade nine boys bumping into a couple. "Hey! Watch where you're going" yells one, frustrated with Tony. "Yeah! Move you're a-" he swears at him. I almost speak up to the rude boys but swallow my words and wait patiently. A couple of seconds later Tony is walking back to me, this time he walks around the boys and I fill with relief when he safely reaches me. Tony is tall and looks tough, but don't let that fool you. He could not, nor would want to, hurt anybody or anything.

I stride towards the door but when I reach them and glance behind me, Tony is not there. I look around the crowded entranceway but I can't spot him. I begin to run with panic towards the water fountain, but I stop short when I hear Tony talking with the grade 9's. I only catch the tail-end of their conversation but from what I hear, Tony is in trouble.

"No bad words," Tony tells the group of guys. I bury my face in my palms. "Imma beat your a\*\* up if you say that one more time," the seemed-to-be leader tells Tony while pointing a stubby finger in his face. "No bad words." Tony repeats himself. The guy looks as though someone had just slapped him across the face. "That's it boy!" he says, grabbing the collar of Tony's large gray t-shirt and lifting him off the ground to meet eye level.

People are now staring, and I am so fed up my blood starts to boil. I take a large powerful step towards him and shout loud enough so he would hear me over top of the laughs. "Put him down" I say with meaning and determination in my voice. He gives me a side glance and then a laugh. "What, are you his girlfriend?" he snickers, keeping Tony at eye level with him. "No I'm not," I pause, thinking of what else to say. "Now put him down, I won't ask again," I add, but that doesn't seem to matter to him, he is more involved with the girlfriend part of the conversation. "Aw look, he's red like a cherry. Cherry boy, Cherry boy," he chants and his idiotic friends join in.

I just want to go home so I quickly explore my options and I decide on one. I take a step towards the bully and slap him across the face. He drops Tony like a piece of meat and clutches his cheek with a scream. When he removes his hand, his cheek is bright red. "Now who's the cherry?" I sneer at him and turn

and walk out of the school. I never look back, not once, because since that day I've unlocked a new skill, standing up.

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*Jorja Harakal has been writing for a long time and has always loved it. Jorja is also a gymnast and a dancer.*

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# New Brunswick Winners' Essays

## GRADE 7/8 ENGLISH

**Kayley Clark**

First Place – Grade 8  
Anglophone West School District

## I Choose Life

**S**adness is a snake. It wraps around you and constricts you within its coils. I know a thing or two about the devastation it causes. We learn best from experience.

My vision was blurred as I stared up at the ceiling, my body sprawled out on my bed. This was new to me. It is true I have had thoughts before, but this... this was different. I felt the thoughts. I forced myself to sit up causing warm tears to fall from my face like raindrops. With a throbbing head, I turned onto my side. My gaze was soon fixed upon the sewing kit laying on my floor.

Looking back, I am not proud of what I did next. I crawled off my bed and placed a hand on the sewing kit's cold lid. My gaze didn't falter. Barely breathing, I opened the small case and snatched the scissors. This could be so easy... no more nightmares. No more letting people down. Things would be better.

The sharp edge of the scissors was now pressed against my wrist. It cut into my flesh, not deep enough to draw blood, but deep enough to leave its cold mark. As I push, something screamed from the depths of my mind dragging my attention from the tingling in my wrists. Blurry images. A family having to bury their own daughter; friends having to find out what happened through the news...

In the back of my mind I knew no matter how dark everything seemed, they would get better in the end. It's always darkest just before the dawn.

The scissors hit the ground with a clang. Bringing on my own demise would be so simple but I could not do that to my friends and family. I chose the hard way. I would still have to deal with the stuff life decided to throw at me but I refused to hurt those I care about.

I picked up the scissors and summoned all my strength to stand up. I dragged myself outside my room. Kneeling down, I gingerly placed the scissors on the ground. I walked back in and closed the door behind me. I chose life as hard as it will be.

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*Kayley Clark enjoys drawing, cosplay and creating costumes.*

**Drew Pellerin**

Second Place – Grade 7

## The Fall and the Climb Back Up

**A** five-year-old should not have to worry about death. They should be thinking about life, laughter, toys and games. But seven years ago death was at the forefront of my reality. At the tender age of five, I was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (A.L.L.).

A.L.L. is a cancer that multiplies the white blood cells to an astronomically high level. They override all other cells, killing you from the inside out. Your blood turns to mush and you bruise as easily as a dropped banana. Your bones are like delicate pieces of glass, just waiting to shatter. The fallout was hard. I was tired and weak constantly. The fear factor was at an all-time high, and there didn't appear to be a light at the end of the tunnel.

Then I started chemotherapy. 'Chemo' is a process that numbs and kills cancer cells. However, it also hurts the liver and kidneys as it is essentially a poison. In the beginning, the outlook was grim. I broke two bones. Then it started to take effect: rejuvenating, life-giving, amazing power began to fill my body. The cancer was beginning to weaken. This inspired me to fight even harder. It gave me a will to survive so fierce that not even a Panzer tank division would be enough to stop me. I knew that I would never give up – not for a million dollars and not in a thousand years.

Now, after three years of life-changing chemotherapy, I have reached the summit. I have kicked cancer's atrocious butt. I stopped it dead in its tracks.

The experience changed me for the better and the worse. On the one hand it made me realize how fast life can slip away. I've learned not to take life for granted. I try to live every day to the fullest. But it took away my innocence. I lost a large part of my childhood. As much as I try to focus on the climb back up, I can never forget the fall!

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*Drew Pellerin is an aspiring musician. He plays the guitar, piano, drums, saxophone and ukulele. He also loves to write and when he grows up, he wants to be an oncologist.*

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**Sarah Mew**

Third Place – Grade 8  
Anglophone South District School Board

## Epiphany

**I** was selfish when I first found out he died. I laid in my bed engulfed in the unbearable sadness of what just happened. I was sad because he left me. I was sad that I had to face my problems without his guiding hand. Life just did not seem fair. Tear-stained faces and constant bellowing minds were what I endured night after night. Nothing made sense. He was so sick. His battle with cancer a gruesome fight to the death.

When I thought about him the memories were so clear, yet so vague and weak. It was as though the good times were disappearing with him. My mind kept going back to seeing his cold lifeless body lying in that wretched coffin. His eyes, that once were stars, were still and his skin as pale as snow. That was not

the jolly, kind Dale Ingersoll I loved. That was not my Grampy. But then I would look up and escape my tormented mind, and everything would come flooding back. His plump, short body indenting his favourite leather chair. His wise eyes scanning a book he just could not put down. His twisted expression-filled face as he scrutinized a meal. That is the Grampy I remember.

I resented my Grampy for leaving me, but most of all I was angry at God for opening the door of death of which I previously had no knowledge. I could not comprehend why he gave such an extraordinary man an undeserving fate. I have not met anyone who had stronger faith than him. It kept me awake at night wondering, "Why?" Was it a test of trust? If so, I most certainly failed. I would sob for hours over my inability to understand. At other times, I would cry internally, my eyes unable to produce more tears. I was not ready; I did not know how to deal with what I was experiencing or how to keep going.

Then one morning I woke up and the clarity of my realization was astounding. It was as though reality slapped me in the face. There is an old proverb saying, "Everything that is not given is lost". My mind felt sharp and refreshed after so long. I did not lose my Grampy. He lost his life, but he did not leave me. He could not. If my Grampy was anything, he was a giver. The majority of my values, beliefs, and opinions were gifts from him that I hold onto. If he ever truly left me, I would no longer be myself. He shared himself with the world and by doing that, he will never leave.

When I experienced death for the first time, I felt like my world was crumbling around me. I now know it is normal to go through this rollercoaster of emotions. Thankfully, I have learned to find comfort in my pain, as it is better to have loved him and hurt than to never have known him at all.

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*Sarah Mew is an avid reader and writer. She enjoys spending time with her family and friends. Sarah plans to attend university and become a doctor one day.*

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## GRADE 9/10 ENGLISH

**Patricia Forestell**

First Place – Grade 10  
Anglophone West District School Board

# The Earth Shaker

**“D**elay is the deadliest form of denial” - C. Northcote Parkinson

It's funny how quickly the smallest tremor can transform into an earthquake. How a seemingly harmless thing can so quickly evolve into something perilous. When my father started to shake, I didn't pay it much attention. In my twelve-year-old mind anything could be cured. I, and the rest of the world, were invincible. When his quiver was diagnosed as an essential tremor nothing changed. My idealistic world was intact; everything was perfect. But after years of tests, exams and changed medications, a discovery came to light. This prognosis transfigured my father's little tremor into an earthquake that demolished everything I thought I knew.

On the day that my parents told the news to our family, Parkinson's was the farthest thing from my mind. At the time, I wasn't even certain of what it was. When my mother called me into my sister's

bedroom, it was strange, but I thought nothing of it. Carefree and happy, I twirled around in my sister's green desk chair, laughing at my parents and younger sister all squished together on her small bed. Then my father started to talk. As I listened to him explain in a serious tone, a lump seemed to lodge itself in my throat. I had an idea of where he was going with this. I tried to swallow while I listened, the backs of my eyes prickling.

"I have a disease called Parkinson's," my father said solemnly, and the iron ball in my throat dropped to the pit of my stomach. Everything that my parents were saying was drowned out by the ringing in my ears. The pink walls of my sister's bedroom spun around me, the rest of the world just smudged colours. Panic started to engulf me, choking me in desperate fear. I sat there, just watching my family as they started to come back into focus, like a camera re-adjusting. My face felt frozen, and I held tears back, knowing if I cried it would only frighten my sister.

I watched as my father's lips moved in a futile attempt to reassure us. "We have options." My mother told us, "Your father is a prime candidate for medical trials and Deep Brain Stimulation." My heart stopped for a second, I just sat there, waiting for her to continue. After a moment of silence, I stood up and stumbled out. As soon as I made it out of the door – and their eyesight - I collapsed against the wall, breathing heavily. I panted, trying to catch my breath and hold back tears simultaneously, allowing myself a moment of weakness. Taking a final deep breath, I got up, staggered to my bedroom and grabbed my laptop.

Hours of research later I found that my father's only options were medication - which only works for so long - and Deep Brain Stimulation, a surgery that entailed my father's brain being open to the world and probed, while he was awake. I sat and let it sink in, absorbing everything I knew so far. My father had an incurable neurological disorder that would, bit by bit, take away his ability to control his limbs. His tremor had started to quake.

My father's diagnosis shook the ground beneath me, crumbling the stability that I craved. But, over time as I have gained some perspective, I've realised that my father's diagnosis could have been worse. He still has his memories, his health, and for now, his main motor functions. Parkinson's will eventually steal his ability to walk, and control his body. The disease has taken things from my family, but it has also taught us. It has shown me that my time walking and running with my father is precious, and limited. Every moment I have with him that would have previously been an everyday occurrence, now holds a special meaning for me. Through this journey with him, I have discovered that his Parkinson's is not a sentence to the end of his normal life, but rather a challenge, an invitation to see the simple joys that I've previously been missing. It has been an awakening to how much I take for granted, and how much my relationship with my father truly means to me.

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*Patricia Forestell volunteers with the Sparks, every week. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, writing, and art. Patricia would like to pursue a career that involves writing.*

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**Makenzie Collins**

Second Place – Grade 10  
Anglophone West District School Board

## Summer of Sixteen

“People go, but how they left always stays.” - Rupi Kaur

Have you ever been so incredibly close to someone that they know you better than you know yourself? So close that you can tell them anything without fear of trial or tribulation? There's an unspoken bond between two best friends that is simply unparalleled by any other. However, we sometimes take the simpler things in life, like friendship, for granted. You never quite fully understand what you have until it's gone.

The summer of 2016 was in its infancy and with it came a sense of wondrous adventure and childlike joy. I had the world at my fingertips and my best friend at my side. I couldn't have asked for anything else. Destiny and I had been close ever since our world was nothing more than Sunday morning cartoons at Nan's and learning our ABC's. Although we were cousins by chance, we were friends by choice.

Approaching my fifteenth year, our bond was stronger than ever. We practically lived at each other's houses, communicated solely through inside jokes and held every detail of each other's lives close to our hearts. With our hopes high and our summer bucket list long, we set out to make our few months of sweet freedom unforgettable. In the end, we got our wish but not in the way either of us had expected.

In the past, Destiny and I have had our fair share of arguments. They would typically last a week or so, until one of us would break down and apologize or totally forget why the other was mad, and at the end of the day, all would be well. It wasn't exactly shocking when a small bicker began in early July. I had assumed that within the next few days, an apology would come and our friendship would once again resume as normal.

Unfortunately, I was wrong.

What I thought was a small quarrel, spiraled out of control. For the next two months, I would go without hearing a single word from Destiny. I had been completely cut off from my favourite person and I was lost. Without her, I had no one. Sure, I had lots of friends but no one like her. I spent countless nights awake wondering if she had thought of me, wishing that she was beside me, laughing and smiling like things were great again. I felt so empty, so alone. I had experienced a loss before but nothing quite like this. It was almost as if I was mourning someone who was still alive.

The warmth of summer faded into the colours of autumn and although the initial pain had subsided, I often thought about Destiny and how hard it would be to see her every day in the school halls. How was I supposed to pretend she was nothing more than a stranger to me, when I knew her like the back of my hand?

During the first week, I saw her multiple times around the school. Thousands of words that had gone unsaid for too long sat in the base of my throat as I watched her pass by. I had so many things to tell her. So much to say. I felt angry and betrayed, but mostly I just felt a longing deep in my chest. I hadn't realized how much I missed my partner in crime.

Not talking to Destiny was becoming ordinary to me until one bitter afternoon, a few weeks into the school year, my phone buzzed to life with a notification. My heart nearly flew across the room as my eyes met the screen. Destiny - it was her! I had been waiting months for this, and now it was happening! I didn't know how to react.

My fingers raced across my screen as a smile grew on my face. An apology. That's all I had needed. Immediately, it was almost as if nothing had happened.

Our connection was not only intact, but stronger than ever before. Our months apart had reminded us just how important our friendship was. However, I learned a great deal from all of this. I had missed the

summer of sixteen, the one I had felt so hopeful, because I didn't put myself out there and apologize first. That time can never be recovered, but I can make sure that in the future my pride is not prioritized over the relationships closest to my heart.

I don't know where I'd be without Destiny today. She keeps me strong throughout my weakest days, lifts me when I am down, and never fails to put a smile on my face. Although we've had our ups and downs, I will always be at her side when she needs me, no matter the situation. While the summer of 2016 didn't turn out the way that we had planned, it was certainly unforgettable. You never truly understand what you have until it's gone.

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*Makenzie Collins plays forward for the school hockey team. She enjoys spending time with friends and travelling with her family. In the future, she would like to go into the field of medicine.*

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### Noah Gallant

Second Place – Grade 10  
Anglophone West District School Board

## One Mutual Friend

**M**y sweaty, trembling hands silently clicked the keyboard. With each tap, my heart seemed to beat faster and faster, with each word my lunch threatened to come up. Despite my desperate attempts not to cry, salt water dripped onto the keyboard.

I tried to concentrate on the words. I wanted, needed, to express my thoughts clearly; however, my emotions clogged my brain. I tried to identify my feelings and only one stood out. Fear. Fear of what people will think, fear of what people will say, and worst of all, fear of what people will do. It was that fear that made me almost stop, almost made me delete the whole post. It was a different fear that made me keep going; the fear that if I did not do this now, I never would.

I finished the post, and looked it over. It took up half of my screen, and was filled with spelling mistakes, but at least it was the truth. For a long time, I was holding a secret in, a secret I couldn't trust anyone with: I am gay.

As soon as I hit post I instantly regretted it. I went to delete it, but before I could, someone commented on it. And then someone else did. Out of nowhere, my post had tons of comments.

I support you 100%.

Love you, no matter what.

You're so brave for doing this.

If anyone has any problem with you send them my way!

All the comments were positive and supportive. My face glowed with a smile, and my heart filled with joy. It felt as if a pile of bricks had been lifted from my back, I could finally stop hiding. My eyes teared up again at the thought of being accepted for who I was. I sat there, oblivious of the time, reading each comment. It could have been five minutes, or five hours. I eagerly read each comment as they came in, hungry for more, reading so fast I often had to go back and re-read. I landed on one comment. The comment that changed it all.

I hope you burn in hell, fag!

My hand reacted as fast as my heart, slamming the laptop closed as I filled with despair. I sat still, and let my worst fears sink in. My friends are going to hate me, I thought. Everyone is going to hate me. I slowly opened my laptop. People were jumping to defend me; already his comment had five people telling him off. But it didn't matter, none of the comments mattered, only his. I subconsciously hovered my mouse over his name, and give a little tap.

One mutual friend.

That was the first thing I read, and it was enough. A new emotion came over me; this time not happiness, not sadness, not even fear. Anger. I was enraged. This person doesn't even know me, doesn't have a clue who I am as a person, and he thinks he has the right to judge me? I went back to his comment, ready to lash out at him, ready to destroy him, but I didn't. Instead, I deleted his comment. He wasn't worth my time.

Looking back, I would like to thank him. The world is full of people trying to tear you down, just for being you. He was the very first person ever to hate me for being gay. He helped me realize that not only should you not listen, but you should not give them any attention. People like him live off the reactions of others. While people were calling his comment out, he was sitting at home laughing and smiling. If you take away the attention, you take away them. That is why I would like to thank you, random person from Facebook with one mutual friend, for teaching me a valuable life lesson. No one in the world matters when it comes to your life. No one, but you.

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*Noah Gallant submitted an entry last year to the anthology entitled Lessons from Death, which won honorable mention. In the future, Noah wants to be a criminal lawyer.*

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**Vardaan Malhotra**

Third Place – Grade 10  
Anglophone West District School Board

## Healthy Roots Bear Sweet Fruit

**F**irsts are always the most challenging: the first time riding a bicycle without support, the first time swimming in a pool without a floaty and undoubtedly, the first day of school in a new country. With thick winter clothing layering my body and my new backpack, I walked to school on the treacherous snow packed sidewalks. My face was aglow with a smile. Excitement grew as the double-doors accepted me into an active school environment brimming with students making their way toward their morning classes. Soon after my arrival, the ear-piercing bell indicated the start of another school day for everyone, except me; it marked the beginning of an enlightening journey that I would treasure forever.

"Let's greet Ishan", my teacher introduced me. "Hello", I said to my neighbouring classmate as I settled in my seat. However, his contracting facial expressions indicated that he was not interested in being friends with someone who appeared different. Hours flew by as I tried to adapt to my new surroundings, but everything came to a halt during break.

Once I opened my lunch, the sweet aroma of Indian cuisine greeted me. "Ew. What is that?" I heard students mutter under their breaths. Quickly closing the box, I hastily stuffed it into the front pocket of my bag, acting like nothing happened. That night, I urged my parents to stop cooking Indian foods for school lunches because students found it unfamiliar. Their attempts at explaining the importance of embracing my culture failed and reluctantly they relented to packing simple sandwiches.

Two years passed as I tried to blend in with everyone around me: eating, dressing, and acting like them. In grade 5, my teacher organized a meeting with my parents when he noticed my unwillingness to have a discussion about India as he spoke of Gandhi. As a result, I was enlisted in a multicultural meet at the school district's office. Students from diverse national backgrounds were grouped together to learn about one another's uniqueness and individuality through presentations that would be showcased to the public. Difficulties arose as I struggled to relive my past filled with ignored childhood memories. I needed help, so I asked my family and instructors to assist in reforming the missing links between my present and my past. This led to my creation of an accurate digital presentation that highlighted Indian culture for the presentation day.

A churning stomach filled with fear and anxiety woke me up that Friday morning. I walked into the room dressed in traditional kurta pyjama attire, with my presentation in one hand and the Indian cuisine, "pohe", in the other. Sweat ran across my brow. An uneasy sensation of prickling hair rushed through my body as I watched the others' demonstrations. The hands of the clock crept to the 10:00 o'clock mark; it was my turn to present.

"The world...world has... been...", my heart rate drastically increased as choppy words slowly escaped my mouth in front of the sea of adults and students whose eyes were locked on me. It was not until I glanced at my mother's encouraging smile that I spoke from the heart with fluency and excitement. "I am looking forward for my future learning experiences and to see more of the beautiful world I was born in.", the concluding slide of my presentation was followed by a standing ovation. Joy overtook my body as I witnessed individuals of all cultures appreciate my identity and compliment my work while they enjoyed eating "pohe".

As people slowly exited, I reflected on my experience, finally understanding my parents' wise words, "It is essential to be proud of your own identity and culture." This moment acted as a catalyst, influencing me to embrace my past while enjoying my present experiences in Canada, which has helped me become a leader and a well-rounded individual. I learned the priceless lesson of unconditional acceptance of others and more importantly of myself. I now merge the best of the East with the best of the West because strong roots offer the best fruit. As Dr. Seuss says, "Why fit in when you were born to stand out?"

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*Vardaan Malhotra came from India. He enjoys playing soccer, swimming, and participating in adventure sports and is an active participant in the community through various charitable organizations and clubs. Vardaan has received awards for academics, for leadership and for his contribution to the school community.*

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## 11/12 ENGLISH

**Emily Squires**First Place – Grade 11  
Anglophone West District School Board

## A Blossoming Tulip

**H**ow does one compare the northern lights to gently falling snow? One appeals to the eye with its vivid colours and movements, the other with its softness and bliss. Which rules the hierarchy of beauty? The answer is neither. Though they are both breathtaking, they are impossible to compare because there is not one true form of beauty, and I wish I had considered that when I was fifteen years old.

I stood in front of my mirror for the hundredth time in no more than ten minutes. I reapplied my peach lipstick, brushed through my neatly straightened hair once again, checked my teeth for any leftover food, and did a quick admiring spin before rushing out the door to my dad's car. My constant mirror checks had led us to being five minutes late for my new stepmother's house.

My dad and I had planned a shopping day with my new stepsister, Nicole, as a "bonding trip." I had fixed my hair, perfected my makeup and put on my best outfit as always. Beginning at a young age, I had always fixed myself so that I would feel dominant in appearance over any girl I met. I always had difficulty with jealousy and perceived the majority of new women I encountered as competition for the "who's better looking" prize.

I strutted into the house waiting for her to come downstairs, waiting to see who won the competition I had mentally constructed. I was waiting for merely a minute by the front door, powdering my nose, and appreciating my perfectly polished nails when she came downstairs. With my nose turned upwards, I looked over at the face that I would soon become so familiar. The moment I laid my eyes on her, my heart plunged to my stomach.

She was beautiful, more beautiful than anyone or anything I have ever seen! Her soft, brown hair fell just past her chest. Her flawless, tanned skin made her bright blue eyes pop. Her long legs took graceful and confident strides toward me in her tight, grey dress that hugged her thin figure. Immediately after this first glimpse, I was a different person.

I looked down at myself and to my surprise, what I thought was beautiful, what I thought was perfect, what I once saw, was no longer there. My red carpet hairstyle turned to a head of disheveled locks. My flattering outfit now looked as if I belonged in a circus. My stomach had miraculously become larger, pudgier, and my entire being that once was a blossoming tulip, reconstructed itself into a shriveled weed.

Instantly, following the encounter, I was no longer Emily. I had mentally transfigured myself into Nicole, and the person I was, slowly began to erode. From that very day the new abundance of jealousy that filled my entire being and coursed through my veins, made me want to clone myself into an exact replica of her. Over countless months I had wasted over a thousand dollars and hundreds of hours trying to transform myself into this woman.

I can easily recall the eye opening day, a year and a half after the encounter. I had metamorphosed myself to finally be almost an exact image of my stepsister. I was lazily browsing my Pinterest, scrolling through my home page, past various images and quotes ranging from comedy to recipes, when one particular post caught my eye. A post most people would have deemed insignificant, yet it changed my life completely. It was a quote that read, "How cool is it that the same God that created mountains and oceans and galaxies looked at you and thought the world needed one of you too."

It then dawned on me - I was made to be Me, and I was made to look like Me! The jealousy that had ruled over my body was suddenly washed away by a powerful river of self-love. The weight on my shoulders from forcing myself, day and night to replicate my stepsister had been lifted. I looked at myself in the mirror, and instead of seeing spilled paint on a canvas, I saw a unique and intricate painting. I don't have to compete to be better than other women because I am my own person and I am beautiful in my own way. I now have the ability to leave my house with messy hair, no makeup and wearing sweatpants. An idea that would have otherwise appalled me. I have erased a trait from my life that I would have never imagined possible. I am no longer jealous of anyone and view each woman I come across, not as competition, but as her own beautifully painted canvas, with her own combination of colours.

The majority of girls aged fifteen to seventeen years old, are unhappy with their physical appearance. We live in a world today where young girls feel as if they aren't good enough, and feel as if they need to change something about how they look in order to raise their self-esteem. I hope those girls, who are blinded by one representation of beauty, learn the lesson that I did; love yourself! You are beautiful! Their stress would deplete tremendously if only they would come to realize that they are a work of art, and they don't need to compare themselves to anyone.

A tulip can only be a tulip. It cannot be a sunflower, nor can it be a rose. Though all flowers are beautiful, they're also all unique. As someone admires the roses dancing in the wind, you can admire someone else's beauty without questioning your own. I am not Nicole. I am Emily, and I am beautiful!

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*Emily Squires was born and raised in Orangeville, Ontario and moved to New Brunswick 5 years ago. Emily enjoys doing makeup and playing sports, especially volleyball. She also works part-time at the local grocery store. When she graduates, Emily plans to attend a post-secondary school for makeup artistry.*

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### Min Jung Lee

Second Place – Grade 11  
Anglophone West District School Board

## It's All About Forgiveness

**P**rompt: Think about the role others have played in your experiences.

The fierce wind pounded on the windows and icy breeze seeped through the tiny gaps. My grip around the banister hardened as I inhaled deeply through my nose. A photo was hung across from where I stood. The smiles plastered in the family photo seemed so fake, so phony, that night.

I took a step down the creaky stairs but suddenly stopped myself. The little voices inside my head warned in alert. Don't get yourself involved again. Don't take sides. Just stay where you are. You can't change what is happening between your parents. You're just a kid. However, it was impossible to ignore the familiar shrill of a scream.

"AAAAHAAAHHH!" Like time and time again, my instinct to protect my mom took over. I have to, I have to defend her! With my shaky legs, I forced myself down the remaining steps of the stairs, which seemed like an eternity to the bottom.

With a trembling hand, I pushed open the heavy, dark door. I was not surprised to be greeted by piles of books, chairs, and a wallet thrown across the carpet floor of the usual unscathed living room. Yes, I was terrified, but I was hardened to the core as a result of these repetitive experiences. It was as if someone had pressed 'pause' on a DVD player. Everything, everyone, even the cold night wind became absolutely still in my presence. My dad, who made every wish of mine come true, was replaced by an unrecognizable

monster. The strong, intelligent mom, who enjoyed a cup of warm tea with golden biscuits, was no longer visible. Instead, two ashamed people locked in sorrow and hatred stared at me as my hollow stare was returned.

"Christina, I wasn't, it's not like -," my dad stuttered but I did not dare give him a chance to finish his sentence.

"Just stop, dad," I begged, cutting him off. "Please, just stop." As soon as the words left my mouth, disappointment filled with pain, flickered across my dad's face. It had been 6 years ago in the living room of our house in Portishead, England. Nothing had changed.

The woman stopped writing and put her pen down. Her face portrayed exactly the same professional look throughout the whole hour. Closing her notebook she looked straight into my glassed-over eyes and asked, "If you were given a chance, what would you like to say to him?" Strangely, a single question was enough for all the walls of hardness within me to fall apart. A single tear slowly rolled down my porcelain cheek as memories of my dad filled my empty head.

Uncontrollable drops of salty tears began to fall as vivid flashbacks of my dad teaching me to swim and telling me how much he loved me, swept across my mind. My body jerked to the rhythm of my silent sobs as all the years I had shut him out of my life were never going to be returned. Never. I realized, right then, on the second last Monday of my summer break, that all I needed was to be given an opportunity to say one word: sorry. The woman did not make any sound but patiently waited for my hiccups to subside.

"I just want to say, I want to tell him that... I'm sorry and that I forgive him," I murmured quietly, interrupted with dramatic pauses. The woman nodded in gratifying satisfaction and slightly tilted her head to look at the clock pointing to 3.PM. It's all over, I thought as I wiped my tears away. Automatically, I stopped crying and stood up, feeling numb and a thousand emotions simultaneously.

"Thank you," I said and walked out while leaving the guilt, the regret, and the pain behind. As soon as I hit the sidewalk, I knew exactly what to do. I reached into my pocket and I dialed my dad's phone number: 010-9208-2334. Beep. Beep. Beeeeeeep. Rinnnnng. "Hey, dad?," my voice cracked as I struggled to continue.

In the beginning, I believed that I had no choice but to forgive him because he was my dad. As a 12 year old, that thought had made me even angrier because no matter how many times I swore I would never forgive him, whenever he came back to me telling me that everything was for my own good I had to let him back into my life. Now I know that asking for forgiveness and forgiving others is a sign of inner strength. Many years were lost as I struggled to accept our father-daughter relationship but there are more years ahead of us to make up for what I thought would never be able to be mended.

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*Min Jung (Christina) Lee moved here from Thailand a year and a half ago with her parents and her older brother. Christina loves colouring, shopping and hanging out with her friends.*

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**Alex Hart**

Third Place – Grade 11  
Anglophone South District School Board

## Frog Attack

**P**assion is a mysterious, yet wonderful concept. It is something that gives us the drive to complete tasks that may seem illogical to the other seven billion people, with whom we share the earth. Passion contributes immensely to our uniqueness as individuals. It has the ability to send our lives in unpredictable directions. Luckily, for me, I unearthed what I am passionate about at a young age. I am

a wildlife enthusiast. More specifically, I take interest in amphibians. It was when I was seven years old; a unique creature shaped a new dimension of my life.

It was somewhat of a chilly afternoon at the lake during the summer of 2007. Brisk winds howled, provoking the smallest of whitecaps to crash on the rock-covered shore. A sense of relief flowed through my body, each time the sun was able to penetrate through the overcast sky. Jagged stones stabbed into the souls of my feet. Goosebumps settled on my limbs due to the cold. As I focussed in on my target, the sound of waves, sensation of cutting stones, and the chills disappeared from my mind. My vision became as sharp as a hawk's, my ears channeled any irregular splashes in the water, and my muscles were poised and prepared to act. I was able to detect the movement of a small green critter, using my peripheral vision. My favoured hand shot out at the speed of a bullet. With phenomenal technique, I was able to swiftly, yet carefully capture my target.

Hours before, I had constructed a frog habitat built of rocks. This was a typical activity for me at the lake. Each rock was placed precisely to ensure the structure was up to standard. The home would have to sit lakeside, with one half being submerged in shallow water and the other exposed to the dry beach. I began by placing flat stones of great width in a circle to form the base. The following step was stacking rocks of smaller stature on top of the base. For insurance, I built a third layer, to prevent waves from trickling their way through my structure. To complete my creation, I added lake grass and water plants for decoration. After an hour of relentless labor, my construction met all the requirements except one. A frog house was pointless without amphibians! Roaming the beach with great concentration for an hour or so, I managed to return with five frogs. A haul that included four small, standard looking green frogs, as well as a unique brown eyed, brown skinned bullfrog. I was eager to introduce them to their temporary residence.

One by one, I set the creatures down in their new luxurious home. The introduction process was a smooth one, with none of them showing the intent of escaping. On the beach, I sat studying the frog's every movement. As I closely observed the habitat, the powerful brown frog leapt to the opposite side of the structure.

He towered over one of the other frogs; his eyes indicating harsh intent. In a lightning quick manner, the strong bullfrog lunged toward his helpless counterpart. His mouth stretched to its maximum width, and scooped up his prey. Gazing in horror, I was unable to react. I was rooted to my spot with shock. My chest rapidly grew tight, and my palms became endless water supplies. My head throbbed and heated to unnatural temperatures. Strangely, my typically reliable brain was incapable of processing what I had just come to witness. Instinct took over.

I grasped the handle of the wooden net that laid nearby. My fingers wrapped themselves around the smooth handle, achieving the firmest of grips. Turning my legs at a blistering pace, I charged toward the evil frog. The loud splashes of my target desperately trying to flee, were followed by the splashes created by my weapon. All the while in the back of my mind, I was not intending on hitting the frog. The chaos continued until I felt the frame of the net make light contact with the enemy. For a moment everything stopped. My eyes filled with fluid and they reached their maximum capacity. A filthy, green river spilled from my nose and down over my lips. Knee deep in the lake I stood, balling.

Overwhelmed by the events that had transpired, I took a breath. I felt sorrow for the passing of the helpless green frog, but mostly I was disappointed in the way I reacted. Thankfully, he came out uninjured. I realized that the brown frog did nothing wrong. I knew I could not expect him to suppress natural instincts. For the remainder of the day, I reflected on the occurrence. It was during that reflection that I took away the positive. I became aware that I had a special connection to these amphibians. I recognized that nobody I had ever met shared the same love and appreciation for frogs.

At the time of this event, I was a seven-year-old boy. The spot in my heart reserved for these beautiful creatures has only grown since. Each time I catch a glimpse of a frog, my heart skips a beat. I am extremely passionate about these fascinating amphibians. With close to half of the world's frog species threatened, I am itching to finish university and become an amphibian biologist. This passion will occupy a part of my

life, until my very last days. I owe it all to the magnificently powerful, unique, brown eyed, brown skinned bullfrog who was hungry on a summer's afternoon.

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*Alex Hart enjoys being involved in athletics and participates in soccer, hockey, volleyball, and football. He also has a burning passion for the environment. Alex is conscious of the environmental struggles our planet faces, and is eager to search for solutions.*

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## GRADE 7/8 FRENCH

**Eve Bustin**

First Place – Grade 8  
Anglophone South District School Board

# Mon ange gardien

« **L**ife is like riding a bicycle. In order to keep your balance, you must keep moving. »

Quand j'avais cinq ans ma vie a changé instantanément. La vie était belle sauf que mon frère Luke vivait dans une maison d'accueil pour des enfants à besoins spéciaux. Il a vécu là pendant plusieurs années. Il ne lui restait qu'un mois avant d'être transféré dans une résidence à Fredericton, qui est à environ une heure et demi d'ici. Il y avait un lit disponible pour lui le 10 septembre. Mon frère allait bien vite partir loin d'ici.

Luke ne m'aimait pas beaucoup probablement parce que j'étais très active et je voulais toujours être autour de lui. Nos dernières semaines ensemble, il commençait à m'aimer, et nous commençons à développer une bonne relation.

Le 9 septembre, 2009, ma mère a reçu un appel des filles qui travaillaient avec Luke. Elles étaient à l'hôpital régionale de Saint John avec mon frère. Elles avaient de mauvaises nouvelles. Luke avait eu une crise cardiaque. Mes parents sont immédiatement allés les rejoindre à l'hôpital. Plus tard cette nuit, l'imaginable est arrivé... Luke est décédé.

Nos cœurs étaient brisés. Je ne savais pas comment parler à ma mère. Elle a pleuré pendant des jours, comme le reste de la famille. Les personnes dans la communauté étaient très sympathiques, mais nous pouvions voir qu'ils étaient mal à l'aise. Même maintenant les gens ne sont pas confortables à parler de Luke autour de nous. Ma famille et moi aimons quand les gens parlent de lui car nous voulons garder son esprit vivant.

«Comment est-ce possible?» je me suis souvent demandée. Comment est-ce qu'une chose aussi terrible puisse arriver à notre Luke? Mais, le plus que j'y pensais, j'ai réalisé que toutes les choses arrivent pour une raison. Luke aurait été terrifié à Fredericton sans sa famille. Il aurait connu personne. Nous n'aurions pas pu le visiter chaque jour comme nous faisons ici.

Luke était la personne la plus forte que je connaissais. Tout le monde l'aimait. Il avait un cœur d'or, et il était le meilleur grand frère que n'importe qui pourrait avoir! Ce n'est pas juste qu'il est mort tellement jeune.

Ma famille a changé après la mort de Luke. Nous avons réalisé que nous n'avons pas beaucoup de temps dans la vie. La vie est courte. Nous ne savons pas quand quelqu'un qu'on aime partira, et que la vie peut changer dans un instant.

Nous avons changé la façon que nous nous parlons et parlons aux autres, comment nous planifions notre temps, et nous disons souvent « je t'aime ». C'est important de dire et montrer qu'on s'aime. Nous avons commencé à aller chez mes grands-parents plus souvent, et nous nous sommes rapprochés des autres membres de la famille.

La mort de mon seul frère m'a appris à ne jamais prendre quelque chose pour acquis, et de toujours être reconnaissante pour ce que j'ai dans la vie. J'ai maintenant treize ans et je comprends que demain n'est pas une garantie. Luke sera toujours mon inspiration.

Tu me manques toujours, grand frère.

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*Eve Bustin enjoys math, hockey, and leadership. She has received honours with distinction for the past two years. Eve is fond of country and pop music. In her spare time, she likes to spend time with her family and her dog, Charlie.*

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### **Mackenzie Curwen-Strachan**

Second Place – Grade 7  
Anglophone East District School Board

## **Derrière la musique**

**T**out a commencé par une petite enveloppe blanche et le rêve de jouer un instrument. Je me souviens encore du jour où je suis retournée chez moi avec l'enveloppe dans mes mains. J'avais demandé de faire partie du programme Sistema, et j'allais finalement avoir la réponse que j'attendais. J'étais tellement anxieuse et impatiente ! Lorsque je suis montée dans l'auto, j'ai montré l'enveloppe à mère immédiatement. En un instant, l'enveloppe était déchirée, puis elle m'a annoncé la bonne nouvelle. « Youpi ! » Mon rêve allait enfin se réaliser, j'allais apprendre à jouer un instrument, sauf que, je ne le savais pas encore, cette opportunité allait changer ma vie pour toujours.

Les premiers mois du programme, avant même d'apprendre à jouer nos instruments, nous avons construit des instruments en carton. J'ai choisi de créer un violon. Des mois ont passé avant qu'on puisse jouer de vrais instruments. Au début, on n'était pas de bons musiciens mais chaque fois que j'entendais une nouvelle mélodie, le son bourdonnait dans mes oreilles comme un oiseau... Plus que jamais, je savais que la musique était ma passion.

Pendant ma troisième année à Sistema, j'ai obtenu la première place dans ma catégorie au festival de musique. Ainsi, ils m'ont invitée à venir jouer au Théâtre Capitol pour un gala. Durant ma performance, je ne pouvais pas regarder la foule. J'avais les yeux fixés sur un point dans l'estrade, mon cœur palpitait et mes palmes ruisselaient de sueur. J'étais nerveuse et excitée en même temps ! Le lendemain matin, je faisais la première page du journal ! Cette expérience m'a donné beaucoup de confiance. J'ai réalisé que mon passe-temps était plus qu'un simple passe-temps.

Rendue à ma cinquième année, j'ai auditionné pour joindre un nouvel orchestre. J'ai reçu un appel quelques jours plus tard pour me dire que j'avais été acceptée. J'ai éprouvé un sentiment immédiat de joie et de fierté ! Cet orchestre serait très différent de Sistema, mais c'était le temps de me lancer un nouveau défi.

Maintenant, en 2017, je joue dans l'orchestre provincial du Nouveau-Brunswick. Les attentes à OJNB sont beaucoup plus élevées. Nous allons voyager dans diverses provinces canadiennes pour le 150<sup>e</sup> anniversaire du Canada.

Chaque expérience est unique ! Faire partie de tous ces orchestres m'a enseigné différentes valeurs et m'a obligée à prendre des responsabilités, ce qui va m'aider lorsque je serai plus âgée. J'espère continuer à jouer de la musique tout au long de ma vie, peut-être que je ne jouerai pas toujours du violon mais c'est une passion qui sera toujours présente. C'est un grand privilège de faire partie de ces orchestres prestigieux; juste le fait qu'ils m'aient choisie veut dire que je suis une bonne musicienne et je devrais être fière de mes accomplissements. Pour conclure, j'aimerais dire que si tu as un rêve, tu dois le poursuivre; même si tu échoues parfois, il faut quand même persévérer et ne pas abandonner.

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*Mackenzie Curwen-Strachan loves to read, play the violin and play basketball in her spare time. Mackenzie prefers speaking the French language.*

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**Alyssa Jeffrey**

Third Place – Grade 8  
Anglophone South District School Board

## Profiter de chaque moment

« **L**ife is so unpredictable. Be grateful for every moment. »

C'était 15 ans après le bombardement du World Trade Center et j'étais assise sur le divan avec mon père. Nous regardions le mémorial du 11 septembre à la télévision quand le téléphone sonna. C'était ma mère qui livra un message à mon père. Je me souviens de la tristesse qui a grandi sur son visage. Je savais que quelque chose était arrivé dont je ne voulais pas savoir.

Je pouvais voir les larmes qui roulaient sur le visage de mon père. Il a dit très silencieusement « Matthew est décédé ce matin ». J'ai pleuré immédiatement. Il m'a serré tellement fort que je me sentais comme si mon cœur cassait en morceaux. Je ne pouvais pas croire que mon meilleur ami était décédé.

Je souhaitais que c'était un cauchemar mais, ça ne l'était pas.

Depuis l'âge de 5 ans, Matthew était dans une chaise roulante parce qu'il avait la dystrophie musculaire. Pendant l'été de 2016, il a reçu une chirurgie à sa colonne vertébrale. Huit jours après sa chirurgie, il est mort d'un saignement interne.

Ce jour-là, le 11 septembre 2016, ça n'a pas pris longtemps pour que la triste nouvelle se répande à travers le village.

La semaine suivante, fréquenter l'école était vraiment difficile. C'est encore difficile parce que je ne le vois plus jamais rouler dans les corridors.

Ces derniers mois ont été pénibles, mais tous mes amis et moi sommes devenus tellement plus proches. Je ne me suis jamais sentie aussi proche d'eux et je peux maintenant leur parler de n'importe quoi.

Chaque jour, je pense aux choses que j'ai faites avec Matthew. Je me souviens quand nous montions l'ascenseur, quand il me montrait de nouvelles chansons et quand il m'encourageait lors de mes jeux de basketball. Il me manque de plus en plus à chaque jour.

J'ai appris que nous devons vivre la vie au maximum. Si vous y pensez, beaucoup de gens n'obtiennent pas une deuxième chance. Mes amis, la famille de Matthew et moi-même, n'avons pas une deuxième chance pour lui parler. Profitez des moments que vous avez avec vos amis.

Je pense à Matthew à tous les jours et à tous les moments amusants que nous avons partagés. J'ai de bonnes mémoires de lui et je suis tellement reconnaissante que je suis devenue sa meilleure amie. Je suis émotionnellement plus forte à cause de la mort de Matthew et j'ai beaucoup plus de confiance en moi-même. Cette tragédie m'a aidé à trouver mon but dans la vie et de faire des connections avec de formidables personnes. La perte de mon ami m'a ouvert les yeux sur comment précieuse la vie est. Même si notre temps ensemble fut court, avoir Matthew comme ami demeurera toujours une période monumentale dans ma vie.

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*Alyssa Jeffrey has been playing basketball for 9 years and received the MVP award last spring. In her future, she dreams of playing university basketball and becoming a dentist.*

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# Newfoundland and Labrador, Central Region Winners' Essays

## GRADE 7/8

**Megan Bautista**

First Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Central Region

## A Moment in the Spotlight

**H**ave you ever had hundreds of people staring at you all at once? The blazing shimmer of the glamorous spotlight, flashing in your eyes? You know that their judgmental glares are picking you apart. They knew how nervous I was, but their kind smiles couldn't revive me from my state of fear. Fear of what, you may ask? Fear of failing.

I remember quite vividly when I had been told I had been invited to sing at the highlights concert, which took place after the Kiwanis Music Festival. I would be singing in front of exactly 552 people. Most people would be jumping for joy, but for me, this was nothing to be excited about. I felt as if I had just been brutally slapped by reality. I would have to sing, alone in front of a sea of strangers tomorrow night.

The drive there was excruciatingly slow, I felt as if I was being suffocated, and my family's words of encouragement and pride, bounced off me as if there was a protective wall of glass, shielding me from any borrowed confidence.

I slumped backstage like a pig ready to be slaughtered. I took my seat in one of the plastic chairs as a skyscraping man fastened a microphone to my head. One by one, the people backstage lessened. I wiped my sweaty palms on my dress and nervously played with the triangular pieces of felt that were sewn onto my costume.

When it was time for me to perform, I eased myself up and nervously walked on stage. I felt like I was going to vomit, pass out, or maybe both! I took my place behind the thick, velvety curtain and felt a deep pang of uncertainty. I wanted to run away, I looked and felt ridiculous in my Kermit the Frog costume. Suddenly the curtain started to rise unwillingly as my stomach wrenched in anxiousness.

I felt the big flashes of lights abruptly turn their attention to me. I had to squint to see the audience, but I could feel their pulsating energy and inviting embrace. The music erupted behind me and I began to sing. The microphone heard every sound wave of rhythmic poetry I produced, and shot it out into the audience. Everyone was looking at me, but I didn't feel their judgmental, attentive glares. In a heartbeat the song was over and I had been worried over nothing.

Looking back at this time makes me realize how much of an impact singing in the highlights has had on my confidence. I now sing multiple times in the festival, am in choir, band and five dance styles. I've figured out that music is where my true talents and passions lie. Music can make me happy, even in the darkest of

times. I know that I will always have the memory of that glorious moment to remind me to never let fear hold me back from reaching success and achieving my goals.

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*Megan Bautista enjoys playing trombone, singing and dancing. She enjoys writing short novels and choreographing dances in her spare time. In the future, Megan hopes to participate in the business or medical professions and strives to excel in all school subjects.*

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**Genieva Hoskins-Murray**

Second Place – Grade 7  
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Central Region

## There Are No Such Things as Little Things

**M**any recall an instance in their lives when something outstanding happened that changed either who they were or how they saw life. They call it their turning point. Mine took place in a stinky, hot Aguas Negras dump, where my family and I spent a Christmas, building homes and providing food for some desperately poor families.

I remember walking through a dusty trail, scattered with crude shelters about the size of my bedroom. The owners were friendly, but severely poor and had fled the brutal violence and crime of Haiti. They had no money so they made a dumpsite their “town.” I couldn’t believe that kids and families actually lived here with no hope for anything better. I felt numb as I watched a man remove a partly eaten apple from a heap of smelly garbage, scrape off the maggots and put it in his pocket for his child.

I fought back hot tears wanting to explode from my blurry eyes as I watched a mom who had cancer fall to her knees, hugging my mom and sobbing how grateful she was that she was going to have a “real house for her children.”

I did not know how to respond when I went inside someone’s home. I stood on the dusty floor with low ceilings made from random pieces of wood, and I could see outside through the many gaps. There were no cupboards, clothes, beds, food, books or toys. I knew this was only my experience for two weeks, but to those who lived there, it was their life.

Shortly after leaving the chiming sounds of Christmas carols, the sweet aroma of cookies and the cozy cleanliness of my own room, I had seen children (some of them even without names) with no parents to care for them, scavenging through hot, soupy garbage. Many, barely clothed in rags too big for them, searched for scraps that were dumped from a garbage truck. I had seen the contrast between crystal clear water splashing upon a sandy beach and, just a few kilometers away, the sour, nose-wrenching smells of a dump and shelters that people called homes, made from scraps of metal, wood and plastic. I had learned how to make concrete from sand and cement. Sure we had blistered hands, skinned knees and burnt shoulders, but our smiles showed the brightness of our hearts, shining like the Dominican sun.

Before our trip, there were so many things, like my warm, cozy bed with its soft blankets and fluffy pillows, I never really paused to be thankful for. It was just my bed. My house, complete with warmth, no leaks and food-filled cupboards, it was just my house. No big deal. Now, I never drift off to sleep without

taking a minute to think how lucky I am for what I have. Because of this experience, I have completely changed the way I see life and how I view all my "little" extras.

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*Genieva Hoskins-Murray has a passion for learning sign language and photography. She also enjoys playing on the town baseball team in her spare time. Genieva loves to be near the ocean and adores water animals. Her dream is to become a marine biologist one day.*

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### **Brooklyn Bixby**

Third Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Central Region

## **Never Let Anything Stop You**

“**S**ometimes in life the roughest roads can lead to the most amazing destinations IF you never let anything stop you.” I never knew that during my earlier childhood years, but later, it would be the theme for my life.

It was the spring of 2014, the grass was growing, the flowers were blooming, and the soft breeze in the air smelled as delicious as the bakery down the road. I, being a young grade four girl, thought nothing could make me feel down at such a pretty time of year, but I was wrong.

My teacher and mother described my limping walk similar to the late and great Terry Fox. I had a new shiny lime green bike that year just waiting for me. I carefully wheeled it out of my shed and gripped the rubber gears on the handle bars while trying to get on the bike – I couldn't. My right leg could not make any upward movement. I released my grip on the bike and ran into the house with tears streaming down my freckled cheeks.

My mom and I immediately left the house and drove to the emergency room. After numerous x-rays, a CAT scan, and an examination by a bone specialist, an orthopedic surgeon, told me my right hip was split in two as if he had told ten year old girls that they had a broken hip millions of times.... I needed surgery. The diagnosis was technically called Slipped Capital Femoral Epiphysis. Before you knew it I was wearing a way too big, open backed gown and counting to seven. This meant a few months on crutches, physiotherapy, and time off school! It was quite a tough journey at times, but so many people supported me. My whole class visited my house on the school bus and my mom threw a pizza party for us. They even made me a quilt just for me.

Déjà vu! Grade six. Winter. The fresh snow fell from the sky and landed on my brown hair; I wore the snowflakes like a crown. Later that day my friends and I went sliding and I raced them down the hills as the wind rushed through my hair, whipping it in every direction. A searing pain in my left hip grew and consumed my happiness. Considering my past, back we were to the doctor for many more visits. Surgery on my other hip! My surgeon's final words to me were, "No more hips!" That brought a smile to my face.

Now I am in grade seven with screws in both my hips, but I am pitcher on my school's softball team, power on my school's volleyball team, a Celtic dancer, a swimmer.... I even climbed Gros Morne Mountain 3

months after my second surgery. Unwanted change gave me a different life perspective, but "sometimes in life the roughest roads can lead to the most amazing destinations if you never let anything stop you."

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*Brooklyn Bixby plays volleyball, softball, and ball hockey. Brooklyn is a skater, an Irish dancer and a swimmer. Her favourite subject is English; she loves writing and reading which are like escapes to a different world. Brooklyn also enjoys ski-dooing with her family and friends and fishing with her dad in summer.*

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## GRADE 9/10

### Victoria Pretty

First Place – Grade 10

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Central Region

# Black and White

A fireman's bunker gear can typically withstand temperatures up to 500 degrees. It was 3000 degrees in my house the day it burned.

It was May 15, 2015, the first day of the Victoria Day holiday weekend. The sun shone high in the sky and despite the wind it was a warm day. The gusts of wind picked up the flames and my entire house was reduced to ashes in 40 minutes. "Fastest I've seen something go," many of the neighbors declared. "It's the worst thing that can happen to someone," whispered others.

After the long weekend my family and I headed to the nearest Walmart to purchase some essentials using money given to us from the Red Cross. While browsing through the aisles my mother stopped to converse with a friend. She asked how we were holding up and told us how sorry she felt. Then she said something I'll never forget, "My son is at the hospital with his friend, Oliver. They thought that Oliver had the flu but they found a malignant tumor too large to be operated on. When the doctor asked if he had any questions all he wanted to know was how much time he has." Immediately I felt my heart sink. I couldn't get any air; it was as if I had been punched in the ribs.

Oliver graduated from high school one year prior to his diagnosis. He turned 19 just that month. He worked diligently for everything he accomplished. His determination was phenomenal. He made a huge impact in the little time he was given. He never had the habits most teenagers have, drinking and partying in particular. He was too focused on achieving what mattered, getting an education and supporting his family. He loved his friends, his family, and the game of hockey.

I saw Oliver every week at the stadium when I had hockey practice. Every single game I played he was the referee. I never had a single conversation with him, but every time we saw each other we exchanged a wave or a nod. He was friendly - he was friends with everyone. He was the smallest player but he had the biggest heart. I realize now that losing your house is not the worst thing that can happen. You can buy new belongings. You cannot buy a new son, brother, or friend.

Although my experience that May was devastating, the heart wrenching news of Oliver's cancer opened up my eyes. He taught me what gratefulness is. The fact that Oliver got out of bed every morning for seven months while fighting a constant battle is astounding; especially when done with such positivity and

radiance. He taught me to appreciate what is around me and gave me the strength to overcome some of life's toughest obstacles. I used to think of everything in black and white, I thought there was either good or bad. However, Oliver taught me that painful experiences can often be remarkably rewarding.

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*Victoria Pretty resides in Bishop's Falls, NL. She plays various sports and one of her most memorable moments was meeting the National Women's Ice Hockey team in Calgary in 2014. Besides her love of sports, she also has an interest in music, reading and travelling.*

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### Abigail Cramm

Second Place – Grade 10  
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Central Region

## Across Canada

**R**ecently I had the opportunity to travel to Ottawa, through Encounters with Canada (EWC). I signed up, sending in my registration forms so fast I barely had time to think. That trip was one of the best things that has ever happened to me.

At the Gander airport; the waiting area was filled with nameless faces all strung with anxiety. It was obvious they would be joining me in Ottawa.

As I walked through security, the reality of what I was doing sank in. I really was flying solo halfway across the country with 120 other strangers. I must be insane!

Between delays, and canceled flights I finally made it to Ottawa, proud of myself for not having a single mental breakdown. Those flights were some of the most stressful hours of my short life. Upon arriving in the deserted terminal, we were met by the kind faces of the EWC staff. Once we gathered all of our bags, we headed to the Center.

Around 11:30 p.m. (Ottawa time), we finally made it to our home for the week. I glanced around at the colorful walls and the flags of every province. I hated it! The bunks were miniature, and the mattress was as thin as a board. There was nothing to eat, and to top it all off, no WiFi! Barely anyone had arrived and most of those who had, spoke French.

Tired and hungry, I crawled under the one itchy sheet and rough blanket, hoping and praying that tomorrow would be better.

And was it ever! Upon waking up at the crack of dawn, jetlagged from the travelling, I made my way out to the only familiar face in the Center, a girl from my school.

During the night the dorm had started filling up and there were loads of girls milling around looking as confused and anxious as I felt. Eventually, we settled in and formed our group. There was one other girl from Lewisporte and me, three girls from British Columbia and one girl from Ontario. I became so close, so fast with these girls. I honestly thought it was impossible to become such good friends with people after knowing them for only a few hours.

It was a week I'll never forget, packed full of memories and experiences. The orange and blue walls were a backdrop for a hundred new friendships.

On the final day, I awoke with such a feeling of dread, knowing this was the last time I would ever wake up in this bed.

As I made my way out to the girls in the other dorm, Madison proclaimed, "Last day girls!"

"Shhhh!" I exclaimed. "Don't talk about it, you'll make me cry!" I could feel tears prickling my eyes.

"We won't think about it," murmured Asha, throwing her arm around me as we made our way downstairs for a final breakfast of powdered eggs.

After a day of activities only slightly dampened by the fact that we would all be leaving each other very soon, we all settled down for the talking circle, an activity they do at the end of every week. As I listened to everyone I'd met talk about the experiences they'd had, I realized how lucky I was. I was so fortunate to have taken this huge risk, and had such a great reward. I met so many people, from everywhere. People I never would have known. People I now felt this connection with.

Later that night, as we sat in a pile waiting for my bus to take me to the airport, it really sunk in how much I loved these girls, and how glad I was that I had come to Ottawa.

When the bus pulled up and it was time for our final goodbyes, I screeched. I absolutely screeched. Hot tears ran down my face as I turned back to the faces of the girls I'd come to love, the faces I was scared I would never see again. All I could think was, "Why would they do this to us? Introduce us to these amazing people only to rip us apart days later?"

But, despite how much it hurt to leave, I didn't regret it. I sat on the same bus, my face salty, driving the same road we had driven just 7 days ago. I felt different somehow, changed you could say. Impacted by all the lives I got to be a part of. The people at Encounters changed my life, and I will be forever grateful I made the decision that snowy day in December to take the leap and register for Encounters with Canada.

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*Abigail Cramm likes to read, play volleyball and go for walks attends in her spare time. Abigail is involved with multiple volleyball teams, girl guides, and tutoring. In the future, she would like to pursue a career in engineering or physiotherapy.*

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### **Maria Pond**

Third Place – Grade 10  
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Central Region

## **Dreams**

If you want something in your life you have to have the will to go and get it. You can't give up the moment so meone tells you it will be hard, or that it is an unreachable goal. In grade eight I felt that I wanted to make a difference in my town to provide a safe and caring environment for youth to enjoy.

As a kid, I spent bright summer days on my front lawn, riding my bike and playing games on the road. I'd play Hopscotch afraid of the rain that would come pouring down on the colourful markings, leaving no trace behind. Winter days were spent building snow sculptures, and filling spray bottles full of brightly coloured water to give life to our creations. Life was simple, we were content and happy, doing what kids enjoy.

As I became older, the friends I had grown up with became strangers. I made new friends, and we went to different schools. We weren't the kids on the street riding bikes or playing in the snow until we heard our parents calling us in anymore. We were growing up.

Days spent with chalk turned into walks and trips to the corner store. I quickly found myself bored, having nothing to do once I reached middle school, no longer interested in bike riding or chalk as I once was. It seemed to me that it wasn't only my friends and me who felt that way; there wasn't much for anyone our age to do in our community. That's when I realized, we needed a change. I was 14, an eighth

grade student. What could I possibly do? I talked to my friends; they were on the same page. I was going to try my best with the help of my friends to come up with a way to fix our "problem".

I had an idea for a place in our town for older kids and teenagers to hang out with friends throughout the year. My friends and I had to come up with a plan in order for this to work, so we started. With the help of our parents, we found contact information and sent emails to the members of our town council in hopes to receive advice as well as information about opening up a Youth Centre in our community. Shortly after the emails were sent, we received one back. "We would love for you girls to join a council meeting," was their reply. We were over the moon, and got to work on preparing slideshows and information for our meeting.

After discussing our options and gathering information on how to proceed with our ideas at our council meeting, we received an email from the local paper asking for an interview. We met with a reporter, and one of the questions we were asked was, "Why are you doing what you're doing?" This question was exciting. We got to explain how we felt and how important our ideas were to us. "We really want to give the youth of our community and surrounding areas a voice, as well as provide a place for youth to call their own, where they can be kids," we replied.

As time went on, I realized how much work it would take to accomplish a goal as big as being able to create a Youth Centre. Trying to find ways to fund our ideas as well as getting enough support to accomplish everything was not impossible but difficult. Even with these road blocks, I never wanted to give up. I became really interested and enjoyed the event-planning aspect of developing activities for the youth of our community as well as surrounding areas to take part in. We hosted different types of events such as dances over the summer, as well as free skating. It felt really great to be a part of something my friends and I had dreamed up all on our own.

I never thought it would be possible for someone my age to be asked to join council meetings and many other different activities. I proved to myself that even though you may be young, you can try to make a change, even if it is something small or it doesn't happen right away. I had will enough to keep going with our committee. Even though at times we would be told, "It's never going to work" by friends or other youth members, we still had support from our parents, family and a few members from our community to help us keep going. Although we still haven't reached our goal of having a Youth Centre, I think it's a very important idea and long-term goal to try and fulfill to keep youth active in our community. Trying to accomplish something on this scale has taught me to never give up on my dreams no matter the circumstances, because where there's a will, there's a way!

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*Maria Pond likes volleyball, reading and writing, volunteer work and babysitting. She has co-founded and organized the Lewisporte and Area Youth Committee. Maria's most recent accomplishment was the successful organization of the annual Daffodil Campaign and Sale in Lewisporte, on behalf of the Canadian Cancer Society, Grandfalls-Windsor office.*

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# Newfoundland and Labrador, Eastern Region Winners' Essays

## GRADE 7/8

**Allison Clarke**

First Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Eastern Region

## A Whale in a Sea of Words

**W**hat is that one very important thing in our lives that we will always need? For some it might be love, others happiness. For me it was learning to read - I was in grade three when I realized that our feelings are attached to our abilities. I realized you cannot depend on anyone to help you read, you have to learn yourself. You cannot depend on others to create your happy place; I should not have tried to make others read for me. So it started. I gathered up all the effort I could muster to learn to read.

At a young age, kids do not understand the difficulties of the outside world. Sometimes, kids take things for granted. I was just starting grade two and I did not have a clue how to read. I wanted nothing to do with it. Whenever I tried, it would not work. My frustration balled up inside me like an overflowing water balloon. It crushed me down to the point where I thought I would become the only person in the entire world who could not read. I felt vulnerable and scared. I had lost my focus, so I pushed my emotions to the side and I did not pick up another book for a long time. Things just got worse. Trying to read the questions in school, and reading instructions to a game became harder. It became too much.

Living without such a little skill can create big dents in your life style - like potholes on the road ahead. I found this out the hard way. All through grade two I could not read. All my friends' minds were like speed boats learning and growing around me, while I was stranded in my own little world. Once again, I got frustrated and another balloon inflated inside. Many thoughts would run through my head: "You aren't good enough", "You'll never read", "You'll be alone... You are alone". Some thoughts I just could not bare! They were tearing my confidence apart like a tiger does his prey. I was mad at myself for creating a dent in my life.

That is when I started trying again. This time determined as ever. I knew what I was doing, and at the start of grade three I began! I read every single night, during the day, outside and inside. I would read on a good day and when it was raining cats and dogs. I had it burned into my brain that I was going to learn how to read and I was going to be great at it! I felt like a whale about to conquer a sea of words!

Sometimes a sea can look smaller than it is, and my whale turned into a shrimp. I got lost in all the pronunciations and silent letters. A dense jungle grew around me and fogged up my thinking. It made me confused and I got more and more lost every day. My learning techniques were not working. My teacher, Mme Manner, always told me that one day, when the time was right, it would just click. So I kept trying, just barely keeping my head on in the process. Then over the summer on the way to grade four, I tried

harder! I read and read and read. I was actually getting the hang of it. The small words became recognizable and easy. My confidence climbed again, and I started enjoying myself more than usual. Then, a few days before starting grade four, as if it just clicked, I read a whole picture book like it was nothing. Then, I finally understood.

When I started reading books all by myself during grade four, my life changed. I did not feel the pressure anymore, that water balloon burst and coated my confidence with a strong, sweet sensation that made me feel safe. It felt as if I could conquer the world, one book at a time. Now every time I read, I sink into my thoughts. I cross the borders and enter the world written into the soft pages. I had not realized how one skill could unlock so many moments of happiness and security. I learned something throughout my experiences, something that made me who I am today. Trying can lead to great success, if you still cannot achieve it, try harder! I still go by that today. This is the lesson I learned, and it changed me in every way possible. So next time you come upon something difficult - a pothole in your life and you think you have tried your best to jump over it, just remember, there is no limit, only the one you give yourself. Push your limit. Always try harder.

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*Allison Clarke is taking Drama and enjoys acting and reading.*

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### **Julia Reimer**

Second Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Eastern Region

## **Epiphany**

**T**here are so many diverse individuals in our society today, and every single one of them has their own unique points in their lives where they change for better or for worse. These events are turning points. Everyone, no matter where they are, what their culture is or who they choose to be, has turning points. Some turning points are small, some big, but they are all important. I have changed so much since I started school, though no time in my life changed me more than when I stopped being a bully. It's true I used to be a bully, but with the help of my friends and family I adjusted my ways. That bully really wasn't me; it was a horrible girl who strived for attention. After the happenings of this year I'm such a brighter, better person.

When I first came to to this school I sought attention. I was determined not to be left behind by my friends. So, when I saw that some people in my class picked on one person in particular, I jumped at the chance to be noticed. Not that I was being left out. In my silly insecure delusion I would fade away if I weren't the center of attention at all times, selfish right? So I joined in on picking on the person. As the year progressed, others began to stop being mean to this boy but I didn't stop though. I kept on bullying him. I said so many cruel things; I told him that my marks were better than his and that I was better at sports. This continued until my friends decided it was enough.

After each time I said something despicable to him I always felt guilty. Sometimes I felt so guilty I would be near to tears or sick to my stomach. Sadly, I've been told that when I want something I tend not to stop until I have it, and I wanted that attention. I was so caught up in all this that I failed to noticed that this attention I was getting was the wrong kind. My friends started making comments that I was bullying him. I always brushed them off even with the guilt of knowing they were right. My friends are great human beings so when I wouldn't stop they went to a teacher for help. Once the teachers learned what was going on, they called my parents, and told them. My parents took this very seriously because they believe in kindness, they didn't suggest I was a terrible, disgusting person, they made me understand. They forced me to

understand that my behavior was reprehensible. What my parents said that day had a resounding effect on me.

Now that I have gone through the transformation from bully to acquaintance, I want to help others make that transformation, too. You see I hated that guilt, it was like an ugly, sticky feeling inside me, and I want to help others end their guilt. I recognize the solution to bullying is to understand the bullies and their problems, because if we understand the bullies we can comprehend the reasons behind their bullying. If we can do that then we can find the solution to the bullying. Bullies are bullies for so many reasons, every different case has separate motives, so this requires a lot of work but I want to and will help be the solution. Not everyone is lucky enough to have the wonderful family and friends that I have.

I am ashamed of my actions and sincerely want to apologize to all. I am ashamed but I am willing to talk about it if it helps resolve the bullying problem. That willingness to help is why this is such an important turning point, I am so much kinder, happier and so much more friendly because of this and I will help others realize that change, too.

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*Julia Reimer enjoys reading and swimming. As a French immersion student, Julia understands the value of communication in a diverse world. She is currently and will continue to be a leader.*

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### **Sam Badcock**

Third Place – Grade 7  
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Eastern Region

## **Cancer**

**H**ave you ever cared for someone, but you never really realized it? That you knew you loved somebody, but you never showed it, and they never felt it? I have, and it was one of the worst things I can remember happening in my 13 years of life. This is my experience, with cancer.

In mid 2015, everything was “normal” and “fine”, and nothing was out of the ordinary. Rarely would anything change, everything was formulaic: wake up, go to school, have supper, go to sleep. I had never realized how lucky I was.

One day, I came home, and something was missing: my mother. I usually never noticed, but today it was different. She had been gone for around 4 hours, way too long to be out grocery shopping.

When she returned, she immediately entered my room. What she told me, was so different, something I would never expect, but something I never wanted to happen. It was a wakeup call, a sickly one, at that. My mom told me that she had been diagnosed with breast cancer.

This was such a shock: something so powerful, yet dastardly. It hit me like a kick in the stomach. My mother was always there to love me, unconditionally, and to give me support and encouragement when I was down, or had trouble. Now, it was time to return the favour. It was time, for once in my life, to show my mom that I cared. Now, with tiny streams of tears running from my eyes, down my cheeks, I told her, I was going to take care of her, no matter how hard it got. And I tried.

Throughout 2015, there was a role reversal. Instead of my mom doing all the work, while I kept to myself, I did the work, while my mom healed. Yet, no matter how much I cared, she kept getting worse, and worse. My efforts seemed futile, worthless. I felt worthless. My mom, however, thought I was a real hero. At every point she would thank me, for whatever I did, for even the smallest things like cleaning the dishes, to getting her medicine when she was too weak. I felt like I was doing quite badly, while she felt I was doing the best job anyone could have ever done.

Despite my help, my mom had to go through the unimaginable. The thought of dying at any moment seems far too taxing for one person. The doctors had to do everything they could to save her, and they did. As a last resort, they removed her breast, which seemed horrific at first. However, it was definitely needed. First I was disgusted, then joyful, to have my mom healthy, at last.

This turning point taught me to never take people for granted because you never know when you might lose them, when you might not be able to spend any more time with them.

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*Sam Badcock was born in Grand Falls, Newfoundland. Sam lives with his mother during the week, and his father on the weekends. He also has an older brother named Zack. In his spare time, Sam enjoys writing and interacting with his friends.*

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## GRADE 11/12

### Caleb Browne

First Place – Grade 11

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Eastern Region

## Sunset

The first time I ever truly thought about killing myself, I was nine years old. Existence in my little corner of the world was unbearable, to say the least. My father was working away as usual and my mother was rarely home because she worked late into the nights. I had no social life apart from the unending torture of my peers. Escape seemed impossible.

As I laid under the body of water that filled my bathtub, praying I'd never emerge, I was ignorant to the near impossibility of drowning myself. I obviously did not yet have a concept of 'suicide'. I don't recall much of the event outside of that but there is one thing I do vividly remember. I closed my eyes for what I thought would be the last time and the vision of an ocean laid before me. It was at rest with not a wave in sight. Orange rays gleamed intensely over this peaceful scene as the sun inched its way past the horizon to give way to night. A sunset, for most, is the end of a day: for me, it would be the end of a life.

This, unfortunately, was not the last time I tried to bring the sun down. I had become exhausted, sick of waking up every morning feeling that way; sick of rolling out of bed and just crawling my body through school until I'd get home and long for my bedsheets. So I tried to end it. Movies would have you believe that all suicides are emotionally driven, impulsive events, that always begin with tears and end in mere moments with a crescendo of drama. For me, that was far from the case.

As I was sitting in chemistry class with a large smile on my face, and surrounded by friends, but having never felt more alone and empty, I made a decision. This would be my last day. I would no longer fill the void with drugs. I would submit to it. Not a tear was shed.

On the bus ride home I felt content with life now that it would be over in a matter of hours. When I got home I remained void of emotion and driven towards one single goal. I entered my garage with a bedsheet, and a chair. One end of the rolled up bed sheet was fastened to the garage door track. The other was wrapped tightly around my neck as my feet were awkwardly placed on the chair. I had every intention

to step off and bring my story to a sudden end without even a note to say goodbye. Something stopped me from stepping off the chair that day - maybe a will to live? Maybe some cosmic being, maybe just some primal survival instinct? Or maybe, the sun wasn't ready to set for me. Nevertheless, I couldn't bring myself to rest all my weight onto my neck, even after an hour of persuading myself to do just that.

The thing about staring at the sun for your entire life, waiting for it to set, is that it blinds you. Any beauty in life is missed as you lust after the sun's embrace with the horizon. So when the sun didn't die, I was able to appreciate the beauty in life. I know the sun will set again one day and I've found comfort in that now. One day the sun will set on all of us, and we can't do anything about it. But as long as the light is shining, we have to see what wonders we are blind to without it.

When I was in the psych ward after failing to end it all, I made my first step away from the end instead of towards it. I was aware of the bright florescent lights pounding against my already troubled mind, the clocks ticking but ever so slightly out of beat as if they were just trying to drive me mad so that I'd stay longer. I heard the chatter and footsteps of hospital staff outside my multicolored door that was intended to just ooze "happiness" but came out beyond insincere. I heard the distant patter of keyboard and mouse. This collage of capitalistic healthcare led directly into the aforementioned crescendo of drama leading up to a suicide. But not a suicide. Something of a much nicer nature. Love. I had looked death in the face and I had overcome it. I admitted my feelings to a girl from school while still there in that hollow joyous room, in which everyone was evaluating my sanity. This girl turned out to be a lot like me and had suffered through the same fate as I had. I ended up falling in love with her because of her flaws and through that, I began to learn to love myself bit by bit.

After I was out of that multi-coloured prison called a hospital, I saw how beautiful the world could really be. I realized that I didn't have to be so distant from my friends. I realized that all my friends were wonderful people in their own right but that I had been too blind to see that. I opened up to them about my anxiety and depression, expecting judgement but instead finding open and caring arms.

So, finally, I realized that I needed to capture the beauty I found in life through art. I've always known I wanted to write, make movies, and draw but I had never taken to actually doing it. It wasn't until I saw that sunset again that I realized that's what I need to do with my life.

In the biggest irony of all ironies, my suicide attempt, for all intents and purposes, saved my life. It turned my life around in every sense. I learned to love others and myself. I've found a purpose for myself. The sun will set, but it can wait. I have a lot of things to see and do in the meantime.

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*Caleb Browne was born in Carbonear, Newfoundland and raised in a variety of cities. He is an avid film fan and spends much of his free time watching movies. In the future he hopes to apply this passion for film and enter the film industry as either a director or a screenwriter. He is also a history buff and is considering pursuing a degree in history.*

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**Erin Burt**Second Place – Grade 11  
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Eastern Region

## What the Mind Can't Remember, the Heart Never Forgets

**A**s a child, my parents and I visited my grandparents quite frequently, so naturally we were very close. As I grew older, I noticed my grandfather began to have trouble chewing and swallowing, as well as he was becoming increasingly confused about seemingly routine things. He went to the doctor and unbeknownst to us he had suffered a mild stroke. He was also diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Hearing this news crushed me and my grandmother's stubbornness only made this delicate situation much worse. She insisted they stay in their own home, even though it was obvious they both needed more care than she could provide. After a few years of her struggling to take care of my grandfather, we noticed that she, too, was becoming confused and unwell. My sense of normalcy collapsed a second time when we were told she also had Alzheimer's.

Taken from their home and placed together in a senior's center, Alzheimer's gradually stole my grandparents away from me. When I would visit, they told me the same stories over and over again. They slowly forgot about all of the activities they'd enjoyed and taken pride in, such as knitting and woodworking. Once a cherished family pastime, my Pop no longer had an interest in watching hockey games with me on television. My Nan, who was always very energetic and full of life, gradually lost all of her spark. Watching their lives crumble away, while powerless to change it, was truly heartbreaking for me. Their condition steadily worsened, to the point where my Pop didn't always recognize me as his grandchild, let alone know what day or year it was.

Some days were bad for my grandparents, filled with confusion and frustration. Frequently, I would visit with them and they would become upset that I hadn't been to see them in so long... even though I'd been there to visit the previous day. I resented the grandparents who came to support and watch their grandkids partake in school concerts and dance recitals, while my Nan and Pop were unable to engage in simple activities with me.

However, during one visit with Nan and Pop, I realized that instead of feeling helpless, I simply had to adjust to my grandparents' new world and appreciate the good days and the parts of them that were still there. This was a turning point for me when I realized that nothing would ever be the way it was before. I had to accept this and move on in order to create new memories with them. My grandparents' Alzheimer's taught me acceptance and the necessity of living in the moment. The moments of clarity, when I had a glimpse of their former selves, were wonderful. My grandmother never forgot who I was and always made me feel very loved. She never lost her sense of humour and loved to hear me play the violin, and showed her pride when she read my report card. When I looked around the nursing home, I realized that we actually had much to be thankful for.

My grandparents taught me about unconditional love. Through the varying stages of their disease, while they may not have recognized friends and family, they always knew each other. Every day they sat next to each other in their wheelchairs, and held hands the whole day. They did not know what was going on around them but they both knew in their hearts, that as long as they were together, they would be all right. Sometimes it was a challenge to continue visiting them as their health deteriorated in front of our eyes. Some of my cousins didn't visit as often, as they felt they wanted to remember Nan and Pop as they were in their glory days, rather than how they had become. But I knew I had to continue to see them, through the good days and the bad. I felt it was important to remember their love, even when they could no longer remember me. Every time we had a good visit, when Nan would joke with me or ask about my marks at school, I knew her love for me was deeper than anything the Alzheimer's could take away.

Two years ago, my grandfather passed away. My Nan would often ask what time of year it was, or where she was, but she never asked for my Pop. I feel that she knew in her heart he had passed. She died less than a year later and that last year she spent broken and lost without him. Their unconditional love for each other taught me so much about what's truly important and I hope to have a love like that someday. I know she never took a moment with him for granted, as they both knew it could be their last.

Accepting my grandparents' illness was a significant, life-changing event for me. It shaped the person I am today because I realized there was one thing that Alzheimer's could not take away from my grandparents, and that was love. I am so grateful that they taught me love was not a memory to them; it was a deep feeling that lived in their hearts and souls.

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*Erin Burt is from Conception Bay South and has been in the French Immersion program since kindergarten. She is very involved in school activities including the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Choir, Interact Club, Chair Team, Softball, Hockey and Regional Science Fair. She has always been active at Topsail United Church in the Children's Choir, Band and Youth Group. Erin plays the violin and enjoys all types of dance. She loves the outdoors and is an avid downhill skier and snowmobiler. Erin hopes to study Medicine at Memorial University.*

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# Newfoundland and Labrador, Labrador Region Winners' Essays

**GRADE 7/8**

**Trinity Murphy-Dicker**

First Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Labrador Region

## The Arguments They Had

**L**ife is like a written story. I wish I could go back a couple of chapters in mine, to erase the regretful mistakes. Most importantly, I would erase the arguments they had. I wish it was that easy.

Did you ever feel like your entire world was crumbling apart, piece by piece? All I heard were the cries seeping out of my mom's room and the loud, argumentative yelling, filling my ears with madness. The fighting felt like an endless routine. As soon as it started, I would rush to run away from it. But with every step I took, it seemed pointless. I'd close my bedroom door, hoping the concerning sound would wear off... but it didn't.

As the days passed by, it got worse. It was every day. Every day I was feeling worried and disempowered. I didn't know what to do and how to stop it. The fighting made an impact on my education. I wasn't doing as well in school because of the environment I was growing up in. When I came home, I would be afraid to open the door because I would hear the two voices arguing.

All I wanted to do was help and make peace at the time. But as a young kid, I was confused as to how. How would I walk away from this? Some nights, I would cry myself to sleep with hope in my hands, praying. Do you ever wish for something bad to just vanish? I have, about a billion times. There were days when I would come downstairs to see the furniture scattered around. I would do whatever I could do, to drift away from the stress taking over my life -- spend time with my friends, take a walk, ride my bike, go to the park, anything. I didn't want to remember, I wanted to forget. Although I did my best to stay strong, it was not easy being me sometimes.

Through this experience I've learned that one's actions and words can make a huge impact on someone's life.

The Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

This saying has changed the way I look at things in life. After they broke up, I realized that you have to respect people and put yourself in their shoes before speaking to them. How do you think they would react

to what you're going to do or say? Show empathy. Even if it's the littlest thing. And if you forget, there's always the option to apologize.

A little advice. If you're in a relationship with someone, make sure it provides you with trustworthiness, loyalty, and love. To this day, this part of my life still haunts me. But I can't pretend it didn't happen. I'm glad I'm not living in that misery any more.

I know that other people have had a similar experience to mine. I know that some have been through worse. We've all been through something. But that 'something' makes us stronger. The scars we earn, are a mark of bravery. But know this: stay strong no matter what, no matter how bad the situation is. Wear courage, and wear it with pride. Be kind to others, and show respect.

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*Trinity Murphy-Dicker loves winter, singing and spending time with her friends. Trinity is very excited to be going to high school next year!*

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### **Alison Mesher**

Second Place – Grade 7  
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Labrador Region

## **Never Forget**

**M**emories are one of the parts of living. They're a picture or video in your mind of an unforgettable event. But that's the opposite of what I really wish I could do. Forget. When I was a young child, I was used. It only took one day, just one night, and one mistake, and it has just about ruined my life. I feel like my flower of hope is slowly withering, each petal slowly falling and eventually, deteriorating into nothing.

I have broken a promise, a promise to him, my dad. That one night that has basically ruined me still haunts me to this day. I feel disgusting, I have very low self-esteem, and I'm constantly afraid because of that one little mistake. I was told to promise and keep it secret. But I broke that promise after about a day. I still live with the guilt.

A broken promise is always something bad. Yelling, fights, and tears, that's what followed. Now, about six years later, it's still here. Confusion, anger, guilt, disgust, sadness, fear, all emotions I feel daily, because I can't forget. It's a memory, tattooed into my brain forever. It's a scar that will never fade, and the more you try to push it away, the harder it pushes back. You can't hide from your memories, or the pain. The warm, salty tears will always find a way through, too.

Now I know what you're thinking. "Oh, you shouldn't cry over him; he doesn't deserve you or your family!" But it's so hard to agree with that when my thoughts, "He's your father, you are his CREATION!" fight against yours until I'm broken down to tears, my mind feeling so broken and shattered, just like a dropped plate.

To be honest I'm angry with myself. Guilty. I broke that promise, and oh boy, the guilt is breaking me. It's like a never-ending punishment I inflict on myself. I feel all of this because I am a victim of sexual harassment. But I'm trying to tell myself it's not my fault, because it isn't. I used to go to counseling for help. We gave that up, because the counsellors were all over the place. But I am, although slowly, healing myself. This experience has changed me for the better, because it proves my strength, my bravery, and my courage. I stood up against him and saved my family.

I hope my story shows that you're not alone, and that you can survive it, whatever your "it" may be. Although this experience was a negative one, I have been changed for the better. There's always going to be happiness and positivity somewhere, you just need the courage and help along the way to find it. Never forget that!

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*Alison Mesher enjoys the outdoors, drawing, reading and hanging out with her best friend, especially on hoverboard. When she grows up, she aspires to be an artist or counselor.*

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**Emily Peyton**

Third Place – Grade 7  
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Labrador Region

## Turbulent Childhood

**E**ndless rounds of daily chemo, endless needles, endless nights in the hospitals, endless doctors' appointments.

They seemed so endless. You could say it was a daily routine.

When you take things for granted, you never realize how precious they are until they're almost gone.

When I was four, life to me was nothing but living in a giant fairytale. I had princess dresses, tea parties, and my imagination. There was so much more to do, so many toys to play with, places to explore, candy to taste, flowers to smell, and butterflies to see.

I did all of this, but unfortunately for my brother his life was on pause.

My brother to me was my brother -- the typical annoying, younger sibling who did not and will never know as much as I do. But to the doctors at the Janeway Hospital, he was just another sick child.

Oct 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008, my brother was admitted to the hospital because my mom noticed he wasn't running around and playing like the little energetic child he was. My mom noticed something different, as if he was uncomfortable. After many, many tests, on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008 the bone marrow tested positive for cancer. Acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL).

There it is. That's my turning point, the reality that my brother was diagnosed with cancer. This was about to be the giant storm that was going to try to knock my sails off, not knowing that it would change my life forever.

I was an easy going kid, I'd make new friends at the hospital, do crafts, and help other sick kids. Sometimes I couldn't be the little princess in her fairytale, sometimes I had to be the older sister and take on responsibilities myself.

It's been 9 years since he was diagnosed. Today I am strong, I am independent, I am unique, I have courage.

I grew up knowing many sick kids, some of them even lost their battles. I've learned that life is so special and fragile. Nothing is forever and sometimes you just can't sweat the small stuff. There are ways to make good from bad situations, my family made the choice to not give up and keep going. My mom always looked on the bright side and now we're stronger than ever.

We are each given one life to live. We are all here to do something, to make a difference. In life, we have to make choices, but sometimes we aren't given a choice. Sometimes, you have to accept what life has given you.

The date January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017, marked his 5 years in remission. He is officially cured!

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*Emily Peyton lives in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. She enjoys hanging out with her friends and is very passionate about the Arts. Emily aspires to be a singer when she grows up.*

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## GRADE 9/10

**Michaela Cabot**

First Place – Grade 10

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Labrador Region

# My Happy Pill

A seven-year old girl is seated on the uncomfortable cushions of a hospital waiting room, her parents poised on either side of her. She sits with a white patch taped tight to her arm, the cream on the inside working to numb the crease of her elbow. She's in a cold sweat, tears pouring down her chipmunk-like cheeks, her jaw straining from the open-mouthed sobs that her mother is trying so hard to quell. She's relaying the words "this too shall pass" over and over in her mind. She desires to be positive, but her fears make her question if her false hope of being "fine" will soon fall to the inevitable.

Before my medication, that girl was me.

I had never found myself crying often, but once the torturous tears began, they would not stop. Fits of salty tears would leave me aching, wondering what would cause this much unending strain to my mind. It was over such little things; dropping an ice cream, watching a cute commercial, even feeling like I couldn't do something correctly. I would freeze, my blood would run cold, just for a moment, before I'd bawl my eyes out in such a fashion that nothing would truly feel real anymore. Of course, since I was so young, I couldn't understand it -- only my parents truly knew that something was wrong with me. Though my teachers would have comforted me during class time when my outbreaks began, not even they knew how to deal with me. Their warm, normal hands rested on the shoulder of an inhuman, unnatural girl that reassurance couldn't fix. It was something that I couldn't fathom, not until I developed more.

It's hereditary -- hypothyroidism runs in my family, but I could never imagine that I had it. The idea, at first, was preposterous. There was nothing truly wrong with me (to me, as long as I didn't have a terminal illness, I was fit to go) as far as I could remember. A broken leg, scarlet fever and a strained wrist were at the peak of my past limitations, but it was so long ago, and I'd always pulled through it as if I were a sickness professional. However, this was different. Mood swings, fatigue and other bodily irregularities were all par for the course, reigning over my decisions and my actions with iron-coated fists. At first, I assumed it just happened to girls as they matured; women either proceeded through these issues with the grace of queens, or the problems simply didn't exist, since none of the girls I've known had spoken a word about such

discomfort to another human being. Was it fake? Oh, what should I care -- if it was, there was no way it could affect a normal girl like me, right?

No, it was real. I soon knew for a fact that it could affect me; my blood-work records proved it perfectly.

I was the kind of child who you'd have to strap down with leather bands in order to give them a flu shot. Textbook enetophobia. Needles were knives to a small child who had regular contact with them, and each visit to get a vaccine resulted in a cacophony of high-pitched squeals -- however, during a surprise vacation to St. John's, needles and blood-work became mandatory to answer the question of what was happening to me. A simple road trip brought a feeling of dread upon me, my eyes leaking uncontrollably when we were halfway to the capital, my mouth dry and yearning to go out to eat; we could not, as we were barely in Gander. My sobs drowned out the motor so sickeningly, so violently, that my mother instantly assumed that something was wrong

Instead of a calm, serene round of mini-golf or a family gathering at a local restaurant, the Janeway would be our first stop in St. John's. My fingers curled against my lap as I heard the words "blood-work" for the first time. In that moment, I could've sworn I felt the blood to be taken from my veins curdle in tandem, a trembling sensation rushing through my fragile skin as my greatest fear came to surface again. I had to get a needle pressed into the crease of my arm, the inner curve of my elbow, to draw testable blood. It felt like I had lost my reflection, like I had lost myself -- I couldn't focus on anything else beside the unending horror of piercing my skin. My mother settled on giving me a patch to numb the skin so I wouldn't feel the needle going in, but that didn't cease my excessive crying, not yet. As I settled in the Janeway waiting room, I noticed the dim yellows and greens of the room's decorative walls, tuning out the voices of other patients, other rambunctious children that could be just like me -- how would I know? I tried to center on the cool sensation of the pure white cream numbing my arm, seeping into my pores to get rid of the needle's eventual sting. I was beckoned into the laboratory soon after, wiping my face with my other sleeve as I followed my parents' looming, confident steps with fearful trepidation. It was as if I knew my life was to change.

One IV and a couple of butterfly needles later, I felt reality strike me hard - my cortisol levels were low, my hormones weren't producing themselves fast, and my thyroid was on the slow side, just like my mother's. As predicted, it was difficult to understand, but I was willing to take the pills I feared that I'd have to receive if it meant I wouldn't have such unsightly fits anymore. My body still has to cope with such an ill fate, but with my medication and my family's support, something told me that it'd all be just fine.

I had finally found my happiness.

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*Michaela Cabot is an aspiring scriptwriter who is planning to study film and English beyond high school. She is involved in her school concert band, festival choir, and drama club, working diligently to promote and appreciate the Arts. She enjoys composing, drawing, and acting, as it helps her express herself. Her biggest dream is to create something that could bring people together, staying true to her love of comedy and theatrics.*

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# Newfoundland and Labrador, Western Region Winners' Essays

## GRADE 7/8

**Megan Williams**

First Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Western Region

## The Broken Bond

The words “leave”, “get out”, “I don’t want to see you”, and “you’re weird” never hurt me so much until I heard them spilling out of my sister’s mouth. People have been mean to me before, but this time it felt different. I felt worthless, like a Cheerio in a big bowl of Fruit Loops.

My sister and I were always close. We made up dances together, wrote songs and we were always there for one another. Even though we were sisters, we were also best friends forever... or so I thought. She made me laugh when I thought I would never smile. She believed in me when I never believed in myself. Everywhere we went we looked like the happiest kids in the world, just smiling from ear to ear. We took pictures together and we were genuinely happy in every single one.

Suddenly those pictures and memories of us being happy together started to burn, tear, and carelessly crumble with every argument and bad name she called me. We were slowly drifting apart, and the next thing I knew, my sister moved out to live with my mom permanently. Now, I only got to see my sister for a week at a time and I cherished that precious time together.

My sister means the world to me and I want her in my life, but it seems like she doesn't want me in hers. I'm devastated that I'm losing the person who meant the most to me. I love my sister to the moon and back. I look up to my sister because she's a huge role model in my life.

Recently she's been different, she never wants me around and she breaks her promises like they mean nothing to her. I try to do things with my sister but it's those words I hear coming out of her mouth telling me things like “you're stupid” that bring me down. Our relationship has dissintigrated so much that we have to see a counsellor together. When I'm sitting in that cold, bare, room with her, I can feel the gap between us physically and mentally, while we're waiting for the session to start.

When I come home, I see those once colorful pictures of us hanging on the wall that have now turned black and white. We're smiling and I think, why? Why can't we be those, carefree, spontaneous, little girls again?

Losing my role model has greatly affected my life for the worse. Unfortunately, the bond that we once had has ruptured to a point that I'm not sure will return. This turning point in my life has taught me about independence because when someone doesn't want to be with you, you must learn to be alone, all

by yourself. It doesn't matter what anyone says to you. Keep being yourself, and always keep your head held high.

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*Megan Williams plays sports such as basketball and volleyball in her spare time. She also enjoys hanging out with friends and dancing. She would like to be a surgeon when she is older.*

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### **Raeanna Foote**

Second Place – Grade 7  
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Western Region

## **The Cherished Memories**

**W**hen I was seven years old, I was a happy kid with no worries. At that age I never really thought something horrific could happen. Then one day in October, tragedy struck. My mom came home from a doctor's appointment. I could see on her face that she had horrible news. I was anxious as to what she was going to say. I thought to myself, it could be anything!

My heart rate increased rapidly—I started to overthink.

"I didn't want it to come to this either, but it's cancer," stuttered my mom.

My world came crashing down on me. I thought how can she have cancer?

After three years of doctors' appointments, scans, and treatments, my mom was finally admitted to the hospital. She felt safer in there. That night I came home from the hospital and thought, my mom is my rock. She has been by my side since day one. I wouldn't be able to deal with it if something happened.

One day in March I woke up with a funny feeling in my stomach; I ignored it. Later that day my aunt invited me to town for dinner, to which I agreed. I had an amazing time. My aunt walked me into the house. As she walked in the door she commented, "It's quite a mess in here. I will call Aunt Anne and we can tidy up a bit."

After a few hours, my father, godmother, and uncle entered the house with a downcast look on their faces. I was very concerned. My father said with a tremble in his voice, "We have something to tell you."

I was terrified and shaking worse than I ever had before. Tears filled their eyes faster than you could say "hospital" and they all started to sob. Then I knew what had happened. I started to sweat. It felt as if my heart was beating out of my chest. They backed me into my brother's room at the end of the hall. I exclaimed with tears in my eyes, "Please, I don't want to hear any bad news!"

I quickly covered my ears with my hands and closed my eyes tightly. My father pulled my hands from my ears and held them. He then quietly spoke to me, "You know your mother was very sick."

Before he could say any more, tears started to stream down my face like a river. In that moment I knew without any uncertainty that she had passed. I thought my life was ruined.

Over time I talked to people about how I felt. It made me feel a lot better about the situation. While my heart still aches and pains significantly, I still share my feelings with people. I've learned to never hold in my

feelings. Talking to a parent, friend, or anyone helped me. Holding in my feelings only made things worse. Every time I talk about my mom, I think about the cherished memories.

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*Raeanna Foote lives in St. George's. She is involved with many activities such as Lego Robotics, 194 Calypso cadets and others. She enjoys exploring the outdoors as well as spending time with her friends and family. She aspires to become an orthodontist. The passing of her mother inspired Raeanna to write her story.*

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### Emma Young

Third Place – Grade 7  
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Western Region

## Open Arms

**F**or the first eleven years of my life, I was alone. I had no one to play with, to share my feelings with, or even to talk to. I couldn't even trust my mother. She was a woman full of hatred. I hid away in my room to escape her fury which she cast onto me, even if I wasn't at fault. I felt like I wasn't good enough for her. Like I wasn't the child she wanted. I didn't understand her. I had good grades, I listened to her, and did all my chores.

Sometimes I thought of running away, just so I could get away from all the stress my mother put upon me. I thought she was just trying to raise me right, with all her constant yelling, but eventually it got worse.

She would drink her nights away on every day that ended with 'Y'. She would blast her music and party all night, while I struggled to ignore the sound and sleep in my room.

My grades started to drop. I was sleep deprived. I couldn't take it anymore.

The next day at school, I begged my principal to let me see the guidance counselor. The counselor brought me into a room and asked me what the problem was, and I spilled. I couldn't hold it in. It was a wave of relief to tell someone about all of my problems. I had dried my tears and calmed my nerves by the time both the police and a social worker had arrived.

This wasn't the first time I had seen social workers. I had been brought to their building a couple of times because some of my mother's 'ex-friends' had called to report her, and once in the second grade I had written in my journal that my mom would threaten me with suicide, but I never told the truth. My mother would make me tell them lies so I would stay with her. She needed the money from me in order to get her beer and her occasional drugs to get her high.

I was brought into immediate care and stayed with my great-grandmother for a week while my social worker found a foster home for me.

Luckily, they found a great home. The mom of the family welcomed me in with open arms. I could tell from the way she was speaking to the social worker that she was very kind and sweet. I knew I was going to enjoy it there.

Almost two years have passed, and my life has changed completely. I'm no longer under stress from being constantly yelled at. As a matter of fact, I'm almost never yelled at. My foster mother and her husband are sweet and understanding.

I've never felt more loved and cared about in my life. This whole ordeal has changed me as a person for the better. This was my turning point.

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*Emma Young enjoys reading, playing sports and hanging out with her friends. She is musically talented and enjoys playing flute. Emma currently resides in Piccadilly, NL.*

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## GRADE 9/10

### Stephanie Budden

First Place – Grade 10  
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Western Division

## Her Sacrifice

**S**nap, the room flooded with light. The cameraman had just captured me at two and a half years of age in my very first family portrait. I was sitting in the middle surrounded by my parents, older sister and younger brother. This is the first memory I have of myself with my adoptive parents. The picture is still hung over an old piano in the house I live in today. I sometimes wonder, would I have even had a family portrait if I had not been adopted?

My story starts long before this family picture though. My biological mom, I have been told, was a very beautiful lady. Her skin was dark, like mine, and we have the same big brown eyes. However, we are different in many ways; she had an addiction. She suffered with alcoholism and became very sick and tired. She soon realized that her condition did not put her in the best position to raise a child, to raise me. So one night she walked to a local women's center and asked them to take care of me. Through this action I know that she is strong, I know that she loved me because she gave up the best thing in her life in the hope that I would be happy and safe. She had no support and my father was in prison for committing various crimes. The brave decision of my biological mother is the most life changing event because her sacrifice gave me opportunity.

She had not only made this sacrifice once, but twice. My younger brother, Mitchell, had to be taken from the hospital since my biological mom knew she was incapable of raising any child.

My brother and I were biologically connected but we were placed in different foster homes. For a little over a year I lived with Paula, Roger and their daughter, Tonya. Tonya became my best friend in the world. According to Paula we did everything together. Our favorite activity was singing the "Barbie Song" over and over and over again. I was happy and healthy. Social Services set up meetings for me and my biological brother. We met at McDonald's Restaurant once every couple weeks to get to know each other. Life was good.

One day everything changed. I was taken by total strangers and moved across the province. I was scared, I was homesick, I sang the "Barbie Song" alone. I missed the gentle faces that tucked me in to bed at night, the faces of my temporary mom and dad. There was only one familiar face on this journey, the face of my younger brother, Mitchell.

It took me a while to realize that I had a new family, that I had a new mom, dad and sister. During the time I was scared my dad held me and sang me songs. My mom rocked me in a chair next to a window. My older sister sang the "Barbie Song" with me and played with me and my brother. I soon found that I was settled in, I was no longer scared or homesick. I finally realized I was safe and secure, I had a family.

Twelve years have passed since I moved in with my family and I am proud to say I have accomplished many things in this time period. During this year alone I have won the Horizon Scholarship, medaled at the Summer Games, learned to play the bagpipes with my cadet core and played with a provincial basketball team. I will keep working hard because I have been given the opportunity to do well against the odds.

The supportive family I have today is a product of the sacrifice made by my biological mother, the most life changing moment of my life. I have choices and opportunities I would not have had if I had not been adopted. I have every door open to me, I can go to university and be a politician, police officer or paramedic. I have the opportunity to become something and whether or not I choose to embrace these opportunities I will always remember I had the chance due to the choice of one woman who made all the difference.

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*Stephanie Budden lives in Stephenville. She is very involved in her community as a cadet, a Girl Guide, a skiing coach, a bagpipe performer in local musical festivals, and an athlete. Her favorite competitive sport is basketball which she plays with her high school team. She does not know what career she aspires to, but knows she does want to help people.*

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# Nova Scotia Winners' Essays

## GRADE 6

**Katie MacGillivray**

First Place – Grade 6  
Halifax Regional School Board

## All Good Things Must Come to an End

**M**y dad sat me down on my bed. “Katie,” he stated, “Your mom only has two weeks left.” My mom was suffering from cancer. His eyes started to tear up so I knew it wasn’t good. I could feel goosebumps running down my arms. I knew the probability of her living the full two weeks were slim.

I visited her every day after school. I would walk inside and smell the cleanliness of the hospital. Glancing at all the sick patients made me ill. I would see my mom lying on the hospital bed, faintly hearing the soft beep of her monitor. She was usually asleep and towards the end of the week she couldn’t talk anymore. She was as white as a ghost and would just stare at you as you desperately cried.

A few days later I stayed with my cousins while everyone was in the hospital. About 30 minutes after we arrived the phone rang. My cousin answered it and anxiously mouthed, “She’s gone.” Though she was trying to keep it confidential with my cousin, I could tell what she mouthed in a blink of an eye. I could feel warm tears running down my face. I took a deep breath. We rushed to the hospital. I was as quiet as a mouse the whole way there.

I walked into the Q.E.Two and saw everyone crying. I glanced at my mom. I could no longer hear her monitor running. She was lying on the bed no longer breathing. I wondered where she went and if she was still living somewhere else. I was isolated from everything else and worried that I didn’t get to say goodbye. I was very disappointed but no tears came. Too many things were running through my head at once. Everyone was exhausted and stressed and it was chaotic. I wiped away my tears, walked up and kissed her on the cheek.

I knew my life would change forever but, if there’s one thing I’ve learned it’s that you must appreciate the time you have because all good things must come to an end....

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*Katie MacGillivray enjoys learning, playing competitive soccer with some of her friends. She also enjoys helping out her community. Katie aspires to one day play provincial soccer.*

**Sophie Norman**

Second Place – Grade 6  
Halifax Regional School Board

## My Parents

**I**t was a bright, summer day around 11:00 am. My brother and I were watching T.V. My parents were talking but we couldn't hear what they were saying, it was nothing but muffled words. We had just finished the show when my mom called us to lunch.

I turned the T.V. off and we sat down at the table. No one spoke, we just ate lunch silently. My dad finished first and looked at my mom. My mom finished up and put her dishes away. My brother and I finished up soon after and we were about to go play when my mom called my brother and me to come sit down.

We all sat there looking at each other, not knowing what to say, when finally my dad spoke up, " I am sorry we didn't tell you this sooner but we didn't know how to tell you that mom and I are getting a divorce."

My heart stopped beating and I looked up at my mom and dad. Their eyes told me it was true. I felt as if my heart had broken into a million pieces that would never be put back together. My eyes streamed with tears as my dad curled me into a bear hug but that made me feel worse. I sobbed on my dad's shoulder and gave my mom a big squeeze. I tried to stop the tears but they wouldn't stop. I crawled onto my mom and buried my head into her. When I couldn't cry anymore I looked into my mom's and dad's eyes one last time and I felt like crying all over again.

My mom took me and sat me down on the couch. " This is going to be a big change in our lives but it will get better I promise." I knew what she said was true but deep inside I knew it would be hard.

From that day on things got harder but over a year or two everything felt the same. I love my mom and dad equally but sometimes I miss my mom or dad for different reasons. My life has changed from that moment on and that's when I realized no one is going to have a perfect life but everyone has special things that others don't and that is what makes everyone different and my special thing is my amazing family.

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*Sophie Norman likes to play soccer with some of her closest friends. She hopes one day to join the provincial team.*

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**Micaela Ferrari**

Third Place – Grade 6  
Halifax Regional School Board

## They That Have No Other Meat, Bread and Butter, They Are Glad to Eat

**H**ave you ever seen someone begging but being ignored? Helpless and yet you can't do anything. Begging is a horrible price to pay for a life. One sunny, warm day in July as I was leaving a bridge I saw just that.

All around people were selling locks to add to the sparkling rainbow that was covering the old bridge. They held up signs saying things like, "Put a lock on the bridge and throw a key in the river." These people weren't allowed to sell locks for the bridge because the bridge was sinking under the weight of the locks but people still did it. I thought the bridge looked pretty even if it was sinking.

As I left the bridge I looked down so I wouldn't trip and I looked from side to side. As I looked to the right I saw a man sitting on the side of the tiled path. He was staring at passing people with sad, longing eyes. He had a tan and was wearing an old white shirt. He wore dark brown shorts that stopped just above the knee but the thing that was most striking was how the bones in his legs stopped where his knee should be and there was just twisted skin until his foot started. He also wore a pair of dirty sneakers.

Beside the man was a can that barely had any money. All around him were people walking and acting as if he didn't exist, almost stepping on him as they passed. I remember being mad at those people because it was clear that they had cash. I still wish I had even a small coin to give. He stared back and looked at me with pleading eyes and then I understood.

Then and there I learned how fortunate I was compared to others. I learned to be more grateful for the things I had and the things I got to see.

I felt a tug on my arm and I was told to walk faster and that it was rude to stare. I never saw the begging man again.

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*Micaela Ferrari is fluent in both Spanish and English as well as some French. She enjoys drawing and writing and holds a purple belt in karate. She visits Argentina every year to see her family. Micaela would like to be a writer or engineer in the future.*

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## GRADE 7/8

**Olivia Chute**

First Place – Grade 7  
Halifax Regional School Board

# The Power of Friendship

**“W**e can do more together, go further together, climb higher together, go deeper together than we ever could trying to go solo.” ~Craig Gross

I felt alone. Isolated. Terrified. The competition was still months away but I could already feel the swarm of butterflies invading my stomach.

After countless hours of training, I was rewarded with a spot on the Canadian Under 13 National Team for the 2016 Pan American Water Ski Championships. Being selected as the only girl on the team was a huge honor. I should have been ecstatic however, instead of feeling proud, I was overcome with fear. Every time I thought about Pan Ams I felt nauseous and it was due to my experience at Nationals in the summer of 2016.

At Nationals my nerves got the best of me and it felt impossible to regain control. Despite my significant time training, and my support system, I was so frightened at Nationals. I had put so much pressure on myself. As a result, I had my worst performances of the year. Immediately after I finished competing I was relieved it was over. Then I thought, "Is it worth it if it's not enjoyable?" My Nationals experience wasn't what I had anticipated.

Leading up to Pan Ams my uneasiness steadily increased but in some strange, magical moments, when I was surrounded with friends, that fear left me altogether. When I told two of my best friends the news that I had made the Pan Am Team we all exploded with joy and they were so delighted for me. I felt the magic then and my friends had helped reduce my fear.

The first time I was together with the three other boys on the team, again, I felt it. We were together. Team Canada. That in itself told me I wasn't alone. I thought, "What could possibly take away all my fear and make me feel so safe?" Later I would realize that it was the magic of being surrounded and encouraged by my friends. That feeling and those people were what helped me deal with my fear.

At Pan Ams something was very different. I decided that my extreme fear was a thing of the past and I forced myself to move on. On the flight to Mexico to compete, and during the training sessions on the lake, I was having fun and I wasn't afraid. Most remarkably, waiting on the dock to compete I had a big smile stretched across my face and my chin held high. I didn't need to stare endlessly into the water and nervously pace back and forth across the dock like I had at Nationals. Something inside me knew that the hard work had already been done and I didn't need to be nervous. So unexpectedly Pan Ams became the complete opposite of Nationals. I wasn't scared and I knew I was going to have an amazing performance. Little did I know at the time it would be my best performance ever. At Pan Ams I set a new personal best. I overcame my fear, and I was proud.

Pan Ams has become a major turning point in my life. From this experience, I learned perseverance, how to believe in myself and how to meet challenges. I overcame a fear that was a constant struggle. Most importantly, I learned a life lesson. Remember that magical and strange feeling I talked about earlier? It taught me that this life we're all living isn't meant to be lived alone. We need to be connected. I discovered that I felt the magical feeling because I knew in those moments that I had friends who would be there for me no matter what. They helped make me stronger and they helped lift me up. My butterflies were set free and so was I.

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*Olivia Chute was born and raised in Fall River, Nova Scotia. Olivia enjoys playing Royal Conservatory piano, and the clarinet in her school band. Olivia dances competitively, plays hockey and competes in waterskiing. Olivia's plans involve attending university for a career in health care.*

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### Heidi Wadden

Second Place – Grade 7  
Halifax Regional School Board

## A Song, a Breath, and a Goodbye

I always thought I would find out what true love was when I was much older however, I found out what true love really meant when I was just ten years old. It all happened in a song, a breath, and a goodbye.

'Jesus Loves Me' was one of my Nanny's favorite songs. The melody and words always made me feel warm and cozy inside. However, as we sang that joyous song it did not have that warm and cozy meaning but instead another more important meaning, one of letting go. Letting go of the person who made me the

most delicious hot chocolate in the world when I was cold, letting go of my loudest cheerleader and letting go of the heartfelt hugs that only could come from my Nanny.

Without warning, the cancer came and she was too weak for any treatment and then we were stuck in that terrible hospital room. Still, I stood there singing while so many emotions overwhelmed my body and I thought I would never be strong enough to do it; to simply let go.

Listening to my family's trembling voices was hard, yet, watching and hearing my Nanny's laboured breathing was heartbreaking for me. As I sat in a hospital chair trying to reminisce about all the special times we had together, all I could concentrate on was the rising and lowering of her chest. She couldn't tell me how much she loved me or laugh her joyful laugh. At that moment, all I heard was one breath after another. I knew she was there but I knew she would be leaving me soon. Everyone knew it was time. My head was pounding with panicking thoughts as I realized one of those breaths would be her last. My heart felt heavy. It was hard to understand what I was seeing and hearing around me so I just watched her breathing. Suddenly, my eyes released an enormous, salty, mournful waterfall that blurred my vision. Was it really time to let go?

I placed a picture of an angel that I had painted on her bedside table. Then my Mom smiled at me and told me Nanny would love the picture and it was then I saw Nanny's smile in hers. It was the way her teeth went together just so and how her eyes would close just slightly. I could feel her sadness but the smile lifted my spirits just a little. Maybe I had Nanny's smile too. I felt lucky to have this time to say goodbye but I still didn't believe that it would really be the last time I would be with her. I walked out of the hospital room and down the long, dreary hall knowing my last goodbye was over. I wanted so badly for her to call out my name and fill the hall with her voice. Instead, I kept walking, letting go of my Nanny.

To this day, it was the most challenging thing I have ever been through. Before that day in the hospital, I never knew what it felt like to lose someone that was so much a part of my life or how deeply it would affect me. Eventually, I realized it wasn't loss that filled my memories of that day, it was something much different. I believe I came to understand that true love is how you feel when you sing a song to make someone happy, or hug someone tight so you can feel their breath, or run back into a room because you have to say goodbye one last time. The love a grandmother gives, and the love I was lucky enough to receive, was alive in that hospital room. So many people felt this precious gift from her and she left it for us to share. A song, a breath, and a goodbye taught me a valuable life lesson that will guide me into my future. I am so blessed to have found true love.

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*Heidi Wadden lives in Windsor Junction, Nova Scotia. She is dedicated to her competitive dance team and dances every day for many hours. She enjoys hanging out with her friends, traveling and exploring new places. Heidi hopes to one day become a pediatrician.*

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### Haley Hunt

Third Place – Grade 7  
Chignecto-Central Regional School Board

## The Shiny Day

**D**o you know those really good days, ones where the sky is clear and the sun is in the corner of your eye and it makes it seem shiny and happy? One where there's a cold breeze but the sun gleaming on your head neutralises it, making everything seem perfect? One where it seems like the first page of a book, a fairy tale you get to live for twenty-four hours because it's just that kind of day? This was that kind of day.

My two older brothers and I were at our babysitter's house. Jake, who was the oldest, had rich dark brown hair. My other brother, Josh, had bright, light blond hair that would eventually fade to a color similar to his brother's with age. We were all playing together at the white and tan orange house that belonged to Irene, our babysitter. She was on the phone with my dad and it was revealed that we now had a new baby brother and his name was Kenan.

It was discovered that he wasn't breathing very well and had to have two tubes in the side of his stomach to remove an unwanted substance. When we got to the hospital I got to see my new baby brother. He had light hair like Josh and me and blue eyes like the rest of our immediate family. The doctors didn't know if he would live but we didn't lose hope.

Thankfully he did live and we eventually got to take Kenan home but, shortly before we did, he was diagnosed with Down Syndrome; a disability caused by an error in the division of cells that has the outcome of an extra twenty first chromosome. This condition leads to slower development both mentally and physically.

At first I did not really understand what all this meant. It was hard to grasp because he was unable to do some things purely because he was a baby, not because of his disability. At the time I didn't know that he would someday become so intelligent. After I got a little older I started to comprehend. "He developed a little slower in some things but not in all." As my mom likes to say.

Kenan is very smart and he can even make some letters. Today, Kenan has very few physical disabilities. He has some skills and can do many activities. Sometimes Kenan and I make up fun games to play. Often, they are a bit unconventional and silly but they are always pleasurable.

This experience has definitely brought Kenan and me closer together. It has also brought my family closer together because, to us; Down Syndrome isn't really a disorder or a disability, it's more of a special character of someone's personality. It's definitely part of who Kenan is but, also, who we are as a family, like the very first page of a novel that makes the rest of the book complete or the angle of the sun that makes a shiny day.

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*Haley Hunt has an interest in gymnastics. She has recently been accepted into an intermediate program at her gym. In the future, Haley would like to become vet, and would like to open her own clinic.*

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## GRADE 9/10

**Naomi Harun**

First Place – Grade 10  
Halifax Regional School Board

# Sacrificing All

**T**he first time I ever saw my Dad cry was the morning we got news that my Grandfather Sokoro, in Kisii Kenya, had passed. It was a normal Sunday, I'd slept in and probably would have until noon if my little brother, Obed, hadn't woken me. He shook my shoulder until I finally cracked open my eyes, wincing

at the bright sun like a hot spotlight shining through my window. Obed whispered in my ear, "Sokoro is dead!"

Grandfather had been sick for a while. A couple of years before he'd experienced a stroke. Thankfully, with lots of support, he recovered soon after. Unfortunately, he'd recently suffered another stroke and couldn't keep up. He couldn't walk or talk and couldn't even feed himself. He was like an infant, depending on others to meet his every need.

At first, I honestly thought my brother was kidding to get me out of bed but I knew Obed wouldn't joke about something so serious. Somewhat awake, I lazily rolled out of bed, headed out my door and down the hall to my parents' bedroom. My mother was sitting on the bed alone looking down at her phone. I walked over and as she looked up, I stared into eyes that, like clear glasses filled with water topped to the brim, would spill with the tiniest of jolts.

I knew the answer before the question was asked. "Is Sokoro really dead?" She nodded her head yes.

I turned to Obed, who'd walked into the room after me. We both had tears like raindrops rolling down our faces. I hugged him and he hugged me back, the warm blanket of my mother's arms enveloping us. "Where's daddy?", Obed asked.

"He's in the basement," was mom's reply.

Like when you are in a haunted house, we weren't sure what to expect. Our dad wasn't usually an outwardly emotional person. We slowly descended the staircase, turned the corner and entered a large room. There, on the smaller of two couches, he sat, head low and shoulders slumped. You could just see the weight of sorrow like a massive boulder resting on his back, trying to crush him into bits of dust. Once again my eyes blurred as tears threatened to spill over. I cried for him and my mother and the loss of a father and I mourned for Obed and myself over the loss of a Grandfather we hadn't gotten to make many life-lasting memories with.

Obed rushed ahead of me and gave Dad a hug. "Thank you Tata," he choked.

He held on a little tighter. I tentatively moved towards the couch, my mind a blank page. I didn't know what to say. Following Obed's lead, I circled my arms around Dad and immediately calmed in this familiar embrace. I couldn't remember the last time I'd hugged him although, it still felt like coming home. Though I had changed over the years, Dad was always a constant force in my life, supporting me in every cause, helping me up when I fell and giving me everything to succeed.

During the process of writing this memoir, my objective was to tell of my Grandfather's death and how I learned the importance of staying connected with family and taking pride in who you are. But while writing and reliving this experience, I realized there was more to gain. Everything my father has done was for my benefit. Moving to North America to study and save money to bring me and mom to Canada, in the process missing my birth and the first three years of my life. Working two jobs to put mom through nursing and pay Obed's and my school tuition. Continuing to relentlessly drive me to do better in school. He knew that education could take me anywhere, it brought him to this country. My Dad sacrificed all for me. It was time that I gave back.

So on that somber morning, tears in both of our eyes, arms around each other, as I breathed in his comforting smell of clean soap, enveloped in his protective embrace, I whispered the only words that came to mind. Words that I hadn't spoken to my Dad in too long. "I love you."

"I love you too" he responded.

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*Naomi Harun moved to Canada from Kenya in 2004 with her mother and is currently a high school student at Charles P. Allen. She loves to sing, dance in her kitchen and enjoys playing rugby, softball, and badminton. During her free time, Naomi likes to volunteer at the Parker Street Food Bank and watch Superhero movies with her little brother.*

**Mia Buchanan**

Second Place – Grade 10  
Halifax Regional School Board

## Junior High, Exceeding Stereotypes, Gender Expectations

The word 'gay' kept repeating loudly on an old record in my head that wouldn't turn off, causing me to analyse my lifestyle and personality, to question if I fit the stereotype. When my true colours began to reveal themselves to me I found myself excusing them. Why me? Wondering if I was gay because of the freedom that was given to me to do little boy things.

The beginning of grade seven the word 'gay' first came out of the dark. I was approached and interrogated by people who only knew my name. The feeling that my privacy was being violated astonished me. I was so young. The thought of being gay never crossed my mind, considering I was raised in a religious family and attended Sunday school weekly before church and was taught to pray and thank God for everything he has given me.

It frustrated me that, just because of my tomboy ways, I was pinned against a corkboard as gay. Eventually, giving into society's pressure and judgement that day led to going out and buying skinny jeans, knock off Uggs, tight shirts, and "real" bras. A huge piece of me hoped that dressing girly would stop them but, it was an uncontrollable wildfire. I was stuck in a civil war. One side telling me to be me, the other saying to be what people expected.

Grade eight rolled around the corner and I was still playing the part of the common teenage girl. The thought of changing to match society's expectations made me feel sick to my stomach, so much that I couldn't look in a mirror without being utterly disgusted with myself and causing me to question every component of my life. I was having trouble trusting as it didn't make sense that my friendships would never be real if I couldn't be my true self. Enough was enough. I finally built up the courage to ask my mother to buy me khakis from the boys section and within hours she arrived home, Aeropostale khakis in hand.

My first day of being my true self was frightening because of the fear of judgement. Upon my arrival I stood outside the intimidating doors taking several deep breaths, filling my lungs with crisp air. Constantly scanning the crowds expecting to spot people pointing or giggling at me wearing grey khakis. Quickly, realizing the majority of students couldn't care less...so, why not amp it up a notch with boys' shirts.

Grade nine was a major year for me. I stopped caring about people's snide remarks, leading me to make a deal with myself, to not give in to society's expectations. The enormous relief filled my body within seconds, finally establishing who I am. Abruptly, out of nowhere, the word gay was pinned on me yet again. Lightning had struck my thoughts, burning down every improvement that was made.

I joined Tumblr, a place where many gay people socialize and where you can follow people and their relationships through their frequent posts. Seeing so many upbeat gay couples opened my eyes to where I could see myself with a girl. Days after, it all became clear but I was left with the thoughts, "Am I too young to identify as gay? What happens if it's just a phase?"

My sixteenth birthday whisked by and two wires just fused in my head. I could completely think of myself as gay and be okay with that, while not having to answer to people if I had no desire. Finally, the civil war ended confirming that I like girls the way boys do, or the way girls like boys. It was like someone took a huge weight off my shoulders, finally being able to breathe, rather than gasping for air.

I decided not to verbally come out to my family because over the years both sides have been dropping hints they'll love me no matter who I am. The feeling of being loved unconditionally made my heart beat so

loudly that it could be heard from kilometers away. All the pain and loneliness was absolutely worth it in the long run because being who you are is the most important thing in the world.

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*Mia Buchanan loves playing sports and is a huge animal lover. Her ambition for the future is to be an engineer in the military.*

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### Abbie Butler

Third Place – Grade 10  
Halifax Regional School Board

## Chasing Time

I remember thinking how every hospital smelled the same. A wave of disinfectant and medication hit me as we walked through the doors leading us to my dad's enclosed room. Constant beeping from the heart monitors mixed with the raspy breathing from patients in nearby rooms surrounded me, my brother, and my mom. The sounds blended together like a melody but nothing could distract me from my anxious thoughts. The only thing on my mind was my dad.

I was devastated when I heard the doorbell ring that Wednesday night. It was about eleven o'clock and we figured my dad had locked himself out. Instead of seeing my dad at the door, we saw Mike, his best friend. He told us my dad had had a major heart attack and collapsed on the field during his soccer game.

We rocketed through the streets on the way to the hospital as if we were racing time, trying to make the seconds slow down as we sped up.

"I don't normally drive this fast, Abbie." Mike said with forced laughter as he flew through another red light. "I don't want you getting the wrong impression."

It was a desperate attempt to brighten our spirits.

I was so frightened and seeing my dad conscious made me even more emotional. I tried so hard not to cry in that emergency room but a few tears trickled down my cheeks. I knew I had to be strong for my dad so I wiped them away so no one, especially him, would see how scared I was.

"So what happened to me?" my dad asked for the fifth time since we'd been there (which had been about 10 minutes).

The nurse explained to him what had happened and how they were going to fix it; with a stent. Because of his short term memory loss, he was repeating his questions, so we kept reliving the same five minutes of confusion over and over and his sudden awareness of his situation.

"I'm sorry I scared you guys," my dad said, his voice cracking with sadness at the thought of disappointing us.

"You didn't scare me," I told him, masking my fear with false bravery, "I know you're going to be okay."

After his small surgery to insert the stent, he was to recover in the CCU for however long it took. This became my routine: wake up, go to the hospital, and hear he was progressing slowly but steadily, like the tortoise making it to the finish line. Even though I knew he was getting better, all I could think of was what if he wouldn't win the race?

One night, after a good day, we piled onto his hospital bed and played headbands. For an hour or so we giggled like little kids and forgot about our terrible situation. My stomach and face were sore from all the

laughing and smiling and in those moments it dawned on me just how much my family meant to me. Family truly is forever.

I was such a daddy's girl when I was little. My neighbor's father passed away when she and I were about seven, but I never realized that there was a possibility mine could go too because, to me, my dad was a superhero, fearless and invincible; there was nothing he couldn't do.

As years went on, our bond slowly slipped away and without realizing it, I lost a best friend. Even as I became more selfish, he continued to be my personal cheerleader, rooting for me on the sidelines and always there when I needed a shoulder to cry on, but it wasn't the same as it used to be.

Sometimes, it takes an extreme shock to open one's eyes to reality. I had been taking my family for granted and now I was stuck chasing the time I had already lost, trying to make up for all the times I passed over them without a second thought.

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*Abbie Butler loves reading, playing soccer and spending time with her friends. She hopes to have a career in psychology or journalism.*

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## GRADE 11/12

### Madeline MacEwen

First Place – Grade 12  
Halifax Regional School Board

# Helpless

The look she gave me, the pain in her eyes, I was heartbroken. I stared at the scars on her small thighs and the warm tears staining her rosy cheeks. Then my own tears began falling, one after another. The only words she was able to muster were, "I'm sorry." She was sitting in the bathtub sobbing softly while clutching her legs tight into her chest. Watching her in this state broke my heart into a million pieces, my own little sister. I felt helpless, like I couldn't do anything even if I tried.

Self-harm wasn't something I had much experience with. In fact, I'd never had any experience with it, until I found out my sister had been cutting herself. I will never forget the day I found her sitting in the bathtub hiding her legs from me. The look she gave me is seared into my brain. It was the day before my family and I were leaving to go on vacation in Florida, we were all so excited. My sister and I decided to each have a nice relaxing bath before packing the rest of our things.

I had my bath and then started doing the last of my packing. My sister went into the bathroom to have her bath and I realized she had forgotten her towel. The door was closed and, usually I would have knocked to go in, but this time I didn't. I sort of wish I did. I started to say, "Hey, you forgot your towel," when the towel slid from my hand. My eyes fell immediately to her thighs. They were covered in a zebra pattern. Stripes of white scarred skin went from her hips to her knees. I thought I was imagining things. Is this true? What I'm seeing? It couldn't be. But, sure enough, it was reality.

I just remember a lump forming in my throat and hot tears stinging my eyes. I had never experienced so many emotions at once. I was sad, disappointed, shocked, worried, but most of all, I felt helpless. In movies and on social media people often romanticize self-harm, and show a side of it that doesn't even exist in reality. But, it's more complex than that. I couldn't understand why she would do that to herself - what could be so bad about her life? Our parents are still together, we live in a nice house, comfortably at that, and she gets good grades, better than me in fact. So what was it? To this day I have never found out; she never talked about it.

After finding out about what she was doing to herself, I had to tell my parents. It was received how you would expect it to be. There were feelings of shock, failure, distress and also some tears. My parents sat her down and asked her how this could happen and why she would do this to herself. My sister just sat there, crying. She had no answer. My parents thought they failed her, which I disagreed with. Mum decided that once we got back from our trip, she would take her straight to the doctor, to see if they would recommend therapy, anything to help her stop.

And so she did go to the doctor and he did recommend therapy. She hated it, but Mum said it was good for her to go. It was good for her to talk about her feelings. She only went a couple times after deciding it wasn't for her. She said it made her feel worse. We weren't sure how that made any sense but we thought it best to pull her from therapy and go back to the drawing board.

After some time, she seemed to be getting better; she was happier and wasn't cutting herself as much. She decided to come to me when she wanted to talk about something, which made me feel good. It meant she trusted me. After almost a year, she seemed totally different. She stopped cutting completely, her scars were almost faded and I think it was because she was able to come to me about anything. I was her form of therapy I guess, which I won't complain about. We never truly figured out what made her that way, but I'm happy she got out of it.

This experience was a huge wake up call for me, it showed me a side to my sister that I never knew existed. It just goes to show that not everyone is as happy as they may seem. It's an experience that I'll remember for the rest of my life and reflect on. It was a difficult time for myself and my family, but after everything, I feel like it brought us together and made us stronger as a unit. We all grew, and learned more about mental illness and self-harm. Most importantly, I realized that someone who is harming themselves is often making a silent cry for help and I know, for my sister, I will always be there to answer.

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*Madeline MacEwen enjoys playing the violin, reading and spending time with her family. She will be attending university in the fall of 2017 in hopes of becoming a teacher.*

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### **Christina Hanna**

Second Place – Grade 12  
Halifax Regional School Board

## **I Can Fix You**

**G**rowing up I was always told, "You are so unique. There's nobody else like you." However, I never truly believed it because I never felt unique or different. I'm just a girl of average height, with dark brown hair like many girls you see around town. I played some sports and always did well in school, but it's not like that made me unique. I never felt I stood out in any particular way until that afternoon in church. But I'm getting ahead of myself, so I'll take you back to the start of that day and we can go from there.

It was just another ordinary Sunday in July during the summer of 2015. Ideally summer is hot and sunny, but this is Nova Scotia, therefore we'll assume it was a mild, cloudy day. I woke up for church at 9:30 as I always do on Sundays. I began my morning routine, nothing out of the ordinary for a teenage girl. I took my time getting out of bed, then brushed my teeth, washed my face and got dressed. I skipped breakfast because I'm not much of a morning person, which isn't very uncommon or special. Ironically, I am always the last to be ready, even though I'm the first to wake up. Nonetheless, when everyone was ready to go, we got in the car and drove over the bridge to our lovely, quaint, church.

Ever since I can remember, I always went to church on Sundays. It was more than just a routine; it was a part of who I was. Church was more than an old brick building, it was a home away from home. On that memorable morning I remember climbing up three flights of stairs to the smell of burning incense. Tranquility and familiar faces greeted me. We followed Mom to our usually pew and sat down and waited for the mass to begin.

This week's mass was supposed to be slightly different than the usual ones because we had a visiting priest from Montreal assisting. The bell rang three times and the procession began. Mass was running smoothly until it came time for the sermon. Usually this consisted of our priest telling us a story of something that occurred during his week and then tying it to a deeper meaning. However, out of respect, he let the visiting priest lead the sermon.

It started like any ordinary sermon. He was telling us a story from his past, about a gentlemen he referred to as his friend. He explained that this friend was seeking clarification and came to him to ask some questions because he had a secret that was getting too heavy to carry. He then shared the secret. It was that his friend thought he was gay. Suddenly, he paused and changed his tone of voice to a more comforting one and said, "Children, do not let temptations and false influences in today's society confuse you and cause you to stray from what you know to be right. Men should not love men, it is a mistake. However like all things, God forgives all, and it is a wrong that can be made right. This is a sin that will send your soul directly to hell in the afterlife, but I can save you now before it is too late."

Immediately, things went from being ordinary to extraordinary, but not in a good way. I felt a tsunami of emotions rising from the pit of my stomach. I was offended, disturbed, and above all, appalled. I couldn't believe my ears. Moreover, the fact that a man with that power was using it to influence an audience so open to following his teachings. I couldn't grasp how he believed he had the power to say such awful and hurtful things, in such a serene place. In addition to all of those personal feelings, I also remembered there were a few members of our church who are homosexual, and I couldn't help but feel for them and their families in that moment.

The entire room was silent, although the tension was roaring as loud as a lion. The priest then continued with his story and told us he looked at his friend and said, "Don't worry my son, God will forgive your sin and with a little time, I can fix you. I can show you the right road and change you back, and then God will accept you into his kingdom." I wish I could tell you what he said next but I do not know. After that last line I stood up, overwhelmed with emotion, and left the chapel.

In that moment I no longer felt at home. If anything, I've never felt more lost. I started questioning my faith, my religion, and my culture. I had never felt so disturbed and yet so angry all at once. It saddens me to say that some members even agreed with the sermon's message, and I couldn't help but simply wonder how?

The following week, due to complaints, our priest asked the visiting priest to return home early. Then time took its course, and eventually things returned back to ordinary. However, I never did. All my life people told me I was unique and different, and after that day, I never felt anything less.

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*Christina Hanna speaks three languages: English, Arabic and French. She is a very social person and a free spirit. She is currently the president of her school's Interact Club, co vice president of the school Student Council, and co-captain of the girl's rugby team.*

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**Alanna West**

Third Place – Grade 12  
Halifax Regional School Board

## You See the Worst

Sweat is dripping off of my body. I know it is getting late and I'll have to be home by 12. The gym is quiet, with very few people there and everyone is doing their own thing. While jogging on the treadmill for the past 20 minutes, I observed everyone, it keeps my mind off how tired I am. I notice everything from the man that checks out all the women, to how many reps and sets individuals are doing, to the guy making funny weight lifting faces. As I'm running, my music is blasting in my ears. The lady next to me can probably hear it. That loud music keeps my energy up, and it gets me to the end of my 30 minute run. I hit the stop button and hop off, walking to the women's changing room with my legs feeling like jello. It was leg day and I added a run for some crazy reason.

Walking into the changing room is a huge change of air, it goes from smelling sweaty to loads of different perfumes. The giant mirror on the back wall catches my attention and I make my way towards it. The first thing I notice when I look into the mirror is that my hair is a mess. I remove the elastic so the messy ponytail falls to my shoulders. I then begin to look at my body, I turn to the left and the right, looking from the top to the bottom. I decide to take off my baggy t-shirt to continue the inspection of my body in my sports bra. Starting to feel discouraged, I instantly break into tears.

It seems as though weight is all that matters in my life. It is a problem I can't conquer, it gradually gains power over me. I consistently think about how my body is looking, while sitting down, when walking in front of others, while just plain standing. For my whole life, it has always been my biggest concern. Even when I was young, I remember hating myself because of my body, and an eight year old shouldn't feel that way. With every "make a wish" moment that I encountered, my wish was to be skinny. I didn't understand why I was cursed with this fat, and none of my friends were. I always believed that if I could just cut off my belly I'd be beautiful.

At the gym, while standing at the mirror crying, a blonde woman appears behind me exiting the sauna. My first thought is that she is gorgeous with not a stitch of makeup on. She's in workout clothes and approximately one hundred and eighty pounds and still perfect. Her body looks awesome to me, and even though it isn't perfect it doesn't define her beauty. She walks over to the scale, takes off her black Nikes and t-shirt, and puts her phone on the ledge. She steps on the scale and shakes her head in disappointment. She steps off and makes a phone call, I'm assuming to her significant other, best friend, or sister. The person answers and she explains to them that she doesn't want to weigh in tomorrow at Weight Watchers because she didn't lose any pounds since the last time. Now she begins to cry, and that's when I realize that we are our own worst critics.

Everyone sees themselves differently than how others do. We judge ourselves harder than we should. We notice the little things, like our eyebrows not being even, a pimple we think is the focal point of our face, how our shoulders are too wide, or the shape of our bodies. No one else sees these things as easily as we do, and we need to stop focusing on them. There's more to life than appearance. The number you make the scale go to, or the jeans size you fit into has no factor in our beauty. We need to stop comparing ourselves to others and just make today's you better than yesterday's. We need to stop trying to be skinny or better than someone else, and just aim to be healthy.

I wipe the tears off my cheeks and fix the mascara under my eyes, and walk over toward the blonde lady, who is now off the phone and still crying. I make eye contact with her and say "hello". She doesn't say anything back just a half smile with tears still running down her face. I then go ahead and say, " You know you're really too beautiful to be crying about anything you see on that scale." She looks up in surprise and

with a little giggle, she replies with, "Then you should know you're way too beautiful to be crying about anything you see in that mirror back there."

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*Alanna West is a student at a school that is new for her. Some of her passions include fitness, yoga, and cheerleading. Alanna's love for animals has led her to become a vegetarian. Her two dogs, Carlos and Stella, are a part of her large, close-knit family.*

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# Ontario, Greater Toronto Area Winners' Essays

## GRADE 6 ENGLISH

**Lucy Qi**

First Place – Grade 6  
Toronto District School Board

### Bud to a Flower

**W**henever I spoke in public - my hands would perspire, my body would shake, and I would burst out the words like a detonating firecracker. As anyone can tell, public speaking wasn't my expertise. Consequently, I went hysterical when my mother told me something. But little did I know, those three words my mother uttered would change my life forever, "Public. Speaking. Class." I clutched my hands into fists and panicked in anticipation. I couldn't believe it! I bellowed, "What are you thinking?!" However, she didn't reply and disappeared.

Eventually, I dragged myself to the public speaking class. The moment I stepped into the room, all the pupils' eyes were glued to me, murmuring remarks. I was forced to give a speech too - where I stood like a stick and coughed out words monotonously. It wasn't a good experience.

Although, each and every time I attended this class, I found the experience better. The pupils gave me encouragement – making me comfortable. The teacher also passed down her skills, so I gained faith in myself to shoot down my insecurities - making my voice louder and my mind stronger. From this, a newfangled confidence kindled within me - conversing no longer was a burden. In fact, I started to love speaking! Thus, when my mother eyed me and inquired, "Would you like to quit public speaking?" I gleefully replied, "No, I would like to continue!"

I realized I didn't view this class as a "scary place" anymore, instead, I considered it beneficial. As it made me more gregarious, so I wasn't afraid to express myself. Additionally, I learned that risk-taking is worth it because if I wasn't bold, I would never have become the speaker I am today - an honored outstanding orator in my grade. Before, I was an introverted bud. However, with effort, I blossomed and became a confident complete flower.

Hence, now, when life throws opportunities at me, I accept them, even though my apprehension makes me reluctant as I know in the long run, it will mold me into a better person.

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*Lucy Qi likes to play piano, draw pictures, and swim. Lucy has competed to win a public speaking competition. In the future, Lucy would like to become a lawyer, as she wants to help people through negotiation and management by using law.*

**Rhiannon O'Brien**

Second Place – Grade 6  
Toronto District School Board

## Cool, Not Weird

**A**re your parents divorced? Is your dad dead? I get these questions all the time. Everyone I meet becomes confused when I tell them about my family. The majority of the human race knows a "traditional" family as having a mother, a father, and possibly a sibling. Not me.

Since my mother had me on her own (in vitro), my family is different than others. I don't have a father. In my younger years, I didn't realize that my family was different. I was happy and knew my family loved me.

As early as grade one, doubts started to creep in. My classmates would tell stories, describing the exhilarating things they did with their fathers. One summer at camp, the "questions" started with another girl. I told her my mother had me on her own, and she said, "Wow. That's weird." I was confused, I didn't feel weird. Was I weird?

Even in class, it came up. In French, we had to talk about our family using a "fill in the blank" supplement. Mon pere s'appelle \_\_\_\_\_. I said, "Je n'ai pas un père." Some of my classmates were shocked. Weird yet again.

And then, one Sunday, I got on the chairlift with a girl in my ski class. We started to get to know each other. I was nervous to tell her about my family situation, afraid that she would use the dreaded "w" word. When it came up and I told her, she did the exact opposite. She said, "Wow! That is so cool!" This girl made me think. "AHA! I've always thought my family was cool!"

I had been noticing many different kinds of families: Some with many children, some with few, some with a Mom and Dad, some with two Moms, some with two Dads, some with a single parent, some with parents together, and some with parents divorced. My skiing friend had put this all in perspective. It all made sense to me. My family is different, but all families are different! Different is not weird, it's cool!

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*Rhiannon O'Brien loves to play volleyball, soccer and perform dance. She plays the bass, the guitar and the piano and loves to sing. At school, Rhiannon is in Choir, Strings, helps out in the library and in the kindergarten lunch room. She is part of an apprentice program where she assists in dance classes in her spare time.*

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**Myles Del Rosario**

Third Place – Grade 6  
Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board

## Isaiah Changed my Life

**B**efore Isaiah, my life was pretty typical. I was a six year old in a family of four. I had my mom and dad, and a cool but sometimes annoying big brother who is two years older than me. Being the youngest was awesome. I got all the attention. I got all the coolest gifts. Everybody wanted to take a picture with me. Everybody wanted to hug and kiss me all the time. I was the youngest child, which comes with special treatment. I got hand-me-downs and a lot of new stuff. It was the life of a king. What more can a six year old ask for? It was heaven!

Then one day... BOOM! A little 7 pound baby boy with the cutest curly hair, big eyes, big nose and cute little smile came into my life. For my seventh birthday I got a baby brother. A baby brother! Most seven year olds get clothes, toys or if you're lucky an iPod or something like that. Nope, I got a baby brother! Awesome right?

Isaiah coming into my life was a major event for me, a turning point. It was a turning point because all of a sudden I had to share the attention. I got less attention which meant Isaiah got more hugs and kisses. People wanted to take pictures with him, and now he was the youngest grandchild. Now my hand-me-downs were going to be his hand-me-downs.

The other reason it is a major turning point in my life is that I became an older brother too! Which makes me a role model. Being a role model is a huge responsibility. Little brothers idolize their older brothers. I see that Isaiah wants to be just like me, so I have to set a good example.

Isaiah has changed my life forever, and I'm glad. I'm still learning and getting better at being a big brother and a better role model. I know that this is something that will last for the rest of my life... and I love it.

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*Myles Del Rosario enjoys playing many sports, such as baseball, basketball, and dodgeball but his favourite is volleyball. Myles recently moved to a new school which was difficult at first but now he is enjoying.*

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## GRADE 7/8 ENGLISH

**Elena Prescott**

First Place – Grade 7  
Toronto District School Board

# As Colourful as Black and White

“The earth has its music for those who will listen” – George Santayana

It's sunny outside, I tell myself, it's sunny. Nothing helps. To me, the world is gray, yet all too vivid at the same time. It is as if I have one eye gazing through a thermal lens, every colour clashing together in hot and cold, and one eye through a black and white one, my surroundings washed out and colourless. My footsteps ring out across the worn, weathered sidewalk. I exit the shadows cast by the buildings alongside me and cross the road amongst a swarm of pedestrians. I slow, and my father, sister and grandmother all bid me good luck; hugs, hopes and farewells passed among us.

I turn and follow my mother, making an effort to smile. Seconds away is the Royal Conservatory of Music building, where this year I'll be taking the exam for their level advancement program. As I enter its shadow, my throat tightens, the building's rust coloured brick rising before me in a menacing wall. Entering through the cool glass doors, I wander the desolate hallways, examining the instruments on display. Approaching a stairwell, my mother and I climb upwards, my movements stiff. We arrive at a table, and register there.

I sit in the waiting room, my sweat coated hands clutching my folder as if it were a life line. Its purple plastic is cool and slippery, my fingerprints visible upon its surface. Despite the windows lining one wall, the room is dimly lit. My stomach is tied in knots, my teeth clenched tightly. Inside me is a mixture of apprehension and excitement for what is to come.

"If you could please follow me, it's nearly your turn." The face of the woman at the registration desk swims above me. I stand, hugging my mother once more before heading down the hall and sitting before a closed door. Behind it I hear someone else playing, the piano's notes echoing hollowly in my head, time stretching out. Suddenly I'm entering the room, handing the examiner my books, sitting at the piano bench. I play scales, triads, my fingers finding the notes and pressing them mechanically. Silence. Her voice rings in the still room, "Study in C Major."

I breathe deeply, and play. The music flows through me, calling forth all my emotion, all my teacher's remarks, all my hours of practice. I look down and see black and white, yet the keys of the piano convey so many colours. That was my turning point. It is then that I realized the importance of perseverance, of courage.

You should appreciate what you do, should try new things. Without the will to play, I wouldn't be sitting here now. Without practice and the faith I hold within me, I wouldn't be hearing what I hear now. I bask in this feeling, this music, realizing then that the world is as colourful as black and white, that life is only what you make it to be.

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*Elena Prescott has a passion for art and music. She has been an avid reader since a young age and has, over time, developed that love into writing. For the past seven years, Elena has been playing the piano and has an appreciation for all forms of art. In the future, she plans to continue exploring the world.*

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### Adele Lopes

Second Place – Grade 8  
Toronto District School Board

## The Fight That Matters the Most

I panted heavily. I was at taekwondo training, and it was the most intense four hour class I had ever experienced. In two days, I would be going to the biggest Canadian competition that would take me to Europe if I won. All my instructors and teammates had scoffed when I told them and had even said, "Good luck not getting knocked out on your first round." Their comments made me feel isolated, insecure and angry. They also made me question my own determination. After that training session, I changed my mind set and became more defiant. I WILL win this. I am NOT nervous. Ok, maybe just a bit.

In the warm-up area, the noise hit my ears as hard as Ronaldo's kick. I heard an array of accents and saw a medley of faces. I saw instructors and fellow competitors from Nunavut all the way to Colorado. Looking at the mass of bodies gathered here set me on edge and made me very aware of the weight upon my shoulders. Without warning, all the memories of the negative comments popped into my head. I pushed them away as hard as I could. The announcer called my name and I made my way toward the mat. My stomach felt like a mall on Black Friday- way too packed. I shouldn't have had that trail mix.

I fixed my short hair and uniform before I stepped onto the mat. All the other thoughts on my mind fell away and I ruminated on all the things I had learned in training. I felt determination and willpower mixed with adrenaline surge through me. As the coach blew her whistle, all my concentration zeroed in on my opponent. Two rounds and four minutes later, the buzzer sounded. I had won 16-6! I jumped for joy at the feat I had attained.

In 15 minutes, I was back on the mat and I was dog-tired. My muscles were sore, my feet ached and I was starting to get a headache. I felt defeated and dreary already. My opponent must have been about six feet tall, and I felt very intimidated. Time passed very quickly. I knew I had lost before I even looked at the final score. It was 8-6 for my opponent. Disappointment washed over me. They were right. I wasn't good enough to win.

It took me a few minutes to contemplate things. I had lost the match, but I had tried my best in both matches. I reminded myself of the mantra on our school wall "Quitters never win, winners never quit". I ended up winning third place that night. Maybe the haters were right; I didn't win, but I did do my best.

I'm still training today, aiming for my next medal. Some days will be tough, but you've always got to cheer yourself on. You must persevere every day. The fight that matters the most is with your inner negativity, not with others.

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*Adele Lopes enjoys reading; her bookshelf consists of historical-fiction to dystopian-fiction. She likes to read long into the night, after she has told her parents she would only read one page. Adele also loves to play the piano and the viola in her spare time. She speaks French, English and Portuguese.*

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### Michelle Binkley

Third Place – Grade 8  
Toronto District School Board

## Brace Yourself: This is my Life

**B**eing diagnosed with scoliosis didn't change my life at first, but a little later I was told that I was going to have to get a back brace. That really changed my life. I had to start being more responsible and organised; it changed my personality and the way I thought of myself.

When I first received the brace, I had to figure out when I had to wear it and gradually increase how many hours I had to wear it. I had to keep track of how long to wear it each day. I wrote how long I had to wear my brace on the calendar in my room. I have to continue to be responsible even though I have to wear it the same amount of time each day. It is crucial to know how long I have had it off and when to put it on each day.

The brace changed how I thought about myself and it changed my personality. When I first wore it to school, I felt awkward and scared. I thought that people would treat me differently. I didn't want to feel that I was a different person. For the first bit, it felt like some treated me a little differently, but it may have just been me because I still have the same friends. Now the brace is a part of me and being with my friends is so normal that I can't even remember not having my brace, but it did make me feel more vulnerable and shy then I was.

Right now, I have to wear my brace 20-22 hours a day and soon I go back to Sick Kids Hospital to see if I can start wearing it less often. If doctors tell me I am almost done growing, I will be able to reduce the time I wear it. It will take 6 months for me to be fully out of it and when it's off I think I will feel weird, like I'm forgetting something, but I will also feel less conspicuous.

Having the brace has been a troubling experience. It is painful and I can't do a lot of the things I used to do, such as physical activity, sitting on the floor, and even hanging out with my friends without having to worry if I have had it off too long. A major turning point in my life has been learning that I am thankful I have had it, rather than something worse like surgery on my spine. When I get the brace off, I will be more appreciative of what I have and what I am capable of.

This experience has allowed me to relate to other people who have to deal with challenges with greater understanding. I am very grateful that this is being done now and that I will not have to live through my life in pain.

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*Michelle Binkley lives in Toronto. She is lively, creative, and strives to do her best at all times. Michelle loves to sing and currently performs with her school choir at every opportunity. She also paints beautifully and enjoys drawing and is working to attain goals in The Arts.*

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## GRADE 9/10 ENGLISH

**Ryan Alfonso**

First Place – Grade 10  
Simcoe-Muskoka Catholic District School Board

# Twelve Minutes

A meaningless number alone, however, twelve-minutes was all it took to change my life. My school has a ritual of having students mindlessly running for twelve-minutes around a track. Most students could run the brief 400 metre track with ease, several times; however, I was not like most students.

I awoke at 6:12 am, brushed my teeth, combed my hair, and dressed myself in whatever would envelop me. This programmed process would take me 43 minutes leaving five minutes to wait for my bus, and eat whatever I could. The blinding eyes of the mechanical monstrosity would encroach on my lonely rural road and abduct me. Like a machine, I lived a cyclical, punctual, dull life.

It was the second semester of grade nine. I found myself in the company of an elderly, brown-haired, brown-eyed man. His name was Mr. Doughty. Neither Mr. Doughty nor I knew the impact he would have on my life. Mr. Doughty was the Mayfield physical-education teacher, notorious for obliterating students through strenuous work.

The third week of his course we were to attempt the twelve-minute-run. "The twelve-minute-run" was a grueling physical examination that left me, an asthmatic and overweight student, grasping at each individual oxygen particle. My first twelve minutes had seen me fail the run with a meager four laps. I was ashamed of myself and this crippling result. My sweating, gasping, and struggle were in vain.

The second twelve-minute-run occurred the next week. Mr. Doughty had developed a sense for which students needed encouragement. I piqued his interest. It was a day where even the bugs didn't dare leave the safety of the cool shade, but Mr. Doughty was unrelenting in his efforts. The track was blinding with the gleaming gravel and freshly-laid cement lining. Mr. Doughty exclaimed, "Get ready to water the grass. You can all sweat right?" On his mark, the track flooded like a tsunami, flattening the track. This flood lasted twelve minutes, however, half-way through Mr. Doughty began encouraging us, hustling us to hurry, and would pass with encouraging words. I began to gain pace and, gradually, was running faster. I completed what to me was an impressive five laps in twelve minutes.

Weeks had passed. I still lived my cyclical life, waking at 6:12 am and waiting five minutes for the bus. Today would be different. In Mr. Doughty's class we would be doing another twelve-minute-run. The sea

of blue uniforms found its way to the track. Strangely Mr. Doughty asked each student what their goal was for the run; I ambitiously said six laps when I knew I could only run five. Mr. Doughty expected me to reach my goal. I ran the twelve minutes but came up short with only five. Mr. Doughty would not accept underachievement and told me to run the twelve minutes again. I ran the twelve minutes three times that day, never reaching my goal.

After school I tried one last time, hopefully not in futility. I was running on the track listening to the hum of the timer when Mr. Doughty came outside and witnessed me complete six laps. With this triumph, I had climbed my metaphorical Kilimanjaro. I could conquer any adversities. For the first time the machine became a man.

The following day I realized I never once thanked Mr. Doughty for his efforts. I walked into the claustrophobic classroom and said my thanks but Mr. Doughty was seated like an old-Greek statue. He never acknowledged my thanks. What he did say was, "Be spontaneous". Then he left the class leaving me to ponder his words. I took his advice to heart. Hence he encouraged bold risks such as trying out for the rugby team despite not being drafted.

I woke up the next day without my blaring, deafening, excruciating alarm. I slept too long, finding myself with twelve minutes to get dressed, brush my teeth, and eat my breakfast. I managed to be punctual to class despite having no schedule. When I entered Mr. Doughty's class he was away for surgery. I would never see Mr. Doughty again. All that remains are the words of his "last testament": "Be spontaneous". Twelve minutes changed my life.

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*Ryan Alfonso is a first generation Canadian; all of his family was born in Cuba. He is bilingual in English and Spanish. He enjoys cycling around his town. Ryan is proud of his nationality, ethnicity and his family. He would like to make his mark on the world, himself.*

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### Vincent Vargas

Second Place – Grade 10  
Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board

## Hidden Scars

Starting a couple of years ago, back in the eighth grade, cutting my wrists was my escape route whenever I felt overwhelmed. It was a type of high that became an addiction. I remember the first time that I picked up a knife to harm myself, and how I watched my blood painfully seep through my skin; later, I cried myself to sleep.

I stopped harming myself in grade nine, but I started harming myself again at the beginning of grade ten because of my anxiety and mood swings. I was striving to become "Mr. Perfect" who did everything, from going to endless volleyball practices, to being exhausted from my part-time job, and achieving perfect grades at school. I would stay awake all night completing my homework and then go to school the next morning feeling sick to my stomach. When my world seemed so hopeless and desperate, I chose to return again to my addiction of cutting myself.

One night, when my schedule was really overloaded, I felt so overwhelmed by my homework and I how I needed to study for the three tests that I had the next day, I started to feel as though I was going through a mental breakdown. I felt sick to my stomach and I even vomited. As I was returning to my bedroom, my legs felt weak, I fell to the floor. My head was spinning and I was sobbing uncontrollably. My mother rushed to me, held me in her arms and asked me what was wrong. I continued to sob as she helped me up and she walked me back to my room. She told me not to worry so much about the tests and then she reluctantly

left me alone to rest. After she left my room, I noticed the scissors on my desk and then I decided to put the blade to my wrist while I bit my lip to suppress the pain. With the blood seeping out, I felt as though I had found my perfect escape route; one that I would return to for the next couple of weeks.

I started to wear long sleeves for volleyball to hide my wrists and I had to hide my pain whenever the ball hit my wrists. One day at school, I was so humiliated when one of my classmates pointed out my swollen red wrists. I was so embarrassed and it was at that moment when I realized that I had made the wrong choice. I felt so ashamed and empty that I decided to leave my home that night. I received many phone calls from my worried mother who cared so much about me, but I ignored them. At the time, I didn't realize that my actions hurt her, too.

When I went back home, my mother noticed my swollen wrists and broke down into tears. Grasping my wrists, she told me that self-harm never brings any positive changes. As she cradled me in her arms, I realized that the true remedy for my sorrows was love, not self-harm. My mother was truly a hero. She was my beacon of hope that showed me the path to recovery.

My mother helped to me to learn that perfect test scores were not worth sacrificing my own health and happiness. I realized that self-harm wasn't the solution to my problems and what I needed to focus on was self-care, not self-harm. I learned that I needed to find ways to reduce my stress and anxiety levels and to always remember the importance of never overloading my daily schedule with too many tasks and responsibilities. Striving to achieve my goals is one thing, but striving for perfection hurts me and the people who love me.

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*Vincent Vargas enjoys being on the volleyball team, watching TED talks on YouTube and his favourite subject is drama. In the future, Vincent would love to travel to France and Japan.*

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### **Katelyn Wang**

Third Place – Grade 10  
York Region District School Board

## **In Memory**

**T**hree days after Christmas in 2011, my Aunt Lina took her last breath and passed into the night. She had been diagnosed with breast cancer, which consequently, had spread into her lungs. Following her passing, there was the expected sadness and mourning in coping with her passing. I remember my mother commenting that the world had just became a little duller.

I was ten years old when Aunt Lina passed away. It was my first experience of death within the family, and inevitably, the first time I was confronted with the fragility and brevity of our existence. Even though it was incredibly difficult to come to terms with the loss of her, more significantly, I was confounded by questions regarding the inexplicable choices made by my aunt leading to her death, and thus, the underlying measure of my own life.

You see, after her initial diagnosis and first treatment of chemotherapy, Lina opted to forgo this treatment. Against her doctor's advice, and unbeknownst to her family members, she chose the path of natural wellness.

When faced with this life-changing decision, one would think that the choice was clear. At that point, all the knowledge to which I had been exposed, only reinforced the persistent human will to survive, and extend life. However, for Aunt Lina, one of her greatest desires was to have a child. Given her age and the duration of the chemotherapy treatment, she believed there would be little possibility to ever have a baby

thereafter. To her, the choice was no longer unequivocal- it was either a longer life, or the chance to give her life worth.

I can only imagine her personal struggle as she challenged what she valued most, and ultimately, determined what truly mattered. Unfortunately, Lina was never able to fulfill her dream. Nonetheless, she remained true to herself up until her last days, and more than anything, owned up to her decision and accepted the outcome.

After her passing, my mind was swirling with questions pertaining to the validation of our life- my life. These thoughts made me wonder- what do we live for? Moreover, I began to ponder the meaning of life as opposed to its quantifiable value. Many people say they wish they can live forever, however, I now see there is something more than simply living a long life. While longevity is an obvious blessing, a life lived without intrinsic purpose and meaning only translates to days in empty confinement. Whether Aunt Lina's choice was right or wrong, witnessing her defiance against life in pursuit of something she wanted so dearly, inspired me. Before this, I was living day-to-day without much thought.

Growing up, I had reached a certain point at which I began to think about the kind of person I would like to be, and the impact I would have in this world. I wondered, how do I want people to remember me? And more importantly, I asked myself what I want out of life. In the case of Lina, she chose the unexpected option, one that would shorten her life in hopes to possibly gain something she thought was greater.

Her passing made me realize that life is not only short, but also, that we should discover the overarching purpose which gives life its true meaning otherwise, our days are only marked by the passing of time void of colour and significance. While Lina never achieved her goal, I would dare say she had a greater effect than many may ever know. Now that I am older, I wish I could have known her more, but it is amazing how she continues to encourage me. In fact, it was in her darkest days that she shed her brightest light on me. Indeed, my aunt's death made the world a little duller, but the insight she bestowed will continue to enlighten me throughout my life.

Aunt Lina had lived freely without fear, so I now seek to venture beyond my own limitations defined by fear and comfort, and to do so with unwavering strength and courage, and thus, act on my deepest convictions. And perhaps, I may also leave this world a little duller when I am gone.

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*Katelyn Wang enjoys working towards solutions regarding issues she is passionate about, such as the environment, disease prevention and clean drinking water. She also enjoys public speaking, debating, playing piano and trumpet, drawing and writing short stories. Katelyn aspires to make this world a better place in her own unique way.*

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## GRADE 11/12 ENGLISH

**Madelaine Koost**

First place – Grade 12  
Simcoe-Muskoka Catholic District School Board

# A War Within

**A**s I walk down the long hallway to my new home for the next couple of days my arms are held tightly by the grip of two security guards. My legs shiver from the paper thin gown I am wearing. I try not to show fear, not to cry. The pain in my arm is unbearable, but I ignore it. My mind is consumed with what will happen next. I glance back at the tears falling down my mother's face. In my mind replays her scared, shocked face. I turn forward commanding my mind to keep walking and for my feet to follow suit.

It is the middle of May. I sit alone. I am in a somber beige room with a single, small window and a bed bolted to the floor. There are no bed sheets, at the risk of one of us strangling ourselves. The door is locked and I am left alone, but not really, because of the camera mounted in the corner staring at my every move. I am not here because I am in trouble. I am here because I am scared--scared of myself.

There has been a never-ending war inside my head for the past several months. The bombs, firing of guns and threats of death do not stop, even to sleep. The two countries, Emotion and Logic, are fighting to take over my body and so far it looks like Emotion is winning. Emotion has come up with advanced strategies to destroy as many of the Logic's as they possibly can. Depression is the name they have given this strategy.

I am in a hospital ward for adolescents with mental illness. I am here because of the violent war taking place inside my head. I am here because the only way to release the cries of violence going on inside my head was to inflict it upon my body.

It is the February before my hospital visit. I sit alone. The smell of blood fills the bathtub I sit in. The screams of the soldiers start now, louder than ever before. I can't stop them. As the screams continue, the water turns a deeper shade of red. The razor blade I hold in my hand is a release like no other. It is Emotion's weapon of choice to commence its plan, "depression", and take over so that Logic has lost the battle once and for all. This razor--it has the same effect on my mind as opening a pop bottle and hearing the satisfying sizzling sound of the carbon dioxide being released into the air. As I slice, the screams inside my head fade. Those at battle put down their guns and shake hands. The war is temporarily over. But then it happens again. This war never ends. The ammunition never runs out and the death threats continue.

It is early May. I sit alone. The door swings open and in walks my doctor wearing her crisp white coat. This is just my annual check up, the one you have every so often to make sure the machine is running smoothly. These specific appointments are most important to the elderly, not teenagers like me. She weighs me and notices something different. I am not me anymore. I have lost my athletic build and my colour--unless "broken" is a colour. As the questions continue, the secrets under my sleeve start to come alive, itching to be discovered. They are tearing away at me; I'm not sure how much longer I can keep it quiet. In an act of saving myself I roll up my sleeve. This act is what put me in a safe place. This act is what helped me save myself and my family from the pain of grief. This act led me to the beige room with a single window and no bed sheets. This small act of courage saved me from myself. The room goes black. I am in the beige room, the room you wouldn't wish upon your worst enemy but here I sit disjointed from both my body and mind. Logic and Emotion are tired of fighting over who gets my body while they are both taking turns destroying it. In their path they have left scars, feelings of burden and many tear-filled, lonely nights.

It is easy to let Emotion win. To let its war lead you to razors and pills and ropes of all thicknesses. But learning to escape Emotion without escaping your body is one of the most difficult challenges to overcome.

The easy way out is to let its war defeat you, to give in to its razors and pills and ropes, or to just leave. But where does that leave the people you leave behind? The war is not over once it defeats your body; it just swallows new victims. These victims are the people that were up all night worried about you, when you thought you were alone, when you thought you were a burden. These are the people that couldn't eat because the bags under your eyes were enough to make them vomit. It is easy to escape your body. It takes strength to escape the war inside your mind.

It is June. I am not alone.

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*Madelaine Koost enjoys taking part in many sports activities such as cross country, soccer and volleyball as well as rep level hockey. Madelaine is a true lover of the outdoors as she fills her summers with long canoe trips down Whitewater Rivers and working as a camp counsellor. Next year she hopes to travel and pursue her love for the outdoors.*

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### Melissa Cavallo

Second Place – Grade 12  
Simcoe-Muskoka Catholic District School Board

## The Pink Ribbon

I sighed as I glanced around the empty restaurant. The worn wooden podium would be my post for the next few hours as I completed my evening shift at work. One of the waitresses came up to greet me as she started her shift. She deposited several loonies into the donation bin beside me and handed me a pink ribbon as she pinned one to the front of her shirt. I thanked her as I held the small pin between my fingers, gripping it tightly. Although she did not know it, that pink ribbon had come to mean a lot to me over the past few months.

Tiny spots of blood filled my vision as I finally allowed myself to admit that something was wrong. They covered my shirts, my bed, and my bras, always catching my eye. Early that Monday morning, I sat on the edge of my bed and did the worst thing I could have done; I googled my symptoms. That dreadful six letter word filled my search page. My body trembled as I continued to absorb the words that were on the screen. I scanned article after article; all of them gave me the same, grim diagnosis. I forced myself to stop reading and began inspecting myself. My arm felt like lead as I lifted it above my head. I searched for the lump that would confirm my internet search, and my nerves were only slightly eased when one was not found.

At school I felt numb. Visions of myself in a hospital, no hair on my head, no life in my eyes, preoccupied my thoughts. I was completely alone with my realization. At the time there was a large argument unfolding amongst my friends: two warring sides that showed no signs of backing down. How could I share something of such importance with my friends when they could not even look each other in the eye?

I told my mom that evening, keeping my voice steady. Although her face remained blank, I could tell that she began to fear the same outcome that I had assumed early that morning. An appointment with a specialist was made that night. Throughout the week leading up to the appointment, I inspected myself constantly, determined to find the lump that would seal my fate. Every night before bed, with the light of my phone screen illuminating my somber face, I would read more articles. The possibility of having cancer was proving difficult to ignore.

My appointment with the specialist arrived. I sat on an examination table in a cramped room, wearing a paper vest the receptionist had handed me, feeling vulnerable and scared. The examination was physically

and emotionally painful as the doctor probed me, searching for lumps as I had so many times before. The doctor booked an ultrasound, insisting he could not give an accurate diagnosis without the results.

During the weeks before the ultrasound, I continued to compulsively inspect myself, convinced that I would find a lump. The spots of blood continued to appear, larger than before. It was a visual reminder every day that my life may soon be vastly different. I tortured myself with images of myself too weak to move and enduring painful therapies. Although I felt so hopeless on the inside, I was careful not to let it break the happy facade that I presented to others.

During my ultrasound, I laid across the table with my arms above my head and a stiff pillow wedged uncomfortably beneath my shoulder. Every few minutes, the technician would pause and more closely inspect the screen before pressing the sensor deeper into my skin. As the music of a soft rock radio station lightly played in the background, I finally allowed myself to accept my situation. It was possible that I may be diagnosed with breast cancer in the next week, and no amount of worrying or crying could change that fact. There were hundreds of thousands of people living with this disease who did nothing to deserve it, and I was not any different. I realized that the outcome of the ultrasound did not have to define my identity and future.

Once again, I sat in the cramped examination room, sure of what the results would be. I felt mocked as the doctor came in with a smile on his face. As he began speaking, I could only hear the thumping of my heart, the palpitations becoming more intense with each passing second. I watched his lips moving, spewing medical jargon that explained my condition. I only became aware of his voice when he said the words that would allow me to take what seemed like my first breath in weeks: it's not cancerous. The veil of darkness that had been placed over my life was torn down and I could finally see clearly.

At the age of sixteen, I never imagined that I would lie awake at night, convinced that my life was going to come to a painful end before it really began. I have endured only the smallest fraction of the pain a cancer patient does, and it almost broke my spirit completely. It was only when I stopped thinking about myself and considered the hardships of others that I realized that I contained the strength to overcome my diagnosis. Although the anxiety did not leave me, I allowed myself to have a more positive outlook on my situation. I have a newfound respect for cancer patients and survivors, because cancer is not just a disease of the body, but also a disease that alters the mind.

We all contain a certain strength within ourselves that only becomes apparent when we need it the most. This strength does not obliterate our fears, but shrinks them down so that we may overcome them. That pink ribbon that was handed to me so many months ago represents the strength that I, and many others have found within themselves, and proudly display it to the world.

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*Melissa Cavallo is passionate about learning new things. She enjoys playing music, reading, and spending quality time with friends and family. She plans to attend university for biomedical science in the fall, and hopes to obtain a career in the medical field in the future.*

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**Elizabeth Lewis**

Third Place – Grade 11  
Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board

## Dreaming in the Dark

I can remember a time when Crown Heights, Brooklyn, felt like home. A place filled with such familiarity every detail was embedded in my head. The raucous yelling in the streets of carefree individuals with no need for sleep, the vibrant convenience stores with enough candy to feed a small village on every corner,

and the unmistakable golden sun that often made its appearance in the humid summers. Most of all, I recall the people I called family. Our brownstone apartment was our little community, a place which protected us from the harsh outside world and demands of society. It was filled with laughter and happiness that threatened to burst at the seams.

However, at age seven, my cornucopia of ignorant childhood happiness flew away like the red balloons I clung to every Independence Day. It was the signal of a new beginning and it was then that I knew everything had to change. Maybe, I had just swept it under the rug like every inconvenient occurrence that had interfered in my short lifetime. Or maybe it was the way that everyone around me pretended almost as if this thing wasn't happening, keeping their feelings at bay to ignore the continuous pain. All I knew, as the days turned to months, were these common occurrences and realities were now unfathomable and unacceptable. I told myself that it was time for change.

The flaws that had always seemed to disappear into darkness, were now highlighted under my intense scrutiny as if they had been placed under a spotlight with nowhere to hide. It started with the bottles of blown glass that seemed always to line the street like soldiers reporting for duty.

Certain stores were always open with a promise to fulfill every desire, feeding the temptation. Maybe it was the thin paper that was passed between practiced fingers or the single moms across the street where every interaction was peculiar, who on every occasion never seemed quite right. I was seeing the definition of alcoholism and crack addiction. It was the neon lights, their effervescent glow which spoke volumes to those who wanted to escape reality for just a second, for a lingering taste of unsolicited fantasy, a gateway to a world of feelings bound without love. The clothes worn by "lords of the streets", whose continuous wars painted the community with vibrant shades of red, a flag they would forever stand by. What about the law you may ask? Whenever they came around, the streets suddenly became empty. No one ever forgot the men in blue who would not stop beating those innocent boys until their faces were pummeled black and blue.

I saw the defects that lived within my family like the unfixed, crooked smiles that graced the faces of portraits that lined the walls. There were the parties which played as an anthem to living another day, the men who decided it wasn't death but infidelity that would make the marriage they vowed till death do us part, and the fathers that would walk in and out of lives, a cacophony of things in record rotation. I could see the way certain women were treated as objects strictly for male pleasure and worse still, they felt this was the way they should be treated. It was as though their lives served only a meaningless cycle of being something disposable, at any time easily thrown to the side, having no other use.

One afternoon, I asked my grandmother about the things I saw. "Why were things the way they were? Why were we the way we are?" I asked, "Why would some women stay with the same men, though they lie across the streets like dogs? Why couldn't things be better?" She replied as if talking about the cool weather we had that late August like it was any other common occurrence. "That's just the way it is", she said. I made myself a promise in those days. I would never succumb to that treatment or make that expectation my own. I would never normalize a substandard, dysfunctional lifestyle or relationship.

Instead of being one of the girls who waited for a man to come around, to drive off into the rhetorical sunset in a shining Rolls Royce, erasing all the pressures of life, I chose to be confident in my self-assuredness, dream and desired purpose. I looked at the young men, men who saw nothing more than basketball and hip hop, saviours to whom they prayed on bended knee, and decided I needed better. I was worthy of better.

I became invested in my education, a path I envisioned would soon create a better life. While having significant wealth became a part of my dream, it is not at the expense of real, meaningful relationships. In the end, what is life without the people that love you.

I am resolved to not repeat what I saw. People who were unhappy with their lives, unthankful for the relationships around them, and ungrateful for the time they still had to chase a better dream. I saw in them the constant need to escape a life they didn't desire. A life of pain, sadness, and brokenness. Real change, real transformation became my pursuit.

Moving to Canada hasn't necessarily made the feelings that still linger subside, but it further moves me to dream, aspire, and work for what I really desire. I am motivated to create my new world, one significantly

better than the one I saw all around me. I guess they are correct when they speak of the beauty that comes from struggle, even though you can't see it right in that moment.

When I go back to Brooklyn, I can tell you things have changed for the place I called home, the place I discovered meaning for my life. Brooklyn will forever be my city, a place where I learned to dream in the dark.

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*Elizabeth Lewis lives in Brampton, Ontario. Elizabeth's interests include reading, researching human-interest stories, graphic design, photography and running. She is also a gifted and compelling singer. One of her accomplishments was winning public speaking competitions for her grade. Elizabeth plans to pursue a career in photo and investigative journalism.*

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## GRADE 9/10 FRENCH

**Camille Tsang**

First Place – Grade 9  
Toronto District School Board

# Ce qui fait un bon ami

Pensez-vous que vous savez ce qui fait un bon ami? Avant la septième année, j'ai pensé que je savais tout, mais en fait, je ne savais rien à propos des amis. J'ai pensé que je savais ce qu'un bon ami était et qui étaient mes bons amis mais quelque chose inattendue s'est passée pendant la septième année. Une de mes meilleures amies a commencé à m'intimider. Je l'ignorais au début, mais elle a continué de le faire de plus en plus. Elle disait des choses horribles à moi et à propos de moi, à tout le monde. Elle disait mes secrets aux gens de toute sorte, qui n'avaient pas besoin de savoir à propos de ma vie privée. C'était une des périodes la plus mauvaise de ma vie. Après six mois de l'intimidation, j'en ai eu marre. Je ne pouvais plus écouter ce qu'elle disait à moi. De jour en jour, elle détruisait ma confiance. Alors j'ai arrêté de parler à elle et la regarder. Selon moi, elle n'existait pas.

Une des choses la plus difficile au monde c'est de passer de parler à quelqu'un chaque jour pour au moins sept heures, à faire semblant que cette personne n'existe pas. Il est presque impossible et cette expérience a changé comment que je vois l'amitié. C'est très difficile à décrire le sentiment quand on perd un ami. Même si l'ami a été terrible, néanmoins ça fait du mal. Perdre un ami c'est comme perdre un membre de votre famille. C'est comme l'expression anglaise, «les amis sont la famille que nous choisissons pour nous-mêmes». Même si mon amie a été terrible à moi, elle a été comme une soeur dans un sens.

Après cet incident, j'ai pensé que j'ai appris comment distinguer entre un bon et un mauvais ami. C'était avec cet esprit de confiance que j'ai commencé l'école secondaire. J'ai pensé qu'il serait difficile de trouver de bons amis, mais en fait, j'ai trouvé une bande de filles et nous sommes devenues des amies fidèles. De plus, j'ai fait un autre ami, plus aîné, qui avait des intérêts très similaires à moi. On est devenu de bons amis très vite, et je l'ai présenté à mon groupe d'amies. J'ai pensé que je pouvais faire confiance à lui, mais j'étais si incorrecte.

Un jour mon ami a décidé qu'il allait me jouer une petite blague, après avoir reçu un nouveau numéro de téléphone. Il a décidé de m'envoyer un texto de son nouveau numéro en faisant semblant d'être un admirateur secret. Au début, je pense que je me sentais un peu flattée. Il y avait quelqu'un qui <<m'aimait>>. Mais après un peu de temps, j'ai commencé à me sentir effrayée parce que cette personne inconnue m'envoyait des textos qui contenaient des détails personnels, que seulement mes meilleurs amis savaient. Il disait qu'il m'a adoré et chaque fois que je lui ai demandé sa vraie identité, il a refusé de me dire. En même temps, je parlais avec mon ami à son vieux numéro, et je confiais en lui que je me sentais mal à l'aise et anxieuse, même effrayée. <<L'admirateur secret>> m'a convaincu de lui rencontrer à un café près de l'école, et un peu malgré moi, je suis allée pendant le déjeuner. C'était là que j'ai appris que c'était lui qui m'a envoyé les textos amoureux. Ce jour-là, j'ai arrêté de parler à lui et j'ai replié sur moi-même. Il a trahi ma confiance.

Après cet incident, je me sentais bouleversée et j'ai perdu confiance en moi-même. C'était une période noire. Je ne voulais pas aller à l'école de peur que je le verrais, et j'avais des difficultés à m'endormir parce que je ne pouvais pas arrêter de penser à propos de l'incident. Après beaucoup de réflexion et discussions avec ma famille, je me suis rendue compte que je n'ai rien appris après le premier incident, sinon je n'aurais pas commis la même erreur. Des fois, les apparences peuvent être trompeuses et j'ai découvert qu'il y a des situations qui dépassent les limites. Dans ces cas, je dois les reconnaître et repenser mon amitié avec ces amis.

De plus, j'ai appris qu'il faut penser d'abord à moi-même. J'essaie toujours d'être quelqu'une honnête, sympathique, et gentille. Je traite les gens dans ma vie avec beaucoup de respect et j'attache de l'importance aux relations de soutien, attentionnées et loyales. Si quelqu'un ne me donne pas le même respect, je dois faire un pas en arrière et réévaluer la situation. De cette façon je vais avancer, et ça c'est comment je vais savoir ce qui fait un bon ami.

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*Camille Tsang was born in Canada and speaks both French and English. She loves to spend her spare time baking, reading, and playing badminton. She also loves to travel, and has travelled to many different countries. When she grows up, Camille aspires to be a French teacher, as she loves helping people learn.*

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## GRADE 11/12 FRENCH

**Maggie Shan**

First Place – Grade 11  
Peel District School Board

# Compte à rebours

**L'**horloge me regarde fixement - 23:55. L'échéance se rapproche. Mes mains se sont pressées alors que je continue à taper à l'ordinateur. «Quel imbécile de le laisser si tard!», je jure ironiquement. Il ne reste qu'une phrase...quelque mots... un point. «Tache de mathématique soumis 23:59».

Un projet à rendre, fait aux derniers moments; une tâche submise juste avant le dernier délais. Pareil à la puberté, cette situation est inévitable pour n'importe quel étudiant d'école secondaire. Elle se passe plus

souvent pour certains personnes et n'arrête jamais. Comme percer un bouton têtue qui se repousse chaque fois, la procrastination devient une habitude qui restera la longueur de la carrière scolaire.

Il y avait trois ans, j'avais ma première rencontre avec la procrastination. C'était le début du 9e année, pour une de mes premières tâches de mathématiques. À l'échéance de trois semaines, je me rassurais qu'il y avait plein de temps. Néanmoins, j'étais loin de me douter que ce n'est jamais le temps qui manque, mais nous qui lui manquons. Lors de la dernière semaine, j'ai commencé à se sentir la contrainte de temps. Je me dirais que je la finirais après le dîner...après quelques vidéos de youtube...après une pause aux toilettes... demain. Enfin, le dernier jour s'est approché et j'avais juste une phrase "Math investigation by Maggie Shan". Prise de panique et d'une montée d'adrénaline, je me suis mise à compléter ma recherche. Quand une personne est si tourmentée contre la montre, on commence à rêvasser une utopie d'éternité - un paradis du temps illimité, exempt de échéances. En vain, ce ne sont que des fantasmes et en réalité, il restait quelques seconds avant la date limite. Avec un soupir de soulagement je l'ai envoyé juste à l'heure. Au fur et à mesure du temps, cette rencontre est devenue une partie de mon quotidien.

Tandis que cette pratique est dissuadée, après avoir commencé l'école secondaire à Glenforest, la procrastination est aisément devenue ma meilleur amie. Comme le commencement de toutes les amitiés, après notre première réunion, je la voyais de plus en plus. Malgré les premières impressions, nous sommes devenues aussi intime que personne ne pouvait pas nous séparer. Dans chaque classe, pour chaque présentation ou feuille de travail, elle était là. Durant les instants d'importance, ou durant mes petits congés, elle était toujours à côté de moi.

Pour la décrire, ma nouvelle amie était extraordinaire. Bien qu'elle était rebelle et l'ennemie des professeurs, elle était très sociable. Tout le monde la connaissait et ses amis variaient entre les enfants jusqu'aux adultes. Remplis avec l'énergie, son esprit était ouvert pour n'importe quelle divertissement. Comme une fêtarde, elle m'encourageait toujours de m'amuser avec mes amis et de participer à chaque événement qui se passe. Au lieu de finir mes devoirs, j'étais convaincue que ma vie personnelle avait priorité.

Dès qu'elle s'ennuyait, elle me taquinait avec des plaintes. Au fil du temps, elle réussissait à me persuader de jouer à l'ordinateur ou de regarder un film. Par conséquent, plusieurs fois avant un examen, ses plaintes devenaient l'origine de nos arguments. Même les meilleurs des amies se disputaient. Nous querellions à propos de mes notes, et je la tenais fréquemment responsable pour mon manque de sommeil et mes tâches en retard.

Quoique notre amitié avait des hauts et des bas, elle a influencé ma vie sociale et professionnelle. En compagnie de la procrastination, je me suis accoutumée aux comptes à rebours très courts. Plus je passais de temps avec mon amie, plus je trouvais que je travaille mieux sous pression. Même s'il y a moins de temps, cette habitude m'a aidé à mieux concentrer et de travailler dans l'urgence - ce qui m'a aidé plusieurs fois pour les requêtes au dernier moment. De plus, avec la procrastination comme une amie proche, elle m'a fait prendre conscience de la valeur du temps. À l'âge de 17, puisque nous sommes encore trop jeunes, nous le tiens pour acquis. "Le temps perdu ne se rattrape jamais" - Robin Sharma.

Au cours de ma carrière scolaire, la procrastination était une grande influence qui m'a changé comme une étudiante et comme une personne. Ma première rencontre avec la procrastination en 9e année est devenue un point tournant qui a changé complètement mon expérience lycéen. Grâce à la procrastination, mon petit cadre de timidité était étendu et je suis devenue plus sociale. Tant que la procrastination est la source des plusieurs nuit blanches, elle n'est pas ni un défaut ni un avantage. Des fois elle me soutient, des fois elle me pose des problèmes, pourtant elle est toujours là, près de moi. Que ce soit une mémoire rigolarde ou catastrophique, la procrastination m'accompagnera toujours.

23:54, le mardi 22 2017, l'horloge se moque de moi. Mes mains se sont collées au clavier d'ordinateur alors que je continue à taper. Par hasard, cette histoire de mon point tournant est aussi affectée par mon amie la procrastination. Quelle ironie! Le temps s'écoule mais il reste qu'une phrase...quelque mots... un point...

"Compte à rebours par Maggie Shan - soumis 23:59".

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*Maggie Shan is interested in the various cultures around the world. While she is fluent in English, French and Mandarin, she aspires to learn more languages and travel across the globe.*

**Jessica Shao**

Second Place – Grade 11  
Peel District School Board

## Gâteau aux fruits

« Soufflez vos bougies et faire un vœu! »

Je peux vous dire que mon souhait d'anniversaire dans ce temps-là se composait d'une licorne, d'une calèche, et d'un autre type de gâteau car je déteste le gâteau aux fruits. J'ai rêvé d'un gâteau à étages. Chocolat au lait. Garnie de crème fouettée. Fini avec un filet de sauce caramel.

Je peux vous assurer que ces choses étaient sur mes listes de souhait d'anniversaire pour au moins 6 ans et aucun d'eux ne s'était jamais réalisé. Chaque année, tout était le même. Le même type de gâteau, les mêmes bougies bleues, et la même table en bois dans ma cuisine. C'était un petit gâteau aux fruits avec des fraises, mangues et kiwis tranchées.

Cependant, je ne me plains jamais parce que mon grand-père l'avait pire. Son gâteau était un pain de banane. Je me souviens que lorsque j'avais 7 ans, son anniversaire avait été celui que je n'ai pas aimé.

Jusqu'à mon 10e anniversaire, (le premier anniversaire que j'ai célébré après que j'ai déménagé de la maison de mes grands-parents avec mes parents), j'ai remarqué le changement de gâteau. Devant moi, il y avait un gâteau au chocolat. C'était l'anniversaire où j'ai fait un souhait différent.

Le changement de gâteau ne me concernait que jusqu'à l'âge de 12 ans.

Mon grand-père est un homme très énergique. Il sourit toujours et fait son tout pour notre famille. Tout au long de mon enfance, il avait été l'un de mes principaux gardiens. Il m'a appris comment voler un cerf-volant, comment faire du vélo, comment nager et surtout, comment devenir la personne que je suis aujourd'hui.

Après quelques semaines, j'ai eu le courage de lui poser des questions sur les pilules. Il m'a dit qu'ils devaient contrôler son taux sanguin parce qu'il avait le diabète de type 2. Le diabète de type 2 est un trouble à long terme dans lequel le corps n'est pas capable de produire l'insuline correctement. C'est une maladie qui peut causer des dommages au cœur, aux vaisseaux sanguins, et mène à des problèmes avec la digestion.

Mon grand-père est tenu de prendre un minimum de 3 pilules chaque jour et il est tenu de garder un journal de la nourriture qu'il mange tous les jours. Il est limité à sa sélection de nourriture, avec pratiquement aucun dessert au choix. Dans les épiceries, les options de desserts incluent des gâteaux en paquets «sans sucre» emballés qui contiennent habituellement du sucre et expirent en quelques jours. Quant aux restaurants, mon grand-père est souvent exclu car il y a rarement des options sans sucre. Par conséquent, il y avait beaucoup de dîners au restaurant qu'il était réticent à joindre.

Tout au long de mon enfance, le fait que je n'étais pas au courant que mon grand-père avait le diabète, je me sens coupable. L'innombrable nombre d'anniversaires que je me suis plaint et où j'ai froncé les sourcils au sujet de gâteau aux fruits, je n'avais jamais entendu une seule plainte de lui.

Pour moi, cela a été mon tournant dans ma vie. À partir de ce moment, ma vision de la société a changé. J'ai appris que notre société est inconsidérée dans la façon dont nous traitons les patients diagnostiqués avec le diabète. Malgré cela, la question était qu'il n'y avait pas d'action pour changer quoi que ce soit sur ce problème.

Le 27 septembre 2016, j'ai commencé ExplorerLaNourriture. Il s'agit d'un projet dédié aux patients diabétiques dans l'espoir de changer notre monde pour devenir plus égalisé pour les patients diabétiques. Actuellement, j'ai commencé un blog pour que les boulangers puissent se connecter et partager leurs recettes favorites pour les desserts pour diabétiques et des conseils. Mes produits incluent un livre de recettes pour les diabétiques, offert en anglais et en français, accompagné d'un calendrier. Mon but de ce projet est de permettre aux patients diabétiques de profiter des mêmes desserts que tout le monde. Ce

projet est une plate-forme construite sur le tournant de ma vie et j'ai consacré mes profits à l'Association canadienne des diabétiques du Canada.

Bien que cet événement ne m'est pas arrivé personnellement, j'ai été affecté par mes actions inconsidérées quand j'étais enfant. Jusqu'à maintenant, j'avais été témoin des deux côtés. Quand j'étais enfant, j'étais un étranger: quelqu'un sans éducation sur le diabète maintenant, je suis quelqu'un qui comprend la vie difficile d'un diabétique.

Pour moi, un tournant n'a pas nécessairement un changement radical qui est arrivé à vous personnellement, mais un point qui a eu un impact direct sur votre vie. Autrefois, un morceau de gâteau ne signifiait plus qu'une simple collision de cacao, de farine et des œufs. Cependant, aujourd'hui, une seule tranche de gâteau apporte tant de sens et de souvenirs à mon cœur.

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*Jessica Shao is enrolled in the IB program at her school. She loves travelling and learning different languages. Currently, she is part of the Mississauga Symphony Youth Orchestra and volunteers at her local community food bank.*

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### **Janna Moselhi**

Third place – Grade 12  
Peel District School Board

## **Un appel. Trois mots. Ma vie a changé permanente.**

Le téléphone a sonné.

Je l'ai pris.

C'était mon amie en Egypte.

C'était la semaine dernière et, j'étais dans ma chambre, où je travaillais sur mon projet pour la classe d'anglais. C'était une semaine chargée donc je n'avais pas eu le temps de parler avec mon amie, Menna, quand elle m'a envoyé un message.

Comme étudiante, je prends mes études au sérieux et, comme tel, ceci interfèrent parfois avec ma vie sociale. J'ai passé cette nuit à travailler sur mon projet, loin de savoir que, le plus grand changement dans ma vie était sur son chemin.

Menna était une fille très calme et douce, et elle souffrait des maladies mentales. Elle souffrait de trouble bipolaire, de dépression et d'anxiété. Elle n'a jamais aimé parler à propos de sa santé mentale et ses maladies - et je ne lui ai jamais posé des questions. Bien que nous avons parlé souvent, j'avais toujours pensé que tout allait bien..mais rien allait bien.

Sarah (une amie en commun à nous deux) a commencé de parler et je pouvais sentir qu'il y avait quelque chose de mal. Les trois mots que j'ai entendus après ont changé ma vie pour toujours. Il m'a informé du décès de mon amie, Menna. Elle était trouvée dans sa chambre après qu'elle s'est enlevée la vie. Les mots ne peuvent pas décrire comment je me suis sentie après avoir entendue ce message. Je suis restée silencieuse. Je n'avais jamais ressentie ce que j'ai ressentie pendant ce moment. Ma vie a pris une tournure soudaine.

Mon esprit me disait, « Avale, expire. Avale, expire. Avale, ex- », mais le reste de mon corps tremblait. Pour les prochains mois, je me suis éloignée de ma famille et de mes amis. J'ai passé la plus grande partie

de mon temps seule, et je me suis accusée pour tout le mal. Je me sentais coupable parce que je ne pouvais pas l'empêcher de le faire. C'est une chose pour quelqu'un de mourir, mais c'est une autre chose pour quelqu'un de choisir de mourir.

Cette expérience avec mon amie a changé toute ma vie...mais au début pas pour le mieux. Comme on dit, les choses s'empirent avant qu'ils s'améliorent. Au fil des jours, j'ai commencé à développer la haine de soi. Il est arrivé au point où je commençais à me blesser, comme une punition pour ce dont je me suis reprochée. Il semblait que tout allait continuer à descendre. Quelques mois plus tard, j'ai commencé à me relever. Heureusement, j'ai lentement commencé à me sentir mieux dans ma peau, aussi, je me suis lentement rendue compte qu'il y avait un plus grand problème dans notre société qui a causé mon amie de prendre cette action.

Mon expérience avec mon amie m'a ouvert les yeux au sujet des maladies mentales. En honneur de mon amie, j'ai commencé à sensibiliser les gens et les adolescents en particulier à ce sujet. Je voulais tourner mon point tournant, en un point tournant pour notre société, où nous rompons le silence autour de la santé mentale et les maladies mentales. Je ne suis pas la seule qui a perdu une amie à cause de cette stigmatisation. Chaque jour, près de 2 200 personnes dans le monde se suicident. Dans 90% de ces suicides, la maladie mentale est la cause attributive. J'ai commencé avec moi-même; en m'éduquant, j'avais plus à donner aux autres. J'avais tellement à apprendre. Plus j'ai fait de recherche sur des maladies mentales, plus j'ai réalisé comment il y a une grande stigmatisation à ce sujet. Tout ce que j'ai appris m'aidait jusqu'à aujourd'hui, car un an après son décès, j'ai découvert ma maladie mentale - on a diagnostiqué une dépression.

Il y a des moments dans la vie qui changent complètement notre façon de voir et de ressentir le monde qui nous entoure. Menna me manque encore - chaque jour - mais les gens vont et viennent, et j'ai appris cela. Mon expérience avec elle m'a appris beaucoup de choses, mais la plus importante est l'importance de la santé mentale. Il faut qu'on s'occupe de sa propre soin de santé mentale, et que moi je prenne soin de la mienne.

Nous éprouvons des événements qui remplissent notre cœur de chaleur, de tristesse, de bonheur, d'accomplissement et de l'inspiration. Cette expérience m'a ouvert les yeux au sujet des maladies mentales, et il a ouvert mon cœur et mon esprit, et m'a inspiré de devenir un avocat pour les autres. Ce cheminement de 300 jours était une période de guérison, et d'apprentissage où j'ai appris certaines des plus grandes leçons de ma vie.

En écrivant ceci, je me sens un peu plus près de ma guérison, et en lisant ceci, nous sommes un pas plus près de briser le silence autour de la santé mentale et des maladies mentales.

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*Janna Moselhi loves to play sports, especially tennis and soccer. Janna plans to pursue a career Biomechanics, and become a teacher in the future.*

# Ontario, Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board (NPAAMB) Winners' Essays

## GRADE 11

**Sierra Wales**

First Place – Grade 11  
Grand Erie District School Board

## Father, No Father, Step Father

People assume one will grow up with two parents, mom and dad, mom and momma, or dad and daddy, but they are wrong. At the age of four that changed for me; my dad passed away as a result of a heart transplant. At that age I didn't really capture the moments I wanted or needed to. The moments I wanted to treasure for the rest of my life are just a blur. I'm now seventeen and I still remember my Dad's service. I remember kissing him goodbye for the very last time. That's the last thing I remember about him. Then 2014 came along, and my life took a turn for the best for my mom and me; soon enough I had a male figure permanently in my life. My mom is happily married. This change made an important impact on my life.

My life is hugely impacted by my mom's marriage because I have been greatly blessed. Since having a father figure, my life has changed. Sometimes it does not seem like it has, but it has. We have constantly bonded with each other by working on cars, doing homework or going to car shows together. Life is all about the little things that count, or the dumbest ideas. Capturing these little moments are a key part in life because you don't know how long they will last. For me it is necessary and important to be bonded with a male figure. I learn more key components in life such as learning how to change a flat tire, or doing an oil change on my car. Having a stepfather has shown me and taught me that all these little fun tips and tricks can help me in the present, and in my future. It's about learning and capturing these important bonding moments I have with him.

Having a stepfather in my life is different. I tend to see myself changing, and pushing myself better in school to be more successful. He pushes me more and more because he believes in me. He sees the drive and the potential in my eyes, and knows that I'm capable of doing things. He gives me that boost of confidence I need on a bad day, or just in general on a good day. He gives me another chance to prove

myself right. He has the strongest confidence because he knows that to be a good step-parent he has to push himself to be the best person he can be for me. He has the 'special' touch that makes me believe in myself more and more. to learn Having a stepfather isn't as bad as other people may think. People cannot say what it's like to have a stepfather if they never had one. They cannot decided for me because they are not me. I have experienced it.

My life would not be the same if I was not given the amazing second chance to see what it's like to live with a male figure in my life everyday. I wouldn't have the extra drive in myself to do things. He's the shoulder I have been given to show people that just because I haven't had the chance to live this life with a father, I do now. Things are meant to change, even if other people don't approve. We proved them wrong that my mom getting married was the right choice. He did ask for my permission if it was okay, and I said, "yes". We have grown together as a family for a while and we have given each other the boost of confidence that we need and it does not matter what other people do to us; we will stick up for each other in many different ways as that's what family is meant for. Without a male figure maybe my mom and I would not have had the chance to show the "real" us, but we can now. In the end my mom and I have a happy little family. Through everything I now have a step-brother and little half-sister, but to me the step and half doesn't mean anything; they will always be my siblings no matter what, through bad days and good days. I will be happy to know that they are in my life.

From having a father, to having no father, then having a stepfather has changed my life a lot and words can't describe what I'm thinking. Having a stepfather has been a significant event that has strongly impacted me and my life by having special bonding moments, being given the chance to change, being given the extra support to be successful, and being given second chances and choices in my life. This is why my step-dad has made the biggest impact on my life.

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*Sierra Wales will graduate next year and will attend college to become a paramedic.*

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### **Bryson Staats**

Second Place – Grade 11  
Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board

## **Be Grateful**

**P**eople often take the simplest or littlest things for granted, things others would give anything to have once or to get back again. People don't realize what a big difference a little thing in someone's life could actually mean to them. I constantly see people bashing their fathers or wishing they never had a father growing up, and that makes me wish that what happened to me, never happened. This is the story of how December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2004, changed my life forever. On this day, I lost what was once my number one fan, someone who taught a four-year-old everything he could. That was the day that I lost my father due to an enlarged heart. I don't remember a lot about that winter or what it was like exactly, but I can tell you that it was the start of a very different childhood from most children. I was only four at the time and didn't necessarily understand what was going on entirely, but I did know what happened and what it meant moving forward.

Although I was very young at the time, my father still managed to teach me a lot. He taught me to never give up on something that I want to accomplish through teaching me how to ride a bike. The first attempt, like any other child's, ended with my falling off and cutting my lip pretty badly, but he picked me up and gave me a little speech. He would always tell me to never stop trying to do something that I loved to do, and at the time it was playing lacrosse or trying to ride my bike up and down the driveway without

falling off once. My father and my uncles played a very big role in my childhood. They all taught me how to play lacrosse and to be as good as I am now; they showed me how to stay strong when my family needed me, and they showed me that I can do whatever I wanted to do if I really tried and put my mind to something.

Before my dad got sick, we were almost always together: hanging out, going out somewhere to eat, sitting in the living room building train sets or just playing with anything around. If I wanted something, he would do his best to make sure that I got it or that I was happy. As long as I was happy and smiling, it didn't necessarily matter to him what I was doing. After his funeral, I played with my little train sets without him, but after a while, I stopped because I realized that it wasn't the same playing without him. I went outside with only my uncles and we played lacrosse for a little while before I stopped because, again, it wasn't the same without my number one fan who did everything with me. He wasn't there anymore. I stopped doing a lot of things I loved to do after he passed away. I gradually played with the trains we built until one day I stopped all together. I wasn't doing so well in school, and I almost quit lacrosse all together. I felt lost and alone. Even though I had a lot of support from my family, it just wasn't the same without my dad. It felt like there was a hole in my life that couldn't be replaced or filled again.

The day of my father's funeral was a very emotional and sad day for everyone in my family. My dad was a very fun and exciting guy. He had a lot of friends and was always talking and having fun, regardless of what he was doing. He was always smiling and enjoying life. Our family went to the funeral for the service and to see him one last time before we buried him. Everyone said their final goodbyes, but I couldn't. I couldn't say goodbye. Not this early. Before we all had to leave, after saying our final words and goodbyes forever, I brought out one of my favourite toys to give to him, so that he would always have a little piece of me and since we would be separated for a long time. Once I did that, I remember my mother and grandma hugging me. It felt like it lasted for hours and, to be honest, I didn't want the hugging to end.

Although our time together was so short, it meant so much to me. It was our personal time together, our years of memories and bonding that nobody else can ruin or make me forget. It was the best four years of my childhood that I can remember from my heart, the years that I wouldn't change or give up for anything. He taught me to never give up on the things that I'm passionate about, and although I was young and may not have noticed or realized it at the time, I understand now that what I do and what I have become is a result of that short but meaningful time that we spent together. My dad will always be with me, and I will never be able to say goodbye forever, but I can say I'll see you when I get there.

Life isn't about how much money we have or if we have what's popular at the time or even how many friends we have. Life is really about making memories that last forever, spending time with the people you love and care about most, and making sure that those certain people know that you care for them, that you love them, and that you will be there for them when they need someone. You never know when they may take their last breath of their life.

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*Bryson Staats is passionate about lacrosse and spending time with family. He is a member of the Mohawk Nation.*

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**GRADE 12****Mikenzie Sandy**First Place – Grade 12  
Grand Erie District School Board

# Mother-Daughter, Daughter-Mother

“Kenzie! Falling!”

Two words I have heard uttered so many times. There’s always a gasp, followed by this phrase, and then the sound of me dropping whatever I had in hand to catch my mother. This phrase is something I’ve become so used to, that I now bolt at the inhale – before the words even tumble from her mouth.

My single parent mother was diagnosed with the debilitating disease of Parkinson’s at the young age of 35. I was only two years old. This didn’t affect our relationship in any way, but created a stronger bond between us. From a very young age I had to take care of myself, and moreover, I was depended on. My mother’s disease affected her entire right side; she doesn’t walk normally, she struggles with tremors, and she cannot write too well with her dominant hand anymore, so she’s taught herself to be ambidextrous.

We’ve grown accustomed to an unorthodox relationship that I wouldn’t change for the world. For my entire life and dependent years it was only me and her. I learned to be relatively self-sufficient while she tried to fulfill both roles of mom and dad. But her disease left her struggling, and trying her best to play just part of either one. Growing up I didn’t have anyone to play catch with, to play hide and seek with, or to be active with.

We learned to adjust with what she was missing out on in different ways, and neither of our coping skills would be considered ideal. This further contibuted to our unconventional relationship.

Growing up, I had people make fun, and make comments to me about the way she walks, the way that her hand shakes. It was difficult to explain to the other kids that these were things that she couldn’t control; they chose not to understand and they would rather poke fun.

The first time I contemplated suicide was in grade 4; I knew that I would never do it, but the thought was there. It’s a scary memory of what I was thinking as a 9 year old.

My mom is a very smart and strong woman; she raised me on her own, put me in every sport one could imagine, still managed to obtain a master’s degree from a prestigious school, and hold two jobs that are both important to our home and school’s community. Although she has taught me a lot, there are many things I had to learn on my own as I had no choice but to choose maturity and independence before I was ready. Having your mother depend on you, the child, shapes you into a different type of person. No criticism intended, but I had to skip my childhood in many ways. Driving, for example: because you need your right foot to drive, and that is her affected side, I had no choice but to learn how to take over the wheel.

As I’ve grown older, and now actually look the age I have been acting for my entire life, things haven’t become any better or easier for us. She started taking the medicine that the doctors administered, and although the pills work for a bit, they weren’t a true fix; they wear off and she has to take more. If she takes them too late at night she’ll have night terrors. When this happens, I am able to hear her yell from her sleep from my bedroom across the hall. I go to her, often mumbling or grunting, but I go to her bedroom and rub her back or her arm until she eventually rolls over, or I hear her sigh in relief.

I do the best I can to take care of both of us, our dog, and our cat; but in the past, I often felt that I wasn’t doing enough. For a mother, in a household, there are always things to be done. And since I hold that position, I would struggle with that responsibility. This would cause me to feel sorry for myself, and as you’d expect, I would look for a way out - even if it was only temporary.

I searched for satisfaction in the bottom of the bottle - such a ridiculous thought really for someone so young, with so much to live for. I was studious, conscientious, hard-working - until suddenly - I just wasn't. I was on a downward spiral before I knew it and all of a sudden I was drunk before 10 AM on weekdays, and on weekends, I didn't care at all anymore. When I didn't drink, but needed the release that I craved, I would do anything I could to feel normal. I would inflict pain on myself just to feel something. Broken knuckle after broken knuckle, hole after hole in my bedroom walls, and scream after scream of frustration when I was alone. I knew this wasn't the right path for me, that I had a bright future. I began to do some serious self-reflection and, it seems, I had an epiphany. This just wasn't the life for me!

"Yup, my baby is going to change the world."

I found my mother's words resonating with me every time I took a drink. And I began to realize that I couldn't do this to myself, and more importantly, I couldn't do this to her. After all, I was still the "go-to" around the house, and if I failed her, she would have no one.

I regained my purpose through sport; I found the control I longed for in how fast I ran, how hard I hit, and in the accuracy of my shot.

I no longer have to touch the substances I once needed to feel normal. At times, I admit, I revert to self-inflicted pain, since a strong mind isn't always enough; however, I know that I have a safety net of people surrounding me that would never let anything happen to me. This makes me feel better. No longer do I wish to leave earth or wish I was never put here in the first place. I know I have purpose. I know I am here to do something. And I think that that "something" is something big!

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*Mikenzie Sandy resides on the Six Nations Reserve and is Cayuga Nation, Wolf Clan. Mikenzie can speak her traditional language and avidly enjoys learning about her culture. She loves to compete in sport at the highest levels; including, elite field hockey, AA ringette, and tier 1 softball. It is Mikenzie's long term goal is to achieve a Ph.D. in linguistics and work toward the revitalization of indigenous languages.*

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### **Maggie Powless-Lynes**

Second Place – Grade 12  
Grand Erie District School Board

## **History and Truth: The Key to my Self-Discovery**

**O**ne event in my life that has changed who I am as a person, is the experience of working at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, Ontario, leading tours of the Mohawk Institute Residential School. I started working there in July of 2016, with the initial hope of solely gaining job experience and some extra money, however, what I gained from my time there has had a profound and powerful effect on who I am as a person. I would consider it the main turning point of my life.

My job was to lead tours of people through the Mohawk Institute building, educating groups about the history of the school and telling survivors' stories of their time spent at the school. In doing this I was able to speak to survivors, learn the history of colonization, and study various traditional Haudenosaunee arts, crafts, music, and games to help teach aspects of the culture to youth. Along with giving facts, dates, and history during my tours, I spoke about the ongoing intergenerational effects that continue to be passed down to the young Indigenous kids today, and how the deteriorating social conditions of so many reserves and communities is due to the impact that these residential schools have had on our connection to our culture and roots.

My grandfather was one of the many Indigenous children taken from his home and forced to attend the Mohawk Institute residential school in Brantford, Ontario. He attended from 1935 to 1938 and, in those three years, was victim of the government's attempt at aggressive assimilation of Native people, losing much of his culture, spirituality, and his Mohawk language. Even though my mother and I did not attend residential school, the effects of my grandfather's experience lives on through us in our isolation from our cultural identity and dysfunctionality within our community. My grandfather, Ross Powless, was a man who dedicated his entire life to fighting the government system which had tried so hard to oppress all that he was. In spite of all the racial discrimination he faced, my grandfather was able to become one of the most well-respected lacrosse players in history, getting inducted into the Ontario Lacrosse Hall of Fame as well as the Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame in 1969, coaching many professional lacrosse teams, and becoming an active member in Six Nations politics to help rejuvenate his community after the impact of residential schools.

The Haudenosaunee culture is a beautiful one, with humbling spirituality that is based out of respect and graciousness, language like poetry that describes the world as something more incredible and rich than there are words for in English, and music with drumbeats that can make your heartbeat feel as if it has found its place. This is the culture that I want to help revive. However, along with this beautiful side of the culture, there is also the ugly side; the side that contains the alcoholism, substance abuse, mental illness, gang activity, crime rates, youth suicide rates, MMIWG, high school dropout rates, and the unshakable feelings of insignificance that I, and so many other Indigenous people have experienced. On this side lies the 16-year-old boy from my school who was shot and killed on Six Nations last spring. This is the side that I wish didn't exist. But I now know that as awful and saddening this side is, it is impossible for me to fully appreciate the beautiful side without understanding the ugly side, and understanding how we got there from a culture once so strong, proud, and beautiful.

Being able to work at the Woodland Cultural Centre has given me an incredible new perspective and understanding about why my family is the way it is; why so many of my relatives suffer from alcoholism, mental illness, health problems, and substance abuse. I now understand why these problems plague, not only my family, but so many others on Six Nations and other reserves across Canada. I understand that it's not their fault. The result of "killing the Indian in the child", as so many residential schools succeeded in doing, is something that has caused detrimental effects on the lives of every child who must follow in these footsteps. The only reason that I have been able to avoid suffering from what seems like a family tradition of pain and self-infliction is due to my mother's strength and her ability to take the dysfunctional parenting tools, passed on to her from her dad, and throw them away. My mother saw and suffered through a childhood with a parent who was shown nothing but abuse and neglect as his example, and she decided that she was not going to pass this dysfunction on to my brothers and me. I now understand how privileged I am to have had a mother as strong as the one I do, who was able to stop the cycle. My mother once told me that, although my grandfather was a great man and he did a lot with his life, he was not a very good dad. I now understand why my mother says that. I understand why she and my dad are afraid of my walking in the city with my friends, because they are haunted by the statistics of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and fear the possibility that I could become part of these statistics. I understand why my mother says that with all her siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, and other relatives who are suffering as alcoholics, she does not think she's better than they are. She says that she's just lucky. I understand that I am lucky, too.

Until I experienced the history and knowledge that the Woodland Cultural Centre and the Mohawk Institute contained, I did not understand or appreciate any of this. Like trying to figure out the picture on a jigsaw puzzle with having only a few pieces in place, I had no context and not enough information to understand what my history looks like. The experience of being exposed to such truth about my culture, through the Woodland Cultural Centre and the Mohawk Institute, has truly been a turning point in my life that has set me on a path to greater self-discovery and has filled me with humbleness and respect for the struggles and resiliency of my people and my family.

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*Maggie Powless-Lynes has many interests, including music, baseball, math, biology, and politics, and will be attending McMaster University in the fall for Biochemistry.*

## Brinton Gould

Third Place – Grade 12  
Waterloo Regional District School Board

# Pipe Bomb

**K**nowing what you want to do with your life is a challenge everyone faces. Even more daunting, knowing some may not accomplish it. But bearer of those dreams dream on, fueled by motivation of some nature. As for my motivation, I don't really know. For some reason, being suplexed on a hardened mat and being pinned by up to 300 pounds of humanity appeals to me. It even appealed to 6 year old me, which actually changed my life for the better.

On a dark night while in the bedroom, I was scouring channels. Nothing was on Teletoon or YTV, not even my favourite Treehouse. So I stumbled upon Spike, which was showcasing a man in the corner being stomped by two others. While I should have been scared and concerned, I was in awe. "Why, who, what?" came to mind, then the guilt of enjoyment. Ashamed, I asked my mum if it was okay to watch this physical assault, to which she laughed yes. She didn't know what she said yes to, and nor could she. She said yes to a kid watching a show, but she also said yes to a kid who wanted to be on that show, to take and give those stomps. From that day on I knew what I wanted to be -- a professional wrestler; or more specifically, a certain wrestler.

In 2010 I was then watching WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment), when a heel (antagonist) was in the ring talking to the crowd. Sleeve tattoos, lip piercing, looking like a punk more than an athlete. But where his appearance turned me off, his words did otherwise. He hated drugs. That was his message. On paper it was the perfect set up to an after school; but he spoke with such bitterness and discontent to society. CM Punk as he was known condemned the occasional drinkers and smokers, comparing them to heroin addicts barely getting by. He lauded himself as being better than anyone because of the fact that his body is pure. His way with words was verbal art -- poetry in the form of hateful oversimplification and criticism. It was ultimately great story telling for a character. They booed, I cheered. As a son of a smoker, I embodied the same sentiment of despising the most tame of taboo drugs. This speech cemented my lifestyle today, as I have abstained from all versions of drugs my entire life. He became my role model and the reason I still take care of myself. Thankfully most of them remained beneficial and wrestling themed. My time in high school was no different.

High school, where middle schoolers souls' die and popular kids thrive. This time of my life gave me a platform to express myself in front of others, which I am eternally thankful of. From grade 9 to 12 I took courses as menial and required as math to entertaining yet difficult as cooking. All in all, four classes had the biggest impact on my tenure as a student: English, Writer's Craft, Fitness, and Drama. These courses kept me on track of my goal, my physical magnum opus of becoming involved in the wrestling business. With fitness it's obvious: stay fit, get good grades, anyone can do it if they try. But after months people really question if their body can take the schedule. I questioned it but I pushed my standards, showing up every day in preparation for an actual match. Right now I lead the class with 95%, because of my early turning point in life.

In wrestling you need to act, so drama was a no brainer. For four years I acted to the best of my ability, attaining B's and A's. People are drawn to charisma, and this class was the breeder of it. I was convincing enough to partake in three school plays, including the Sears theatre competition. In my mental diary, I was halfway there.

While athleticism is a huge part, story writing is just as big a factor behind the scenes of the sport. English and writer's craft taught me the bare essentials to the higher echelons of crafting stories. Drama, romance, action, it all has a part in my dream. The thought of a vampire cult having satanic crucifixion of a boss's daughter is stupid on the surface, but it takes a literary genius to make people give a damn. Wrestling provides the platform for those stories; my stories.

In finality, wrestling turned my life around in the sense that I would be lost without it. My drug free lifestyle I started when I was nine, my health and physical strength, my high academic marks and of course my very future all started at the ripe old age of six. Every day I watch a match and exercise for my chance. I save up just a little bit more for university and wrestling school. This turning point sent me on the straight and narrow; and I am not looking back.

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*Brinton Gould is an author. Of Metis descent, Brinton is highly interested in Native culture, namely Mi'kmaq (his Native ancestry), as well as professional wrestling and journalism. He looks forward to attending Wilfrid Laurier University for a Master's degree in English.*

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# Ontario, North Bay Winners' Essays

## GRADE 6

**Hezekiah Guy**

First Place – Grade 6  
Near North District School Board

## Phoenix Friendly

“ Things are not always what they seem.” - Author unknown.

I was 8 when I was told I would have to move schools. As I heard these words, tears slowly and painfully started drizzling down my face. How do you expect a kid to move from school to school just like that? Giving up something familiar that felt like home.

The summer quickly ended and the first day of school arrived. As I was getting ready there was a little voice telling me, "Everything's going to be alright." That still didn't make me feel any better and tears once again started stinging my cheeks as they streamed down my face. I reluctantly turned the handle of the door, and as it opened, my feet fell out of the house. I walked down the driveway in despair not knowing if I'd ever feel the laughter and comfort that I shared with my Sunset Park friends.

The bus pulled in the driveway and the doors opened. A kind, cheery lady said in an enthusiastic voice, "Good morning!" I had nothing to say. I slowly and sadly walked to the back of the bus with my head down. I had no idea a 5 minute bus ride could feel so long.

The bus arrived at Phelps Central, Home of the Phoenix. I felt like a zombie who didn't know anything. I followed a line of students into the school gym. I was introduced to my teacher Mrs. Colbert. Our first task was to write a story. I have always loved writing. I put pencil to paper fast, wrote a short story and handed it in.

Mrs. Colbert grew a smile and told me, "Wow, we have a real author in this class. This is amazing." I had several emotions running through my head. Relief, happiness, joy and excitement.

Now that I'm older, I realize that change can be a good thing. In fact, I've met friends and teachers that make me feel welcome, part of this school and home again.

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*Hezekiah Guy is a very talented boy in many ways. He loves to write and, enjoys, and excels in most sports. His goal is to work hard and become a surgeon.*

**Calum Pascoe**

Second Place – Grade 6  
Near North District School Board

## The Move of my Life

I found out I was moving and I had no authority to do anything about it. In 2011 I had to move from my hometown in Thunder Bay. I was only five years old. I had a lot of heart touching moments in Thunder Bay. Although I was leaving everything behind, my memories will never fade.

I was afraid to move because I didn't know what people from my new school would think of me. Will the kids like me? Are they going to be kind to me? These questions were racing through my mind. I left home with only one thing in my head, fear.

I remember it being a bright afternoon when we were backing out of our driveway. Next thing you know, I was staring out the van window watching the roads and buildings just pass by like leaves blowing in the wind. I was thinking about my two best friends that were always by my side. I hoped they were thinking of me. The long drive lasted two whole days! Finally, we arrived at our destination. It was a small town named Temiskaming. We stayed in a rental house for two or three months, even though it felt longer. Then it was time to see our new house in Redbridge. We pulled in the driveway of a huge house. I said to myself, "I hope this will be my home!" For some reason it felt like home already. It was so beautiful. I knew I would be comfortable there. I found it really easy to make friends. Redbridge is a small community where every one knows everybody. I was happy and thought I will never leave this place. I loved it! I had everything I wanted.

Six years later and my family is still here. I have a great school, great friends and a wonderful family. What more could I ask for! I learned that change is alright. Sometimes unforeseeable things happen and you have to do things you may not want to do. In my case everything worked out. Always keep an open mind and good things will happen.

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*Calum Pascoe enjoys all aspects of the curriculum and excels at everything he does. He participates in a variety of sports and always puts forth his best efforts. He is beginning to really enjoy the arts, drama and dance.*

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## GRADE 9/10

**Amy Ouellette**

First Place – Grade 9  
Near North District School Board

# Disconnected by Circumstances

“The pain you’re feeling doesn’t compare to the joy that’s coming” ~ Romans 8:18

Sharing a room, giggles, childhood secrets, and true sisterly love. Those are the memories I used to share with my sister, Casey, when I was six. How could that change so quickly to crying, hospitals, hand sanitizer, being miles apart, and feeling like an orphan?

When Casey began to get sick, it appeared to be nothing more than the flu. At school, kids would ask, “When’s Casey coming back?” “She’ll be back in a couple of days,” I’d reply. But a couple of days turned into a couple of weeks, months, and then years away from school.

Casey’s mysterious illness meant, that when I had a dance competition, I was sent to Toronto with my friend’s family instead of my own. I remember the Moms backstage doing ponytails, hair spray filling the air, and all the girls talking about how excited they were for their parents to see them dance. I sat on the concrete floor feeling completely alone; little did I know this would be the first of many times I would feel like this because five hours away while I sat on that floor, my sister was being admitted to CHEO and was diagnosed with Leukemia; Casey had cancer.

While Casey was fighting for her life, I was left with my grandmother, Memere. She’d take me shopping almost every day and let me have friends over often. I was given anything I wanted, but still, it wasn’t the one thing I needed: my family. I didn’t see my sister or my parents for almost a month. Once we were reunited, we embraced each other like a scene out of a movie. The sun was bright and everything seemed right in the world, like we’d never been apart, but once again it all came crashing down as the weekend came to an end, and we had to go our separate ways.

As life went on, things began to get more difficult. People kept asking me questions that I didn’t know the answers to, and even though I was constantly with Memere I felt more alone than ever. Once, I remember, I was sitting in the corner sobbing and when Memere asked me what was wrong, I replied through tears, “I hate this cancer. I hate what it’s doing to my sister. I hate that it’s taking my family away from me, and I hate that it’s destroying my life.”

Time passed and Casey came home. But the girl who came home wasn’t the Casey I knew. She didn’t have any hair, her eyelashes and eyebrows were gone, and her face was swollen. She looked sick. I was scared of her. She didn’t look like the girl I used to call my best friend. She wouldn’t play with me or get off the couch. I didn’t feel as happy as I did the first time we reunited, and yet I was glad to have my family together once again. However, it didn’t last long; it was never permanent when she came home. Often I’d wake up to different family friends in the place of my parents. They’d explain to me that Casey had been rushed to the hospital during the night for a fever or other complications. It was always something new and worse each time. Once again, Cancer had taken my family away from me, and I was alone.

Finally on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the sun began to shine again. Casey officially finished her treatment! She was free of that hospital bracelet, and I was free to feel secure that my family would always be there.

This event changed my life and temporarily took away the one thing I was most dependent on, my family. Casey and I faced different conflicts, but we both had to be brave when there was no other option. Bravery is not the absence of fear; it’s the courageous action to face the fear. It’s in those times you learn

to be grateful for every moment life has to offer. Our journey may have presented some challenges, but because of the struggles we faced separately, we're ready to take on the new ones, but this time, together.

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*Amy Ouellette enjoys public speaking, acting, singing, and spending time with her friends. She is one of two children and has an older sister in grade 12. She has a deep passion for writing.*

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### Molly Davis

Second Place – Grade 9  
Near North District School Board

## Always the Stupid One

**M**ost kids like school at first. It is a way to make friends, and some even like learning. I, on the other hand, always hated school. I could never focus because I just got distracted. I couldn't read and understand what the words were telling me and I couldn't spell or understand the questions I was asked. Teachers used the words "lazy" or "needs to work harder" or "never going to get anywhere" to describe me. It did not matter how hard I tried to work, when I did not improve and those words became what I thought of myself, I gave up on school.

When I got tested and found out that I had a learning disability, I was young and did not fully understand what that meant. My first thought was that I was a disappointment and that I let my parents down because I could never be the smart kid who got good grades. I tried to hide that part of me, never telling anyone that I had a learning disability. When teachers started to ask me if I needed help I always said no. I did not want people looking at me differently or treating me differently. I saw what happened to people like me; they were made fun of or others were jealous of because students with IEPs got extra help. Even some of my closest friends acted that way. I did not want to lose them so I did my best to fit in.

My grades kept going downhill. It did not matter how much I tried. I felt insecure and isolated, and at the age of nine I already felt like a failure.

The moment it all changed was in math class. I knew an answer to a question that even the smart kids were struggling with. I was so confused! I was the stupid kid! There were many emotions going through my brain, like anger at myself for not letting myself believe I could be smart, not asking for help when I needed it and happiness that I had the potential to be smart.

I then did something that I never thought of doing, I asked the resource teacher for help. She helped me to understand my learning disability. She explained that I was smart, I just needed some help. After learning about my strengths and weaknesses I began looking at the world differently. I started to see myself as intelligent and learned to stop caring what others thought about me.

I realized that I was actually very good at math, but not at memorizing numbers. I also discovered that I had to slow down when I was reading, and that I learned best if someone read to me. Puzzles and number patterns were easy for me to understand, but I had to have my multiplication table beside me to complete answers.

Learning to advocate for myself was a turning point in my life. My future now is hopeful and full of dreams and goals.

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*Molly Davis is an only child. One of Molly's passions is horseback riding.*

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**Jazlyn McGuinty**

Third Place – Grade 9  
Near North District School Board

## Chopsticks to Forks: A Journey of Change

**H**aving spent the first five years of my life in Asia, I spoke the Korean language, Hangul, fluently. I had faithful friends from the South Korean Peninsula, and was loved by an amazing extended multicultural family. I lived in a city with 1.5 million people until my final year in Asia. We moved to an island between South Korea and Japan where I had little exposure to the English language. My father was the only one who spoke English, as his hometown was North Bay, Ontario. I was comfortable with the island life, though it never occurred to me that I would lose it all.

My five-year-old self was unaware of the changes on the horizon. The moving van parked near our apartment was going to ship our belongings half-way around the world. We were on our way to Incheon International Airport, and 16 hours later I was greeted by bone-chilling northern air, and white fluffy cotton floating around - snow!

Stepping off the plane, I was so quiet, shy - perhaps these are traditional Korean values. I was now in a small, Northern Ontario town of 54,000 people, and had little to no access to my mother tongue, literally. My mother was the only one who spoke, wrote, and read Korean with me. I was anything but comfortable in this new life. Where were my old friends, and more importantly, how would I make new ones? I could barely even speak English, let alone begin to socialize and fit in. Thoughts of loneliness plagued me, along with increased anxiety and fear of the unknown. Imagine culture shock...for a five-year old!

Whenever my parents tried to get me to socialize, I would hide behind them, feeling scared that the other children wouldn't like me. I was afraid to communicate with others because of my poor English skills. I had gone from big city to small city life, Hangul to the English language, many friends to no friends at all. People talked differently, dressed differently, and even ate differently. I mean in Korea, you couldn't even find a fork in a restaurant, chopsticks only. And, when the first day of school came, it felt like going to yet another country.

I was no longer immersed in the Korean culture. I had Caucasian classmates and I began to evolve dramatically. I often wondered, "Hey! Is this you Jazz?" My first year was a big struggle, but then my confidence and self-esteem started to build. I realized that as I began to make some friends, and as my English slowly developed, Canada was starting to feel a little more like home. I started to get "A's" and "B's" in elementary school, and eventually won the 'Valedictorian Award' in Grade 6. Shy Jazz was turning into Confident Jazz.

When I think back on moving from Korea to Canada, I am immensely happy, and somewhat surprised. I got through and conquered so many unexpected and surprising challenges. If I had never moved to Ontario, I wouldn't be who I am now, and I wouldn't have the determination and work ethic that I now possess. Because of these challenges, I have grown stronger and am better prepared for the future. I have learned not to worry about what other people think, to be confident in my abilities, and to accept things the way they are.

When people think of moving, they often think of moving vans, boxes, new houses, new neighbourhoods, and the like. But, moving is not just that – it is trying to adjust to a new world, striving to feel accepted, and leaving the past behind for an uncertain future. One has to go through this in order to fully understand its depth. Travelling back to busy South Korea from peaceful Canada is an adjustment

when I return to visit relatives and now distant friends. The most important thing that I have learned is that life is like chopsticks to forks because change is always around the next corner, so try to accept it.

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*Jazlyn McGuinty is energetic and compassionate. She enjoys playing sports, reading, and spending time with friends in her free time. She speaks English and Korean. She is an only child who is passionate about music and writing. She hopes to get into a top university in the future and have a successful career.*

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## GRADE 11/12

**Emma Smith**

First Place – Grade 11  
Near North District School Board

# Pressing Send

**M**y hands are shaky and clammy, my breathing becomes quick and short, my heartbeat skyrockets as I am plummeted into a panic attack. I had pressed send for the message containing my longest held secret. I could have avoided this anxiety. I could have stayed quiet. Quiet and angry.

Don't look at me. I'm scared and foolish. Beady eyes staring at me no matter what I do. If I mess up they'll see I'm so angry. I am angry about everything; the way the pencil sits in your hand, the way you speak, the way you work, pushes me more and more.

The story starts 4 years ago; it was my first year in West Ferris. I was part of the first batch of kids tossed through the intermediate wing. I was scared and confused. My friends had started to settle into their new personalities from the childhood switch. They had sweet little crushes on boys and some even had boyfriends. My best friend would sleep over and ramble on for hours about the boy she liked, and when it was my turn to spill the beans, blush overcame me, and I'd stutter out a random boy's name. I'd never felt the attraction to boys she did, and automatically my naïve mind concluded that I was broken.

As a kid, I was always mature for my age, and when my best friend started to feel a real attraction to boys I was surprised I wasn't too. It was my fault, it had to be. I fought with myself every day. I couldn't find why I wasn't feeling attracted to boys like every other girl in my grade.

One day, some time later, after the depression set in and the feelings of being a broken failure became an everyday occurrence, I sat in a Tim Hortons booth with a boiling hot chocolate in my hands, and the smell of bagels in my nose with my old friend across from me. She took a few sips from her Ice Cap before asking me if I ever considered that maybe guys weren't my type, but girls were instead. A hurricane of thoughts appeared in my mind that day that refused to mute. I had never legitimately considered that option until she brought it up.

I had known plenty of gays but it had been drilled into my mind that I couldn't be. My "liberal" mom didn't have a problem with gay people as long as it wasn't her own offspring. One of my closest friends was gay, and somehow concluded that I was, long before I came to terms with it. It became a joke with my friends; they all accepted the fact that I was gay even if I couldn't wrap my mind around it yet. I hated

the topic. With just my friends it wasn't as horrific, but when my mother was around her reaction was venomous to my growing complex nature.

A couple years passed and I entered the high school portion of West Ferris. My depression faded as I finally accepted that all those friends I held dear to my heart were right. I still couldn't say the words aloud but they knew I figured myself out. But I was still holding the biggest secret from my mother. I had just figured the anger was part of my personality, and I couldn't shake it. I was lucky if I managed one day without having the everlasting urge to punch somebody. It was only with my mom that I got so heated. Just the sound of her voice fueled my anger. But by the end of freshman year, I could say it to myself and my closest best friends. "I'm gay," I'd say. Sometimes it would be the only thing on my mind all day but, it wasn't enough. I wanted to tell my mother an immeasurable amount of times, but I was too scared. She told me I couldn't be anything but straight for years of my life.

The dreadful day finally came. On August 26, 2016, at 11:46 pm, I sent the most memorable message in my life. I waited what felt like forever for an answer. I sat contemplating whether to send "just kidding" afterwards or to hold my ground. She replied only a minute later, a vicious tone in my mind echoed her answer, "What?!" I inhaled the largest breathe I could and sent it again. No answer she could send me would make me feel down, as all I felt was the weight lifted from my shoulders. I had finally got it off my chest; I was free from the shackles that were this secret. The metallic taste of blood pooled in my mouth from biting my cheek in anxiety, a nervous habit that happened automatically. However, no matter how her response went, no matter her reaction, I'd be just fine. I had a friend who told me that if it went badly I was always welcome there.

I never needed that friend's couch. My mother carefully made her way to my room, and tenderly hugged me-against my will might I add. She accepted me even after all the years she said there was no way. She promised we could have dinner anywhere of my choosing and as long as I am healthy she would no longer fuss. We became closer. I no longer felt the need to push her away, and gone were the angry moods. My anxiety, depression and anger were all lightened as I had nothing to hide. There was nothing to fear anymore, only the presentation due next week that made me want to punch walls and cry into the AM.

People can be mean, and judgemental if you aren't just the way they want you to be, and I certainly do not fit in every person's cookie cutter. I once read a quote saying to take the path that scared you most, as it would only make you grow. I finally learned it first hand and not once have I regretted the decision to open my mind. I have grown, and will continue to grow every day, choosing some tough or easy paths, as long as they don't include presenting.

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*Emma Smith is a grade 11 student at West Ferris Secondary School.*

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### **Hailey Ferguson**

Second Place – Grade 12  
Near North District School Board

## **What's Your "Thing"?**

**O**n all of the "first days" I've ever had – first day of the school year, camp, new job - I've been asked to state my favourite thing to do, my passion, my 'thing'. I have always felt slightly uncomfortable answering these questions because I'm more than just one thing, aren't I? On each of these first days, when someone inevitably asked, "What's your name, and what do you enjoy doing?" all I heard was, "Please, tell me your life story". This was particularly difficult for me to explain because despite doing plenty of activities, I didn't enjoy any of them.

On the first day of the fourth grade, I was added to a split class with only three other fourth graders. This may not seem like a big deal, although, to a scared nine-year-old girl with very few friends, this was my worst nightmare. It felt like I was being thrown out into the frigid winter on Christmas Eve, while my family ate gingerbread and laughed by the fire. As bitter as I was, I decided to join the soccer team to spend a little more time with these girls after school. I did not particularly love the sport. And, in all honesty, I spent half the time picking flowers, practising my handstands, and fidgeting in anticipation for the scrapbooking club to start. I have no idea how I even made the team. Despite my lack of enthusiasm, surprisingly, I played a successful season. My team finished the season third, in the final tournament. I had grown to enjoy playing, and spending time with my friends, so I decided to stick with it.

Fast forward six years. I had just made the Ontario soccer team. You would think that my enthusiasm would match my skill but I absolutely despised it. I despised missing school and going out of town on the weekends. I despised the nightly training and the dieting. I despised lying to my family and coaches about my 'love' for the sport. Most of all, I despised not having a single friend on the team, and because I was never around, I did not have a single friend in school. Ironic, I had joined my fourth-grade soccer team to stay connected to my friends, but I ended up being 'the girl who plays soccer' to them. And so, with this realization, I dropped soccer, as quickly and simply as you could drop an egg, but without the ugly mess. For as long as I could remember it felt like I was choking on smoky air. I vowed to stop trying to please the ones that said you should pursue what you're good at, passionate or otherwise. This was the best thing for me, and I was proud of myself. I could finally take my first breath of fresh air.

I wish I could say it ended there, that I was happy, and poured all of my reclaimed time into my love of art that year. That I made new friends, that I also loved art; and I ate lollipops and sunshine for breakfast every morning. Although a lot of this did come true, as I did fall in love with art and I did become friends with the best people in my life, the response I got from my family after quitting soccer was not positive. It seemed as though in the six wretched years that I played soccer, it had, against my will, become a part of me. It was my label. My parents treated my decision to quit as an opportunity to mourn a loss. They flipped through a scrapbook of ribbons and medals from my 'glory days' and looked at it like it was an open casket where I was wearing a blue uniform and holding an MVP banner. I didn't understand why they were so upset over something positive. And then it came to me; because I was no longer 'the girl who plays soccer' it was a shock. It took me a long time to convince them that quitting was what I really wanted; it wasn't some phase, or a cry for help. And so, I should probably retract my earlier statement. In dropping my metaphorical egg, I did in fact make a mess. There was a slimy film of yolk dripping from the countertop onto the floor, and now I had to clean it up.

Luckily, despite the mess, these years have taught me an abundance of valuable lessons. I can't please everyone all the time, and sometimes letting others down to make myself happier is a good thing because in the end, these are the decisions I have to live with. It was after I quit that I started doing something that I really enjoyed. I truly began to know what it felt like to be passionate about something. I became a genuinely happier person in every aspect of my life. I finally felt like I was more than one thing. I started to open myself up to reading, baking, photography...the list goes on.

Our identities are not simply what we like to do; our passions twist and turn- as we do -throughout our lives. It's the small things in life that determine who we are. It's our favourite songs, our childhood bedrooms, how we take our coffee, and the books that make us cry (even though they're happy), and as much as my past self would be horrified to admit it, the medals and MVP banners.

I know I cannot control what my future label might be, however, I can say that with art, it is something I can be proud of. Now, on any future "first day", I will still be unsure when answering the cliché question, "What's your name, and what do you like to do?", but I can smile knowing that whatever I do decide to say, it will be something that I am truly passionate about.

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*Hailey Ferguson is a visual arts major, who hopes to attend OCAD University and pursue a career in art curating. She enjoys volunteering for her school and within the community. She enjoys spending time with her family and pets.*

**Rachel Kreps**

Third Place – Grade 12  
Near North District School Board

## A Life Worth Remembering

**A**lzheimer's Disease is like a mental cancer. It destroys you before anyone knows it is even there. It eats away the inside of you, consuming thoughts, memories, and personality, like real cancer takes over internal organs. In the early stages, it is difficult to distinguish between personality quirks and Alzheimer's effects. Towards the end, you are searching for a sign of anything untouched by the sickness.

I was six years old when my grandfather, who I called Opa, was diagnosed with

Alzheimer's Disease. As soon as my parents got the news, my family of five packed into the car to go visit my Opa in his new nursing home. Being as young as I was, I did not fully understand what was going on. My parents tried to explain it to me, but weren't all grandmas and grandpas a little forgetful at times? It did not make any sense to me as to why my Opa could not live on his own anymore just because he had misplaced a few things or got lost sometimes.

Nothing could have possibly prepared me for what I walked into at that nursing home. At first glance I saw the same Opa I always did, but quickly noticed something was not quite right. He was sitting in a wheelchair, his eyes were still and focused on the floor, and when he finally looked up at the sound of my family approaching, he was not wearing the big grin I was so used to seeing on him. He looked at us as if we were not the family he loved, as if my father was not his son, and as if my sisters and I were not three of his grandchildren. He looked at us as though we were strangers.

Our visit did not last long. The short half hour was filled with simple conversation such as the weather, or whatever show was playing on the tiny television propped on the corner table of the room. We gave Opa stiff awkward hugs as we said our goodbyes. I remember my sisters and I being so worried about him on the car ride home. My parents explained to us that he must have just been very tired and needed some rest. I felt so dispirited after seeing my grandfather in the state he was in, I found myself wondering what it would be like if I were ever to forget my family.

Over the next three years these short uncomfortable visits became a regularity. They were still filled with the same simple conversations, but as I grew older, these conversations and visits started to take on a deeper meaning. I had become educated about Alzheimer's Disease, and had learned a particularly concerning fact about the illness; Alzheimer's was hereditary. As I watched the nursing home staff assist my grandfather to the washroom, I felt as though I was getting a "sneak peek" at what the future might hold for me, and I knew that was not a life I wanted.

With every visit, I became more aware of the intense care my grandfather needed. He could no longer feed, bathe, or clothe himself independently. I had so much sympathy for him, and it pained me to watch him struggle so much with these simple everyday tasks. The hardship my grandfather experienced must have been immense, and it was overwhelming to picture that as my future.

On May 26<sup>th</sup> 2010, at the age of 78, my Opa passed away from Alzheimer's complications. This is also the day that changed my outlook on life. I had always thought that I would get so many more years with my grandfather. It broke my heart to know that he would never get the chance to watch me graduate, see my sisters and I get married, or meet his great-grandchildren one day. He deserved so many more days than he got, but despite that, I could not have been more inspired by him. He battled with his illness for over four years, yet he still had the most optimistic view on life out of anyone I knew. His passing was the first real loss I had experienced, and it was such a huge eye-opener for me.

I know that there is nothing I can do to eliminate the chance of developing Alzheimer's myself, and that there is the possibility the gene is already in me. Although these facts may be true, that does not mean that they must define my life. Watching my grandfather suffer from his memory loss truly taught me to never take a moment for granted. I must enjoy time spent with family and friends, appreciate looking back on

memories, and be optimistic about what the future has in store for me. Alzheimer's may be in my future, but I will not allow it to take away from my present.

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*Rachel Kreps plays basketball, hockey and badminton and enjoys reading. She has a passion for sciences and hopes to complete a degree in Health Science and become a dentist.*

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# Ontario, Sudbury Winners' Essays

## GRADE 7/8

**Ashton Bertrand**

First Place – Grade 7  
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

## Change of Perspective

All I could do was sit on my couch silently as I watched the golden sunlight creep through the curtains and onto my living room wall. I waited, side by side with my siblings, in confusion of what was happening. I could feel the tension in the room grow thicker and thicker with every second that ticked by.

Finally, the silence was broken like a loose twig snapping in the forest. My father explained to us, in a concerned voice, about how my grandfather was very sick and had to go to the hospital to get tested. As a kid, I just assumed he had the flu because I never knew there was any other version of "being sick." Looking back on it, it probably also had something to do with me being so young. As a child, you have so much innocence that you just never worry about what's really happening around you.

Months passed with more visits to the hospital, almost one after the other. It became ingrained into my life as part of my schedule to visit him. I enjoyed spending time getting to know my grandfather, learning from him. It was always interesting talking to him and it made me proud just knowing that I'm related to someone like him.

"He passed away," my dad had told me at the end of one regular day. My soul was heavy from the sadness of the moment. The weirdest thing, though, is that I felt personally responsible for his death. Obviously, I knew I didn't kill him, but I did feel like I could have seen him more, got to know him better or maybe even helped to bring the relationships within our family closer together. He was the first person close to me that had died, and it made me realize that I'm growing up faster and faster every day; that the world we live in can be a harsh place and what I was struggling my way through was not unique. Hundreds of people every day face losing the people they love.

Then it clicked for me. I knew I had to leave my childhood behind and head towards adulthood so that I would be able to handle similar situations like this in the future. So that I'd be stronger than I was before. So that next time, I would be capable of always appreciating the people who cared for me, before they were gone forever.

Although I may not cry every time his name is mentioned, or have visited him as much as I would have liked too, it doesn't mean I love him any less than everyone else. He was her husband, his dad and my

grandpa. I miss him every single day. He helped usher me along onto the road to adulthood, and I only hope to one day become a man he would have been proud to know.

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*Ashton Bertrand is the eldest of six children. Ashton has a passion for music and enjoys spending his time singing or playing instruments such as the piano, ukulele and saxophone. In the future, Ashton would like to continue to pursue his music and study photography.*

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### **Breanna Coyne**

Second Place – Grade 7  
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

## **The First Stride**

**M**y heart raced like the sparkling time on the score board. The clock ticked, counting down the last seconds as my life changed forever. In these seconds, I knew it would be the last time, that I would never go back. That I couldn't go back. My skates hit the ice and it was like no other feeling, as instinct took over and my feet knew just what to do. Stride by stride, my skates cracked into the ice. It only took one shoot, and I was transformed from a pretty girl in her tutu standing at the back of dance class, into a tough hockey warrior calling all the plays.

My grandma always wanted me to be a dancer, but that was never me. I wanted to please her, please my family, my parents and my friends, but somewhere along the way I started to wonder if maybe I should just please myself. I was scared, staring into my future. I could see what I wanted to do when I was older, and it sure wasn't dance. How was I going to tell them? Should I follow my heart or theirs? Digging deeper I wondered though, am I good enough to break through the boys' mindset of girls in sports. Should I play it safe and stick with what I knew, or was I good enough to change everyone's perspective of me and what sports a girl can play. Words and thoughts ran through my mind, just like the rippling water on a foggy frigid day, until, that is, the person whose opinion mattered most, spoke to me.

My dad sat me down and explained gently that I needed to stop trying to please everyone else and please myself. I confided in him my biggest fear that everyone will be disappointed if I choose to embrace the sport that just seemed to be a part of me. When I heard his answer though, suddenly the room lit up like a sky filled with the glow of floating lanterns. This moment shaped who I was and how I would face all the life lessons, I still had to overcome. That is the day that I started to live for myself.

Having the courage, the strength and the confidence in my own decision to skate away from dance and towards the sport that has become my life has showed me that I need to have more faith in my own ideas. In myself.

I've always been really close with my Dad and continue to be. His opinions speak to me. Inspire me. Even though I have learned to follow my own heart, I'm smart enough to listen to good advice when I hear it. I may not be his pretty princess that runs around in her tutu anymore, but with his help I found my inner me in that first stride.

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*Breanna Coyne is a student who has a passion for ice hockey. She started playing hockey at the age of four and currently plays for The Sudbury Lady Wolves. She credits her parents who got her to every early morning game and always encouraged her, for much of her success. Breanna dreams of one day representing Canada on the ice.*

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**Emily Rowsell**

Third Place – Grade 8  
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

# I Can Stand Alone

I was shaking uncontrollably as a breath of hot air left my delicate quivering lips. Never have I felt so alone, so unwanted and so unloved, and in that moment it felt like the world was against me. I was paralyzed but on the inside I was a looming tempest. Demoralized, I wanted to scream and turn the world upside down. Thoughts raced through my head. I had so many questions with no answers to them. I didn't understand how one simple sentence could make me feel so inadequate, and so inferior. That one sentence, "I don't love you anymore."

Was I unlovable? How could the person that made me feel so remarkable make me feel so worthless? I felt like I was drowning in my own sorrow. I wanted it to be a dream. I wanted to wake up and know that everything would be okay. I was madly in love with a boy who didn't love me back. The boy I'd go to when I was upset and scared. Now who was going to make me feel better? Who was I supposed to go to? Why did I condition myself to depend on someone else's love to make me feel good about myself?

As the days passed and the "I love you's" faded away like a washed up shore, I became numb to the pain I was feeling. But his image haunted my mind. His charming smile, curly hair, and beautiful blue eyes, how could I forget such alluring blue eyes? I guess I did because whenever I think of them now, the image is all foggy and unclear. It was then I realized I had forgotten. I forgot and that was okay. I let go and I was proud. I was proud of myself and proud that I didn't need him. I came to realize that he wasn't there and I was fine. I didn't depend on him. I realized I didn't need somebody to tell me that I was beautiful, unique and funny. All I had to do was look in the mirror. All I had to do was take a step back and look at myself, and my accomplishments. I'm me. I'm the person who has always stood proud and tall, smiling at the world that looked down upon me. I wasn't going to fall apart because one person couldn't see my potential. I was going to get up and try harder, be better, be stronger because, I'm extraordinary.

You may look at me and not see anything special, but I know differently. I'm stronger than I ever knew I could be and just because I now stand alone doesn't mean I am alone. It means I'm strong enough to handle things by myself. Through all of this, I learned that I am strong enough to walk away and not look back, and that I will always be strong enough to push forward and keep on moving.

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*Emily Rowsell is the youngest of three siblings and an avid musician.*

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**GRADE 9/10****Lauren Carlson**First Place – Grade 9  
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

# Chroma

There once was a time when people's colours went black. No more were the deep blues dancing with midnight purples, the sunshine yellows speckling floral pinks, the forest greens entangled with icy blues. All that remained was a drab echo of what it once was, splashed on a vast expanse of darkness that lacked all richness the colours once had. I was depressed, and life became dull to me.

I was lost. My cousin had left after eight miserable months of sharing the same living space with me. My mom had been diagnosed with an early stage of skin cancer. School was becoming overwhelming. I was rapidly losing friends. Anxiety attacks became more regular. There was so much pressure to succeed, stress, questions with no answers, problems with no solutions, depression, fear, loss, and longing. I would overthink everything. My head was full of landmines; one misstep and I was forced to the ground gasping for breath. I would wander in circles for hours becoming more and more lost. Spiralling out of control. One step forward, two steps back.

I find it amusing that my turning point from something so consuming would be so simple and mundane. The key, pivotal moment that altered my fatalistic outlook began with me trudging along the sidewalk, heading home from another exhausting day at school. My bag was heavy on my back, my shoulders ached from the strain. I was unable to block out the world with music, as I had forgotten my earbuds at home. I was forced to listen. My ears were open to the wind whispering its secrets in my ears. I could hear the dry crunch my shoes made as they dug up snow, and the evergreens shivering in the crisp streams of air. My hair was tossed around in the currents, tickling my face. My own breathing was loud in my ears. I could feel my heart steadily beating, giving me my own rhythm. My eyes were wide open, absorbing my surroundings, taking in everything with a new perspective. I was like a child, gazing in wonder at the world, thirsting for more, captivated by its sheer beauty.

I felt a spark deep down inside me. I felt the black tones being stripped away, like a veil being lifted. I can see it now. I felt powerful, I felt in control. Things made sense once again. So what if I didn't have all the answers? Some things are more fascinating if left a mystery. So what if things get tough? There are people around me willing to help me through it. So what if things crumble? Rebuild and start again. I felt more alive than I had in ages. I was back on top of my world. I could focus, my thoughts were clear, my outlook was optimistic. All it took was removing the distractions. Instead of simply looking, I actually saw for once. This is the real world. It is bigger than what goes on inside one's head. I realized that even when everything may be changing in your inner self, the world goes on. You can always count on the sun rising, and the nighttime stars.

Chroma [kroh-muh] : the purity of a colour, or its freedom from white or grey. I can feel the colours once again. The lifeless hues are gone, their echo long receded. Everything is bright and vivid. The colours I see hold emotion and character. They breathe into who I am. I can see it in my mind's eye. I can see the pearly mists meeting the sea green sunshine. I can see the rose red glitter falling over the emerald sand.

Because of my realizations on that sidewalk, I know who I am, my place, and who I aim to be. I am silver quicksand, lilac waves.

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*Lauren Carlson is very creative and likes to look at things from different perspectives. She loves to read and paint. She wants to travel, especially to Europe, to discover new things. Lauren's friends describe her as trustworthy and funny.*

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### **Elecksia Desjardins**

Second Place – Grade 9  
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

## **Into the Darkness**

**B**eep...beep...beep... That was all I heard the entire night, except for at 2 a.m. when a friendly voice told me it was time for my medication. All I could think about was how much I wanted to be on the soccer field. My life wasn't always like this. My life was pretty normal; I went to school, played sports and had fun with my friends. My life changed one day when my younger sister accidentally poked my left eye. I rubbed my eye and realized I couldn't see anything. I blinked several times and nothing happened; black.

I panicked but my parents were convinced I would regain my vision, so they decided to wait until the next day to go to the hospital. The doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong with my vision. Neither could my optometrist who called the Ottawa Eye Institute. Based on their advice we left for Ottawa immediately. Over a two week period, I had numerous appointments with four different specialists in the following fields: Ophthalmology, Neurology, ENT Physician and Genealogy. When I met all these doctors, I realized what had happened was a lot worse than I thought. Finally, I received an answer.

I was diagnosed with MacCune-Albright Syndrome. This syndrome caused the bones in my head to grow very quickly. This resulted in my optic nerve being crushed. My sister was relieved to hear that she was not the cause my lost sight. Everyone was hoping surgery would restore my vision. I was excited about my surgery on December 21, 2015, but as the day came closer I grew more nervous. On the day of my surgery I was anxious, just waiting to be rolled into the operating room. The anesthesiologist injected me with the anesthetics and counted down, "10,9,8...,7..."

I woke up with blurred vision, like I'd opened my eyes underwater. It was very hard for me to figure out what was going on. My mom was right by my side. She told me that the surgeons were able to relieve the pressure on my optic nerve but that it wouldn't restore my sight like they'd hoped. At that point, I didn't really react because, from the start, they told me that it was unlikely I would see out of my eye again. However that wasn't only side effect from the surgery, my legs required air pumps to prevent blood clots and I was unable to stand up. When I attempted to stand for the first time I fell, and at that moment, I doubted everything. I thought it would take me forever to walk again and get on with my recovery. All I wanted was to go home and get my life back to normal or as normal as it could be.

I was hooked up to a lumbar drain which relieved the excess fluid from my brain. My neurologist visited me on December 25<sup>th</sup> and watched me take my final test, walking the hallway. I finally did it! I received my

medication schedule and the doctor told me what was going on with my head. Upon my release, I wasn't given any sports restrictions. I could do what I love; play sports again. What a Christmas gift! I packed my clothes, took a well-needed shower, got my medication, then left for Sudbury. Although we got home at 10 p.m and all I wanted to do was sleep, since it was Christmas, I opened all my presents with my family. But the best present I got that day was coming home to my family and friends and being done with the chaos in the hospital.

Beep.. beep... beep... that's not the sound I hear anymore. Instead I hear cheers of victory every time I play sports. It's the best sound ever. I am so thankful that losing my sight did not take that away from me. Without sports I don't know what kind of person I would be. The whole experience really showed me that you can't take an amazing thing like sight for granted. I soon realized that I am a stronger person than I ever thought I was.

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*Elecksa Desjardins is involved in the school film festival and many sports, such as volleyball and soccer. She would love to travel outside of Canada.*

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### **Kaylee Kruk**

Third Place – Grade 9  
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

## **Would You?**

**I**f you had the chance to change your fate would you? In the moment, I would have done anything to wake from this nightmare. I wanted to go back in time to the 'easy days' when I coloured outside the lines and would cry over ice cream, or fast forward to the 'happy ending' when everything would go back to normal again. What I didn't know at that time was that I'd look back at those moments and value their importance and the impact they had had on my life.

It was the summer of 2012, and with the house hot and stuffy, enjoying the outdoors was the best way to take in the blazing weather. Therefore, that's where we spent most of our days. We were always running outside, playing on the trampoline and having fun. It wasn't until the night I heard those three painful words that everything changed.

Five long hours had past since my parents had taken my seven-year-old sister to the clinic. It was around three a.m., and the only people awake at my house were my Nana and I. I couldn't sleep with the ongoing thoughts inside my head and the endless possibilities: "What's taking so long?", "Is Karissa that sick?". At the age of nine, I'd never before experienced unease. I forced myself to stay awake so that when they came home I could ask them all my questions. Then, the phone rang. My Nana, anticipating it, answered quickly, and within a few moments, tears rolled down the side of her cheek. I was instantaneously filled with shock and confusion, wanting to know the reason for her devastation. I vividly remember the awful words that escaped her mouth when she hung up the phone: "Karissa has cancer."

At a young age, this has very little meaning, especially when cancer is such a mature topic. However, I felt as if I were on the verge of finding out more than someone my age should know. In the blink of an eye, I was walking down the halls of Toronto Sick Kids. Seeing all the suffering children on my way to my sister's room broke my heart. I didn't realize how many children were affected by this awful disease. Karissa was in intensive critical care, being pricked and prodded over and over again for tests and bloodwork. She was promptly diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia and began treatment immediately. Karissa had now begun

the fight for her life, and as a family, we were about to do anything to keep her mind off the dreadful pain. I would try to make Karissa laugh with some jokes, or have sleepovers at the hospital to lift her spirits.

While spending nine months in the City of Toronto, I became familiar with all of the procedures, tests and operations. Daily checkups and blood work became second nature. My whole life was flipped upside down but I believe it only made my family stronger. My faith and maturity grew tremendously as I'd been exposed to so much independence throughout the year. Karissa had many ups and downs but with the support of the doctors, nurses, volunteers, and her family and friends, she took her last chemotherapy pill on April 3, 2015. Karissa was miraculously cured and now remains in remission. The joy and happiness this day brought to our lives was inexplicable. The feeling of accomplishment and completion was rewarding.

Throughout this journey, I made life-long friends and many memories. I had the privilege of travelling to Hawaii with my family as a celebration of our journey. I go to camps each summer to interact with children my age who have experienced similar struggles. As well, I was introduced to many potential careers, that I never before knew I'd be interested in, like a pediatrician. The incredible things I've been blessed to have done and seen, all due to this nasty disease. There has been many positives that have come out of this miracle, and I wouldn't change a thing. Therefore, if you had the chance to change your fate, would you? My answer to this is simply, no.

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*Kaylee Kruk comes from a big family and has seven siblings. She loves to play the ukulele and sports such as volleyball and basketball. She would like to join her school's Girls Athletic Association next year. Her friends describe her as intelligent, independent, and powerful.*

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## GRADE 11/12

### Mackenzie Marshall-Deschenes

First Place – Grade 12  
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

## Pills

“She has fought many wars, most internal. The ones that you battle alone, for this, she is remarkable. She is a survivor.” Nikki Rowe

“You are very sick.” The doctor's words rang through me as I sat on the edge of the hospital bed. I felt a red hot ball of rage at the bottom of my stomach. I couldn't speak, only bursts of tears and anger escaped my mouth as the doctor continued to explain my condition to my family. In a matter of minutes, I was put in a hospital gown four sizes too large and was admitted to the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. For the rest of my life, I will need to deal with swallowing numerous amounts of pills each day, but being diagnosed with an incurable disease at the age of sixteen will forever be the hardest pill to swallow.

My first week spent in the hospital was unquestionably the worst week of my life. After my doctor broke the news to me that I'd be staying in the hospital until further notice, I contacted my family and friends at home. I felt like I was drowning with anxiety. I was placed in an isolated room on the fifth floor

that had a window facing a colourless brick wall. The smell of “clean” made me feel nauseous. Doctors and nurses flooded in and out of my room wearing special yellow gowns. They introduced themselves and poked, pinched and prodded me. Cold hands touched my belly, sending rockets of pain through my entire body. Different cold hands checked my pulse, ba-dum, ba-dum, ba-dum, throbbing in my ears. Every morning, medical students did their rounds and spoke to each other about me like I wasn't in the room. I was dragged all over the hospital for X-rays, MRI's and blood work. They pushed me around in a wheelchair as I dragged my IV along with me. I felt helpless.

On my second day, I began prepping for my first endoscopy. A thin, purple tube was inserted down my nose and into my stomach, administering me a drug to clear out my system. It passed down my dry throat and made me feel like I had gone a week in a desert without water. I fasted for over a day and grew weaker and weaker by the minute. After an extremely long and difficult night, I counted to ten the next morning in the operating room and was put to sleep. I have never been so terrified. Although endoscopies are generally safe procedures, all of the possible complications ran through my mind. What if something happened while I was on the operating table? What if I woke up in the middle of the procedure? What could go wrong?

I fluttered open my eyes an hour later and I was back in my sterile room with my mom by my side. For the first time in over four months, I felt remarkable. The procedure went flawlessly with no complications and I had no symptoms. I felt normal again, joking and laughing with my mom beside me. It was determined during my endoscopy, that I suffer from Ulcerative Colitis, an incurable auto-immune disease that causes long-lasting inflammation and ulcers in my digestive tract.

Over the next sixteen months, I experienced two treatment failures. I swallowed pill after pill and dealt with the ugliest side effects, including worsened anxiety, depression, mood swings, weight gain, joint pain, and insomnia. One day I'd be my normal bubbly self and the next day I'd be wrestling with feelings of despair. School was a war zone, I doubted my abilities and self-worth in many situations. Sadness and stress overcame me as if I were standing in the rain, but I didn't have an umbrella. I isolated myself from friends to protect them from the burden of my hopelessness and my unpredictable mood swings. I was running on ten percent of the energy of the other kids my age but people just didn't understand what I was going through. My diseases were invisible and many were blind to the heavy grey cloud that followed me around. Some days I felt numb and others I felt like I could explode, but every morning I gulped down my pills.

It is now March, 2017, a year and a half after my diagnosis. Every month I receive my medication through an intravenous treatment and I feel healthier after every infusion. After swallowing my last pill on March 6<sup>th</sup>, I realized that I am stronger than I ever knew I was. Although I know I will have to deal with my illnesses for the rest of my life, I will be able to recover from anything the universe throws at me. Even the biggest pills I will be able to swallow. The most important lesson I learned from my experience is that asking for help and speaking about my illnesses does not make me any weaker or any less of a goddess. Putting your own health first is not a sign of selfishness but an indication of empowerment. For those who have friends or family members with chronic illnesses, try your hardest to understand. Let them open up to you. Ask them questions. Understand. For those who deal with chronic illnesses, you may feel like you are stuck in a sandstorm of negative thoughts and uncertainty but eventually, the sand will settle and you will be left even more powerful than you were before. The minute I learned to love myself with all of my maladies, I did not wish to be any different.

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*Mackenzie Marshall-Deschenes loves science, math, and expressing herself through visual arts and storytelling. In the future, Mackenzie plans to study physics, travel, and become a teacher.*

**Gavin Rudolf**

Second Place – Grade 11  
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

## Not Feminine

**S**ociety: it has the most power in our world, and gives the people it falls victim to no mercy. This was the case with me when I came to realize who I really was. People around me were always a big influence, whether I knew them or not. All I wanted was to be normal.

It started in fourth grade when I first noticed, then rejected, the thought of being feminine. I was always the kid that would draw rainbows and flowers on my work, the “girlish” things, as other boys would call it. My classmates would talk about how different I was behind my back, how they thought I was secretly a girl. When you're that young you don't understand “different”. I was pushing the idea of being feminine to the back of my head. I couldn't help expressing who I was. Was it because they didn't understand who I was, or because “I” didn't understand who I was? I suppose looking back now the answer was both.

I was sure I had to hide being feminine from everyone. I wasn't ready to share anything with the world because I believed I could change myself. I believed that I could alter my own genetics and personality to the tune of others. I would dress differently, wearing more “masculine” things; I would like things that other boys liked in my class like Pokemon or wrestling. I wasn't even my own person. I was a mere reflection of everyone else that I encountered, and I can remember thinking to myself that if I wanted friends and acceptance I had to keep everything in.

I had my own formulated opinion on people that were gay. I can recall my father saying something that would stick in my head forever. He said, “Remember Gavin, you like girls and you always will.” To which I gave a heavy nod, expecting to forget about it the next day, but I didn't.

As the years went on it became harder to bottle my emotions inside. I remember a moment in the sixth grade when I started asking questions about myself. The first, I can remember very clearly as if it was super glued into my mind. I walked into class right after lunch and noticed all the girls were forcing the boys to get their nails painted. I saw this as an opportunity, a chance to break my mental walls. I casually walked over to the girls to make it seem like I was an innocent bystander. They noticed me and pulled me in, so I “fake struggled” to seem like I wanted none of their mischief. I can remember looking down at the sloppy blue polish; freedom quickly flushed my mind, perfection, happiness, and belonging. I was so happy I started crying, for that one moment was so much more than it appeared to be. It was a way to show society that I was not going to bind to its rules, I was going to show the world who I was. For once I felt myself, and I wasn't going to let that moment go.

For the next couple of years my feelings remained dormant. I was not ready to rise up to society yet and put myself in front of my classmates and beg for acceptance, not yet. My mom was starting to notice that I wasn't acting myself. I was still closed off, waiting to show who I was, and it was taking its toll on me. I was becoming more depressed. Fear and humiliation were sapping the life from my body. I knew all I had to do to release it was to tell someone, anyone.

I came home one day and my mom told me I had a meeting with a counsellor, Debbie. My first appointment came and I made an attempt to lie about my strange behaviour and said it was because I missed my dad. She knew I was lying to cover something up. She was smart and asked very direct questions that would leave me cornered. After months of appointments, the truth finally came out. I broke into tears in the middle of a conversation and started screaming that I was a humiliation to my father, a faggot. It felt like I had popped a balloon in my head, and in that quick moment, all she did was smile. She shot her big grin at me, shoved it right in my face to show me her pleasure with my outburst, because it was exactly what she wanted. She then directed me into a room alone where I completely spilled everything. It was like everything that I had been through, every inch of pain and infuriating anger had transformed itself into a tropical oasis of relief, flowing out of me. She told me that it was best for me to tell my mom what I was feeling so I didn't hesitate.

The outcome was very positive from my parents; they were okay with whom I was and that I was feminine. And at this point, I was starting to realize that I was gay and my mindset had completely changed. I started doing what I wanted to do and not what others expected me to do. The happiness I craved was finally here. I had freedom in who I wanted to be, and shortly after I came out as gay to my peers and my family. Not only was it my experiences that helped me find myself, but the experiences of others, such as Debbie who really brought Gavin out into the world.

Society: It has the most power in our everyday world. But if we rise up to the challenge, face our fears head on, happiness doesn't have to be as far away as it seems. We all hold the power inside of us; we all hold the key to open the door of liberty. It's just a matter of finding that key.

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*Gavin Noah Rudolf lives with his mother Sherri, his stepfather Paul and his older brother Quinn. If not working at his part-time job or doing schoolwork, Gavin can be found practicing makeup on himself/peers or caring for his cat. In the future, Gavin hopes to become a world-known makeup artist.*

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### **Shayna Snucins-Earl**

Third Place – Grade 12  
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

## **A Spark, A Dream, A Vision**

**D**uring the summer of 2014, I had the opportunity to participate in a life-changing trip to Ghana with the organization Me to We. I traveled with seventeen other like-minded youth from across North America to build a school. At the beginning of the trip, I had no idea how much my experience in Ghana would impact my life. The people I met on the other side of the world changed my global perspective.

On our first day in the community called Asemkow, I met a child named Paul, who was welcoming and compassionate. He smiled constantly, and made me feel at home in this strange village on the other side of the world. Over time, I learned that Paul was eight years old, and was entering the second grade. He was fortunate to have attended school for his entire life, and would likely continue his education for at least another two years, or until he finished third grade. After third grade, if he was able to continue attending school, he would have to walk forty-five minutes to the nearest village. Paul was one of the few children in Asemkow who received schooling; many children did not attend school because they were required to help their fathers fish to earn income, or collect water and firewood and take care of their younger siblings. It was almost incomprehensible to encounter the realities I had only previously watched on TV, and I felt guilty for disparaging my education.

In Ghana, I had the opportunity to ask community members about challenges they face and their hopes for the future. I listened to countless stories concerning access to water. During the trip, I met a girl named Mary. She was small for a seven year old, but she had a contagious smile and radiated kindness. She also carried her younger sister on her back. Later, I learned from one of my trip facilitators that Mary was an orphan and lived with her grandmother. At seven years old, she was required to care for her younger sister, was responsible for the household, and woke up at 4:30 every morning to collect water. This story affected me deeply. I could not accept that part of my global family did not have access to basic human rights.

Prior to the end of the trip, our facilitators warned us about reverse culture shock, but I did not anticipate the profound impact I would feel upon my return to Western society. When I landed in Canada, the world felt different. Everything seemed overly extravagant, from the amount of food in my fridge to the excess of clothing in the mall. I remember crying when I dumped out excess water from my water bottle,

because I knew many people in Ghana did not have clean water to drink. On the first day of school, I arrived with Ghanaian bracelets halfway to my elbows, and quickly became upset when students complained about the start of another school year. At this moment, I knew I had to turn my nostalgia and shock into action.

My trip to Ghana lit a spark that cannot be extinguished. Through my roles as the President and Vice-President of the fundraising council at my school, I have helped raise over \$15,000 to benefit our local and global communities, and I have led a two-year campaign to build a well in Kenya through the organization Free the Children. Every day, I remember the children in Asemkow, and I am optimistic that the money we raise will benefit children living in similar situations. My trip affected my career goals, and has inspired me to pursue a career related to global governance. One day, I hope to be the Secretary General of the United Nations.

Travelling to Ghana increased my confidence and shaped my personality. Prior to my trip, I was terrified to speak in front of large groups of people. I made the decision to overcome my fear and to develop strong public speaking skills, because I was determined to share my experiences with my school. Now, I look forward to informing students about fundraising events at school-wide assemblies. Speaking at our school helps students connect with our cause, and allows them to understand the significant impact our fundraising events have in local communities and villages overseas. This is a powerful way to foster a sense of empathy in young people.

Travelling to Ghana taught me that no goal is unattainable, and that youth can work together and change our world. I learned about the importance of questioning the status quo, and that perseverance and passion are the foundations of change. I became inspired to speak up about issues I care about, and to fight for what is right. My generation must work tirelessly to bring together the global community to create peace and unity.

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*Shayna Snucins-Earl is the President of the Marymount Catholic Charities Council (fundraising council). In addition to her work with the council, she organized Walk in Her Shoes Marymount, a celebration of women's rights on International Women's Day. She is particularly passionate about girls' education in Africa and clean water issues. In the future, she plans to pursue undergraduate and graduate degrees in Political Science, and eventually hopes to work for the United Nations.*

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# Saskatchewan Winners' Essays

## GRADE 7/8 ENGLISH

**Kyler Gervais**

First Place – Grade 8

Holy Family Roman Catholic Separate School Division No. 140

## From Fat to Slim

**W**hen I was a little kid I ate a lot, and because of this I got very large. I never noticed it. I always knew I was bigger than most the kids in my age group but I thought that was just because I was the oldest. I knew that I was big, but it did not matter because I didn't care. I had friends, and I knew some of them talked behind my back, but I didn't care because I never knew that I was as large as I was.

When I got older I became aware that people were making fun of me. I was picked on more and more. I lost more friends and it hurt a lot. I felt alone. No one wanted to be around the weird big kid at school. I kept living my life, even though I was miserable. I became completely anti-social. I didn't leave my house unless I absolutely had to. It was a terrible situation. This was honestly the hardest time in my life so far. It took all my strength to not give up. I was trying my very hardest, but it was too hard for me to not give up, and I started to give in.

Just before I almost completely gave in, my mom asked me to come to CrossFit with her. Since I was a pre-teen, I was not too excited about it. Once we got there I actually had fun. It was interesting how everyone kept cheering on and encouraging each other. I saw people struggling with the same problems I had. That was the day I decided I was done with being fat. I didn't like how I looked, and for once I wasn't going to sit around and be sad about it; I was going to do something about it. I started to work out, first once a day, then twice a day. It was still hard for me to get up and actually work out because I wasn't getting results, but I wasn't going to give up. I was done with being picked on and being fat. I kept on going; I knew I wasn't changing my body type yet, but I felt better. I had more energy and I was healthier. For once in a long time, I felt happy. It changed my life.

I still work out two times a day. In the summer I would work out three to four times a day. After a month or three, I got results. I was finally becoming what I wanted to be. Now, I am happy; I have a girlfriend and I am staying healthy. Sometimes it's still hard to get up and work out because I have to ask myself, "Why am I doing this anymore?" It is easily answered. I do it to motivate my mom. She has body image problems and I don't like that. She didn't give up on me, so I will never give up on her.

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*Kyler Gervais is very athletic and is an AA Bantam hockey player. His interests are working out, playing sports, participating in most school activities and spending time with his family.*

**Kyler Dutka**

Second Place – Grade 8  
Holy Family Roman Catholic Separate School Division No. 140

## Wounds Too Deep for Healing

It was around 9 o'clock when I woke on Christmas morning. I was so excited to open my gifts! I jumped out of my bed and ran down the hall as fast as I could. I sat down by the huge Christmas tree. My mom, my sister, my dad and I started opening gifts. Then I thought to myself, "Where is Grandma?" I didn't want to open any more gifts without my grandma. That's when my dad told me that the ambulance had come and taken her to the hospital an hour before.

I knew my grandma was sick, but I had no idea that it was that bad. For the first time I was afraid of losing her. I told my dad that we needed to go visit her right away. He said that the doctors were operating on her at the moment. When I heard that, I knew things were not good. I broke down; I felt so alone and the tears came.

Hours later, I sat next to my grandma who was lying in a hospital bed. As I sat holding her hand, I could see the pain in her eyes. I wondered then how the worst could always happen to the best. No matter how sick my grandma was, she always had the biggest smile on her face. I wanted to cry again. I couldn't stand seeing her in so much pain. I wanted to take her place on that bed. I thought about how God could take her away on this day, on Christmas day.

It was around 8 p.m. that night. My family and I sat at my grandma's house, waiting for my grandpa to come home with news. Part of me didn't want him to come in; I was scared. Then I heard the front door open. I heard the heavy footsteps, and the creaking of the floor. My grandpa came into view. He sat down next to me. I could see the sadness in his eyes. Then he started sobbing as he whispered, "She's gone".

Two years have passed now and I know Christmas will never be the same. I knew though, that I was not going to let my grandma die for nothing. I was going to continue the kindness and happiness that she had made others feel when they were around her. I was going to get people to see my grandma in me. People will remember her, through me. It was my turn to spread the kindness and happiness that my grandma had shown to others. My grandma will live on through me.

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*Kyler Dutka is a very fun-loving and energetic student who enjoys playing sports such as hockey and basketball. He loves to go on trips and adventures and travel the world. When he is older he wants to be a software engineer and a professional Youtuber in Los Angeles. Being a competitive person, he works very hard in his school work and strives to be the best possible. He speaks 3 languages: English, French and Spanish.*

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## Kendra Cossette

Third Place – Grade 8

Holy Family Roman Catholic Separate School Division No. 140

# Eva

This was it. I had been waiting for months to hear these words. It wasn't the exact setting where you would think someone would hear this. It was at volleyball districts, hearing people cheering and the ball going across the court. I'd been asking my mom almost everyday after school if she had heard any news. I knew time was getting close ever since I saw my brother's truck leave the farm to go to Regina. I walked up to her and asked the same question I usually did.

"Any news?"

"Yup," she said as she showed me a picture of an adorable baby girl. "Congrats, Auntie Kendra!"

When I got home, I couldn't stop asking questions like when they were coming home and when I could see her. Then a few days later, I saw my brother's truck pull into the driveway of our farm and go to his trailer. After a few minutes, my dad got a text from my brother saying to come over. There was so much emotion. I will never forget seeing my dad cry for probably the first time. It was so heartwarming to see everyone so happy surrounding Eva.

As weeks went by, I enjoyed visiting her and watching her slowly grow and change. I thought it would be easy to babysit her, but there was a lot more to taking care of a baby than I realized. Of course, I thought of the basic things like changing diapers, feeding her and putting her to sleep, but there was also a lot of crying, keeping her calm and if I was holding her, she wanted me to stand up, not sit down.

I enjoyed spending time with her and learning more ways to take care of her. I also loved talking about her and taking pictures of her. At first, I thought she would love me because we were related, but it took some time for us to get used to each other. I never knew how much her emotions could affect mine. When she was upset, it made me sad and want to hold her tight and calm her down. But when she was happy and giggly, it made me so happy that I couldn't stop smiling.

Eva has really influenced and changed my life. She taught me more about raking responsibility, caring skills and has brought changes to my outlook on life. She makes me really happy when I'm around her and she can change my mood really quickly. It's such a great experience creating a connection with someone who can't even talk yet. I can't wait to watch her grow more and learn different caring techniques for every age she reaches. Not only has she changed my life, but she has changed the lives of my family.

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*Kendra Cossette enjoys reading, listening to music and playing volleyball. She hopes that her future includes some volleyball. Kendra tries her best at everything she does and works hard to achieve personal and academic goals. Kendra is very helpful, kind, loving and confident in everything she does. Her friends and family have helped her become who she is today. She has two sisters, a brother and a little niece and lives with her loving mom, dad, their two cats, Tortie and Freya, and their dog, Sadie.*

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## GRADE 7/8 FRENCH

**Charlotte Andrist**

First Place – Grade 8

Holy Family Roman Catholic Separate School Division No. 140

# Ma grande soeur

Quand ma mère nous a dit qu'une fille d'Allemagne allait rester avec nous pour une année pour qu'elle puisse étudier au Canada, je ne savais pas quoi penser. J'étais excitée et nerveuse en même temps. Notre famille la connaissait déjà parce que nos familles sont de bonnes amies. Sa famille vit en Allemagne mais ils viennent au Canada chaque été pour visiter leur famille. Chaque fois qu'ils viennent, ils nous visitent aussi. Alors elle était déjà une de mes amies. J'avais hâte qu'une amie allait vivre avec moi! Je suis la plus âgée dans ma maison. J'ai des soeurs jumelles et un petit frère, alors avoir une grande soeur avec qui je peux m'amuser, me donne un bon changement.

En Allemagne, ma nouvelle soeur adore aller en cheval et visiter des granges. J'habite sur une ferme alors elle était très excitée qu'elle aura la chance de voir nos chevaux à chaque jour. Elle a un très grand respect pour les animaux alors elle a pris la décision de ne rien manger des animaux. J'ai trouvé cela très intéressant et j'ai décidé de l'essayer. Au debut, j'ai trouvé que c'est difficile de ne manger rien qui vient d'un animal, mais ça devient de plus en plus facile. Elle est habituée à faire sa nourriture elle même et elle m'a appris beaucoup.

Pour moi, des fois, j'ai de la difficulté avec mes études. J'essaye d'aider mes soeurs et mon frère et maintenant j'ai quelqu'un qui peut m'aider. Elle est vraiment forte à l'école et elle met beaucoup d'effort dans tout ce qu'elle fait. Ça m'encourage à le faire aussi. Elle m'encourage aussi de faire plus de choses avec les chevaux. On travaille avec les chevaux ensemble. On échange des idées et des conseils pour améliorer notre forme ensemble.

L'expérience avec ma grande soeur est vraiment intéressante et amusante. J'ai fait beaucoup de changements dans ma vie pendant son temps avec nous. J'ai changé les choses que je mange, j'ai changé comment je travaille et maintenant j'essaie vraiment fort dans tout ce que je fais, même si je ne réussis pas. Elle a aussi changer la façon dont je travaille avec mes chevaux et comment je vois les animaux. J'ai appris comment être une meilleure étudiante et même une meilleure soeur. Je suis vraiment contente qu'elle est venue rester avec ma famille parce que je n'ai pas juste trouver une nouvelle amie, j'ai trouvé une personne qui à changé ma vie. Ma grande soeur.

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*Charlotte Andrist is very musical and began playing piano at a very early age. She also plays numerous sports such as basketball, water polo, speed swimming and horseback riding. Charlotte is excited for the next chapter of her life.*

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**Adah de Leeuw**

Second Place – Grade 8

Holy Family Roman Catholic Separate School Division No. 140

**Mon frère****M**on Frère Marcus

Aujourd'hui je me considère une personne responsable, patiente, et capable de faire beaucoup de chose, mais je n'étais pas toujours comme ça. Quand mon petit frère était né, il m'a changé et il m'a aidé à grandir. Aujourd'hui je peux dire qu'il me rend la vie un peu difficile, mais il continue à m'aider en plusieurs façons. Comme chaque famille, nous avons nos moments entre frères et soeurs, mais nous allons toujours être des meilleurs amis.

J'avais 6 ans le 27 octobre de 2009 quand mon petit frère Marcus était né. C'était un gros changement pour moi parce qu'en ce moment, je n'étais plus la seule dans la famille. Quand il était bébé il était vraiment mignon. Chaque jour je jouais avec lui et chaque jour il grandissait et il changeait beaucoup.

Quand j'avais 10 ans je pouvais rester à la maison toute seule. J'ai aussi commencé de prendre soin de mon frère toute seule à la maison. Le plus que je regardais Marcus toute seule, le plus responsable je devenais. Il est un des raisons que je suis aussi responsable que je suis.

Quand mes parents vont quelque part pour la journée et j'ai besoin de prendre soin de Marcus pendant la journée, j'ai besoin de savoir comment faire le souper et le dîner. Mes parents ont commencé à m'enseigner comment faire la nourriture comme la Mac & cheese, les hot dogs, les sandwiches grillés, des biscuits et beaucoup d'autres choses pour manger. J'ai commencé de cuisiner à un très jeune âge parce que je suis en charge de mon frère pour la journée et pendant la journée il doit manger.

Pendant mes journées seules avec Marcus c'est vraiment amusant; nous jouons ensemble, et nous faisons les activités ensemble. Mais des fois, Marcus peut être très ennuyant. Beaucoup de fois, Marcus m'énerve mais je dois rester calme et patiente. Je savais que si je crie à Marcus ça ne va pas aider la situation et ne l'arrête pas d'être ennuyant. Je dois être patiente et calme, et travailler avec la situation juste au temps qu'il arrête.

En conclusion Marcus est un de mes meilleurs amis dans le monde. Je ne savais pas ce que ma vie aurait été si il n'était pas dedans. Il est une vraiment une grande partie de ma vie. Il est la raison que je suis comme je suis.

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*Adah de Leeuw has many interests outside school. Adah has played hockey since she was in grade one and continues to play. She also enjoys competitive swimming. In 2011, Adah started playing piano. Adah is happy about her accomplishments and what she has yet to accomplish.*

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# Participating Schools

We would like to recognize the involvement of the following schools in the Turning Points program:

## **Anglophone East School District, New Brunswick**

Magnetic Hill School  
Birchmount School  
Lewisville Middle School  
Northrup Frye School  
Shediac Cape School  
Edith Cavell School  
Queen Elizabeth School  
Riverview East School

## **Anglophone South School District, New Brunswick**

Barnhill Memorial School  
Bayside Middle School  
Belleisle Regional High School  
Harbour View High School  
Princess Elizabeth School  
Harry Miller Middle School  
Quispamsis Middle School  
Riverview East School  
Rothsay Park School  
Simonds High School  
Sir James Dunn Academy  
St. Malachy's Memorial High School  
St. Stephen High School  
St. Stephen Middle School  
Sussex Middle School  
St. John the Baptist-King Edward School

## **Anglophone West School District, New Brunswick**

Bliss Carman Middle School  
Canterbury High School  
Fredericton High School  
George Street Middle School  
Harold Peterson Middle School  
Hartland Community School  
Harvey High School  
Leo Hayes High School  
McAdam High School  
Oromocto High School

## **Francophone Sud School District, New Brunswick**

Centre scolaire Samuel-de-Champlain

## **Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board, Brantford, Ontario**

Assumption College School  
Blessed Sacrament School  
Catholic Education Center  
Holy Cross School  
Holy Trinity Catholic High School  
Jean Vanier Catholic Elementary School  
Our Lady of Providence School  
Resurrection School  
St Patrick School  
St. Gabriel Catholic Elementary School  
St. John's College  
St. Joseph School  
St. Leo School  
St. Theresa School  
St. Pius X Catholic Elementary School

## **Calgary Board of Education, Calgary, Alberta**

F.E. Osborne School  
Mountain Park School  
Nickle School  
Queen Elizabeth High School  
Simon Fraser Middle School  
Sir John A. MacDonald School  
Ted Harrison School

## **Calgary Catholic School District, Calgary, Alberta**

Bishop Carroll High School  
Bishop Kidd School  
Bishop McNally High School  
Father James Whelihan School  
Good Shepherd School  
Holy Cross School  
Light of Christ School  
Notre Dame High School  
Our Lady of the Assumption School  
St Martha School  
St. Martin de Porres High School  
St. Albert the Great School  
St. Ambrose School  
St. Gregory School  
St. Helena School  
St. Joseph School

St. Stephen School  
St. Timothy Junior/Senior High School

**Chignecto-Central Regional School Board,  
Nova Scotia**

Uniacke District School

**Conseil Scolaire Viamonde, North York, Ontario**

École secondaire Étienne-Brûlé

**Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board  
Mississauga / Brampton, Ontario**

Ascension of Our Lord Secondary School  
St. Augustine Catholic Secondary School  
St. Bonaventure Catholic School  
St. Francis Xavier Secondary School  
St. Mark Separate School

**Grand Erie District School Board,  
Brantford / Hagersville, Ontario**

Hagersville Secondary School  
Tollgate Technical Skills Centre

**Halifax Regional School Board, Halifax,  
Nova Scotia**

Brookside Junior High School  
Caldwell Road Elementary School  
Charles P. Allen High School  
Crichton Park Elementary School  
Dartmouth High School  
Eric Graves Junior High School  
Fairview Junior High School  
George P. Vanier Junior High School  
Graham Creighton Junior High School  
Portland Estates Elementary School  
Prince Andrew High School  
Ridgecliff Middle School  
Sackville High School  
Seaside Elementary School

**Halton District School Board, Milton, Ontario**

W I Dick Middle School

**Hastings and Prince Edward  
District School Board, Belleville, Ontario**

Bayside Secondary School

**Holy Family Roman Catholic Separate School  
Division No. 140,**

Estevan, Saskatchewan  
Saint Mary's School  
Sacred Heart/Sacré Coeur School/Ecole

**Near North District School Board,  
Sundridge / Mattawa / North Bay, Ontario**

Almaguin Highlands Secondary School  
F.J. McElligott Secondary School  
Phelps Public School  
West Ferris Secondary School  
Widdifield Secondary School

**Newfoundland and Labrador English School  
District, Newfoundland and Labrador**

Amos Comenius Memorial School  
Ascension Collegiate  
Amalgamated Academy  
Baccalieu Collegiate  
Baltimore School  
Beaconsfield Junior High School  
Belanger Memorial School  
Bishop White School  
Bonne Bay Academy  
Brother Rice Junior High School  
Burgeo Academy  
Canon Richards Memorial Academy  
Cape John Collegiate  
Carbonear Academy  
Catalina Elementary School  
Clarenville Middle School  
Cloud River Academy  
Copper Ridge Academy  
Corner Brook Intermediate School  
Cottrell's Cove Academy  
Cowan Heights Elementary School  
Crescent Collegiate  
Discovery Collegiate  
Donald C. Jamieson Academy  
Doreen Collegiate  
Exploits Valley Intermediate School  
E.A. Butler All Grade School  
Frank Roberts Junior High School  
French Shore Academy  
Grandy's River Collegiate  
Greenwood Academy  
Gros Morne Academy  
Hampden Academy  
Heritage Collegiate  
Hillview Academy  
Holy Cross All Grade School  
Holy Heart of Mary High School  
Holy Redeemer Elementary School

Holy Trinity High School  
Indian River High School  
Jakeman All Grade School  
Jens Haven Memorial School  
J.R. Smallwood Middle School  
Lake Academy  
Lake Melville School  
Lakewood Academy  
Laval High School  
Leary's Brook Junior High School  
LeGallais Memorial  
Leo Burke Academy  
Lewisporte Collegiate  
Lewisporte Intermediate School  
Long Range Academy  
Lourdes Elementary School  
Macdonald Drive Junior High School  
Mary Simms All Grade School  
Mealy Mountain Collegiate  
Mobile Central High School  
MSB Regional Academy  
Mount Pearl Intermediate School  
Northern Lights Academy  
Our Lady of Mercy Elementary School  
Our Lady of the Cape School  
Pasadena Academy  
Persalvic Elementary School  
Prince of Wales Collegiate  
Queen Elizabeth Regional High School  
Queen of Peace Middle School  
Roncalli Central High School  
Smallwood Academy  
Southwest Arm Academy  
St. Boniface All Grade School  
St. Catherine's Academy  
St. Francis School  
St. James All Grade School  
St. James Regional High  
St. John Bosco School  
St. Kevin's Junior High School  
St. Lawrence Academy  
St. Lewis Academy  
St. Matthew's Elementary School  
St. Michael's Elementary School  
St. Michael's Regional High School  
St. Paul's Intermediate School  
St. Paul's Junior High School

St. Peter's Academy  
St. Peter's All Grade School  
St. Peter's Elementary School  
St. Peter's Junior High School  
St. Simon & St. Jude Academy  
St. Thomas Aquinas Elementary School  
Stella Maris Academy  
Stephenville High School  
Stephenville Middle School  
Templeton Academy  
Tricentia Academy  
Valmont Academy  
Viking Trail Academy  
Villanova Junior High School  
White Hills Academy  
Xavier Junior High School

**Peel District School Board,  
Brampton / Mississauga, Ontario**

Bramalea Secondary School  
Dolphin Senior Public School  
Glenforest Secondary School  
Turner Fenton Secondary School

**Pembina Trails School Division,  
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

Acadia Junior High  
Arthur A Leach School  
Bairdmore School  
École Van Wallegghem School  
École Viscount Alexander  
General Byng School  
Henry G. Izatt Middle School  
Laidlaw School  
Linden Meadows School  
Oakenwald School  
River West Park School  
Ryerson School

**School Sports Newfoundland & Labrador,  
Newfoundland & Labrador**

St. Annes Setanewey High School

**Simcoe-Muskoka Catholic District School  
Board, Bradford, Ontario**

Holy Trinity Catholic High School

**Sudbury Catholic District School Board  
Sudbury / Hanmer, Ontario**

Marymount Academy  
St. Anne Catholic School

St. Benedict Catholic Secondary School  
St. Charles College

**Toronto Catholic District School Board,  
Toronto, Ontario**

Annunciation Catholic School  
Blessed Margherita Catholic School  
Blessed Trinity Catholic School  
Catholic Education Center  
Epiphany of Our Lord Catholic School  
Father John Redmond CSS  
Holy Spirit Catholic School  
James Cardinal McGuigan CHS  
Madonna CSS  
Monsignor Percy Johnson CHS  
Saint Mother Teresa Catholic Academy  
Senator O'Connor College School  
St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School  
St. Agatha Catholic School  
St. Basil College  
St. Bede Catholic School  
St. Catherine Catholic School  
St. Cecilia Catholic School  
St. Jane Frances Catholic School  
St. Joachim Catholic School  
St. Luigi Catholic School  
St. Mary Catholic Academy  
St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Catholic School  
St Michael's Choir School

**Toronto District School Board,  
Toronto / Etobicoke / Scarborough / North York,  
Ontario**

Brian Public School  
Burnhamthorpe Collegiate Institute  
Central Toronto Academy  
Elkhorn Public School  
Fairglen Junior Public School  
Fern Avenue Junior and Senior Public School  
Forest Hill Junior and Senior Public School  
George Harvey Collegiate Institute  
Glenview Senior Public School  
John English Junior Middle School  
Maurice Cody Junior Public School  
Parkdale Collegiate Institute  
Queen Victoria Public School  
Toronto District Secondary School

**York Region District School Board, York Region,  
Ontario**

Bakersfield Public School  
EJ Sand Public School  
Pierre Elliott Trudeau High School  
Richmond Hill High School  
Wilshire Elementary School

# In Appreciation

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