



LES ESSAIS GAGNANTS 2019

AWARD WINNING ESSAYS 2019

Les essais gagnants 2019

Moments tournants

Award Winning Essays 2019

Turning Points

Foreword

Life has many turning points – the events and experiences that lead to or stimulate a significant change and have a demonstrable impact on a person. These turning points often stem from struggle and making it through the challenge requires courage, forgiveness, generosity, love, patience, perseverance and resiliency. The struggle also offers a gift, an opportunity for self-reflection, for learning and for growth.

We are pleased to present you with the 2019 collection of winning essays from this year's Turning Points/Moments tournants program. The pages of this anthology are filled with stories written by students, highlighting a turning point that has changed the direction of their lives. Through our program, student authors were guided on a journey of reflection and discovery. They share their stories that are moving, funny, tragic, honest, real and celebratory. Although each journey is different, every journey is personal, and every triumph has taught them something. The authors have demonstrated tremendous courage and resiliency in sharing their innermost thoughts and experiences, leading to the most important question we can ask ourselves, "Who am I becoming and what matters most to me?"

At The Learning Partnership, our work prepares students to thrive in learning and in life. We are extremely fortunate to have sponsors who believe in the power of our program and the impact it has on preparing students for their future. It is the generosity of our funders that makes it possible for us to run the Turning Points/Moments tournants program and we are so grateful for their support. We also deeply appreciate the encouragement and support of the teachers who facilitated the writing process, the judges who took time to review the essays, and all of the students who participated.

We applaud these young authors who have courageously shared their compelling stories of what matters most in their lives. Their honest voices give us all hope for the future.

Debra D. Kerby
President & CEO
The Learning Partnership

Marni Angus
National Program Manager, Turning Points
The Learning Partnership

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Overview for Judging

The writers recount a single personal event, experience, or challenge, that signifies a “turning point” in their lives and make connections to explain the impact that this turning point had on the development of their personal values and growth.

The writing is clear and concise and includes all of the elements of a personal narrative.

The writers skillfully employ a range of literary devices, vocabulary and language structures to engage/inform the audience throughout the essay from beginning to end.

Grade 6

Ontario, Greater Toronto Area

Pushan Gupta

First Place - Grade 6

York Region District School Board

NO SCARS TO YOUR BEAUTIFUL

“It’s so hard to forget pain, but it’s even harder to remember sweetness. We have no scar to show for happiness.” - Chuck Palahniuk

Have you ever made a small mistake that had a lasting impact? Something that only lasts a moment, but the repercussions of which are everlasting? I made a small mistake that changed my life, and I will never forget it. In late 2014, one incident left me lying on a hospital bed.

That winter my parents had sinus problems. Mucus was blocking their airways, and they were wheezing like the wind blowing in Chicago. They were boiling water to take strong and forceful breaths of vapours to help clear their airways and finally breathe. Meanwhile, I was playing all around the house but I was in the depths of despair when I went into the kitchen. The boiling water was still on the stove and I was pretending to fly with my arms wide open. My hand swung as fast as a catapult on the pot that splashed all the boiling water on me like lava spilling out of a volcano.

I was in shock. I couldn’t speak or move at all. When I saw my left arm, the skin was peeled like layers of tissue piled up and my chest was burning. My parents rushed me to the hospital where they poured cold water on me and gave me painkillers. I did not go to school for 3 months and everyday for those 3 months, I had to go to a medical centre where they treated the burn and put a cast on it. Presently, my burn is fully recovered but my scar will be there for the rest of my life.

Time heals the pain and wounds but the scars remain. My scars remind me always to be careful and watchful about my surroundings, to stay safe and keep others safe too. I still think about that night - how a small mistake has the potential of changing one’s life. Moments like these teach us hard lessons that leave everlasting repercussions that stay with us forever.

Pushan Gupta is a student at Roy H. Crosby PS. He lives in Markham with his parents and older brother. He loves reading fiction books and enjoys playing sports such as basketball, soccer, and badminton. In the future, he hopes to pursue his interests in health sciences at McMaster University.

Ayana Bansal
Second Place - Grade 6
York Region District School Board

FINDING MY OWN WAY

“Do you know what we call opinion in the absence of evidence? We call it prejudice.” - Michael Crichton

Everybody is always telling us to think for ourselves. Form opinions based on your own observations and experiences. Sometimes, it's easier said than done.

I remember when my Dad told me he was getting remarried. I was scared. I didn't know what to expect. “Would she be mean to me? Not accept me?”, I thought to myself. It also didn't help that someone close to me didn't have nice things to say about this person's culture. This person said that “they” were bad and dirty people. I didn't know what to believe. Here I was, 10 years old, scared, confused and not knowing what to believe!

After getting to know my Dad's fiancée in person and visiting her country, I realized that “they” were nothing like what I have been led to believe. I realized that I was scared for nothing! Everybody I met, from family to strangers, were honest, helpful, and always willing to come to the aid of others. This made me understand, you can't judge people before meeting them.

I also learned that opinions are not always based on facts. Sometimes they are based on a common idea, which may come from a place of being scared, and that this person was probably just repeating what they were told to believe. I now know that my confusion and fear were based on prejudice - it was an opinion without any evidence.

Now, I meet everybody with an open mind and accept them for who they are. The culture they are from is not their choice, so we can't discriminate against them for it. We should always get to know people better before forming an opinion. Only then can we begin to understand them. What I have learned is that forming opinions based on your own observations and experiences is key.

Ayana Bansal is a student at Roy H. Crosby PS. She enjoys reading a variety of books and creating science and STEM projects. Ayana is also part of many clubs at school, including cooking, crocheting, STEAM club, and woodworking. She enjoys travelling with her parents, and recently had the opportunity to visit Sri Lanka for the first time. In the future, she hopes to pursue a career in science.

Rowan Crocker
Third Place - Grade 6
Toronto District School Board

LOVE REMEMBERS

I went to a sleepover and innocently forgot to say goodbye through all the excitement. It remains one of the biggest regrets of my life.

Many happy moments were spent with Guthrie. Me and my dog. A first glance gave you the wrong impression of my beautiful, huge, red-furred dog. He was gentle, good with kids. He was a huge reason I looked forward to the end of every school day. All the kids on our block loved him. Even the ones with dog allergies.

He meant so much to me. I didn't consider him a pet, something owned. I thought of him as an older brother. I told people I had two siblings, my younger sister, and my older brother - Guthrie. Even now, I think of him as one of my favourite people.

After I came home from the sleepover, and I saw my dad's face, I knew something was wrong. He told me Guthrie had died after having a surgery trying to do something about his cancer. For a while I thought it was my fault because I didn't say goodbye. Now I know better. Though I still wish I could have said a final goodbye, I know that wouldn't have saved him.

The next few weeks were torture. My dog had lived a good life, but I still couldn't face the fact that he was gone and I would never see him again, except for in memories, photographs, and my dreams.

It has only been recently that I did manage to face that one, horrible fact that impacted my life so greatly. I know the meaning of death. I used to think death was similar to a trip, and there would be a return from it. But now I realize what it means to have someone you care about pass away.

That horrible moment in my life changed my perspective on the world around me. Now I know, keeping loved ones in our memories and hearts is the only way to truly see them again.

I think about him constantly and miss him every day.

Rowan Crocker was born, raised, and lives in Toronto with her parents, dog, and younger sister. When she's not busy reading, she's busy writing, loving Marvel, swimming and playing badminton. She speaks French and knows some sign language. She plays the ukulele and participates in Girl Guides. She loves to write and hopes to be an author or a journalist.

Ontario, North Bay

Julia Synnott

First Place - Grade 6

Near North District School Board

THE TRAIN CRASH

“Home is where your family is.”

An incident occurred that shook me to my core. It left me reeling, not knowing what my new normal would look like.

It was 6 a.m. on a school morning when the police knocked on my door. My dogs went ballistic as my Mom slowly opened the door and asked the burly police officer, “Is everything OK?” My heart beat so fast, getting louder with every thump as I waited for a response. I couldn’t hear everything that was being said, which made me feel panicky and a little frustrated.

My Mom rushed into my room and quickly repeated the instructions the officer had given her, “A train crashed in our yard. We have 30 minutes to pack and leave.” Those words hit me like a ton of bricks. Thoughts rushed through my head. How bad was the damage? Had anything spilled that could hurt us? Was it so bad that we would have to move? I physically shook my head as if to clear my thoughts and realized I had no time to dwell on the possibilities. I had to pack and go. Once my family, our essentials and three dogs were safely secured in our car, we travelled to my aunt’s. Very few words were exchanged.

My Mom said everything would be fine, but I had my doubts. I did not want to move. I loved my house. Somehow when I walked through the door, my troubles and worries always seemed to disappear. It was my safe spot. Finally, after hours of waiting and worrying huddled on the couch at my aunt’s house - we got a call. The officer on the line was relieved to report that we could return home. As we drove up the driveway and I turned the corner, I could see a beacon of light come through the trees as if welcoming us home. I came to appreciate my home so much more that day. This situation made me realize that everything can change in a blink of an eye. I have come to appreciate the things that we sometimes take for granted. It made me think about the big picture and to not dwell on the little things in life.

Julia Synnott is a student from North Bay who enjoys tennis and dance. She also plays the drums, piano and ukulele. Julia received a parrot for her birthday and spends time studying and training him in her spare time. Julia wants to be an Orthodontist and run her own business in the future.

Cole Sandula
Second Place - Grade 6
Near North District School Board

MORE THAN JUST A CAROL

I never thought that going caroling would change my life, but it did.

We started caroling in 2017. My aunt asked my family if we would like to go caroling with some of our friends and extended family. I was so excited. I loved spending time with my relatives and friends.

It was a cold, clear night. The stars were dancing in the sky as we drove through town to go Christmas caroling. I turned to look at the scenery around me and noticed my breath hitting the window and freezing instantly.

My Grammy is a member of the Golden Age Club and she helped partner everyone up for the evening ahead. The Club gave us cookies to give to people who were unable to leave their homes. They also gave us a list of people who might want to have carols sung to them. Most of the people on the list had lost someone or were very sick.

We made our way down the street knocking on doors and singing our hearts out. The people were friendly. They stood by their doors and smiled the whole time we were singing.

Our last stop was at a nice little white house that had a single string of Christmas lights wrapped around it. My aunt walked up to the door and knocked. A few moments later an older woman opened the door. She was a little surprised to see a group of people in colorful elf hats and reindeer antlers standing on her porch. My aunt quickly explained to her that we were caroling and would like to sing her some songs. She asked us to come inside.

She wore an old-fashioned yellow dress. Her eyes showed kindness even though her face showed little expression. The inside of the house was lit with a soft relaxing glow that made the room feel warmer. We started caroling like we normally would. This time after two songs we noticed she was crying. When we ended the song, through her tears she said, "You took time out of your weekend to do this for me?" Her response surprised me. Her face and eyes were radiating with so much happiness that before I knew it, I was smiling too.

That changed me. That made me realize why we caroled, it wasn't for us it was for the people we sang to.

Cole Sandula is a student at Phelps Central School. He was born in Barrie and moved to Redbridge, Ontario when he was one. Cole enjoys the outdoors with his friends and in his spare time, he likes to whittle and read. Cole plans to continue his education after high school, however, he has yet to decide what he would like to study.

David Timmermans
Third Place - Grade 6
Near North District School Board

A LITTLE WONDER

I gazed down at his twinkling blue eyes, his warm little body resting inside my two-year-old arms. He was wrapped up in a small and white blanket, with tiny blue polka dots. Sitting on my outdated, faded blue couch, I watched, full of curiosity to see what this miniature human would do next.

From the youngest of age, he was a challenge to understand, from yelling and whining, screeching and tantrums, as he grew into the nine-year-old boy he is today. Although he may have some struggles on the outside, he is a loving and caring person on the inside. You just need a little patience and to look at him from a different perspective.

He is full of love, wanting to laugh and socialize. Alex has a range of interests and skills. I'm reminded of a time when I made my parents, I Love You, posters at home. Inspired, Alex, being the thoughtful brother that he is, made an I Love You poster for me. This is one of the many special moments that we share, and I think of them when he is having a rough time.

His tantrums aren't who he is. I know that he is having a hard time controlling himself and I often see the remorse he feels after. He is a kind person that loves with all his heart. It frustrates me when people at school see him differently. If they could only see the little wonder that he is. They would realize that he is an awesome person that we could learn from.

Alex has helped me to be a better person. He has shaped who I am. I know that I have learned from him to be more patient and understanding. These skills I use now in everyday life from sitting in waiting rooms for hours and untangling the huge ball of Christmas lights my Dad hands over to me each year! Patience has taught me to persevere.

I hope that others will see that twinkling blue-eyed boy for who he is deep down. I know who I will look up to if I ever lack patience... He's my little wonder.

David Timmermans is a student at Phelps Central School. He was born and raised in Redbridge, Ontario. David enjoys gym, science, coding and math and puts forth an extended effort in all academic endeavours. He is involved in school sports and his leadership is recognized on and off the court. David enjoys playing hockey, and riding the trails on his snowmobile and side-by-side. He isn't certain what the future holds, however, he does see himself continuing his studies after high school. His dream job is to become the general manager of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Saskatchewan

Auryn Schira

First Place - Grade 6

South East Cornerstone Public School Division

A REAL SMILE

For two long years I pretended to be emotionless. No happiness, no nothing. Everyone thought I was just a blank faced little girl with no emotions. But no one knew I had more emotions than anyone. I became swallowed by my depression, too shy to ask anyone for help, and too scared to tell anyone how I felt. I began to think I would never be truly happy, until the day came when I would finally smile a real smile.

It was a sunny Tuesday morning with two days left until school started, and I was sitting in my truck looking blankly out the window at the Alberta prairie. I was anticipated seeing a plain old horse, but the horse I met took my breath away. Her name was Ore; she was a big sorrel mare, a thoroughbred, not exactly stunning but had a presence about her. I was still trying to wrap my head around the fact that this horse could be mine. She was a rodeo-winning horse, and the most powerful horse I had ever ridden at the time. She was perfect. There was just one problem. I was a horrible rider who had no idea how to handle such a hot-blooded horse. I had to get off the horse; it was just too scary. I waited there on the ground for a little while trying to stop the fear that swirled in my mind. Mom told me to get back on the horse to try just one more time. I could feel the power surging from Ore's body as she took each step. Then "wham!" she took off like a bullet, a really slow bullet. She was just trotting, but with the trotting came the happiest moment of my life, and the biggest most real smile I have ever smiled.

A week later Mom had to pry me from the saddle just to get me to come in for supper. I couldn't stop smiling all day, all the time. It was the start of a first love, an obsession, and that is my true happiness

Auryn Schira was born and raised on a farm outside of Weyburn, Saskatchewan. She loves all animals, especially horses, nature and the rodeo! She also likes to sing in and outside of church and plays the mandolin. A proud accomplishment for Auryn is raising her horse, Spicy, from a baby. She enjoys unusual sports like Crossfit and Rodeo. Auryn wants to graduate from school and enter the World Pro Rodeo Circuit.

A.J. Bratrud
Second Place - Grade 6
South East Cornerstone Public School Division

SCARIEST RIDE IN THE PARK

I took one step and it was amazing. We had just entered the biggest and most successful theme park EVER - Disney World! I was overwhelmed by the giant rides. I was amazed. Tracks twisted and turned around each other as the searing summer sun reflected off the metal bars seeming to push forward the small capsules holding many people screaming with their hands in the air. But then I saw it, a tall tower and its shadow, covering as much as three rides! It seemed scary but I realized this would be the best trip ever!

We slowly moved towards the tower area riding on rides as we went. I only went on a few. The unsettling screams from the metal cages of the zipper flipping its rider's upside-down made me pass on quite a few. Once we moved towards the tower that I still couldn't read the name of, my dad finally convinced me that it wasn't a scary ride. I walked in the metal door and stepped up the one way staircase. I saw the title of the treacherous ride, "THE TOWER OF TERROR!!!" I immediately felt a wave of regret.

The first thing I wanted to do is leave. I heard the group in front of us ride down the elevator ride screaming constantly. I asked the man where the exit was and he said down the elevator. That's right, on an elevator break down ride, the exit is an ELEVATOR! My dad said, "Finish what you start and ride this ride, and imagine the bragging rights!" I agreed with him and went on the ride. Once I was inside, the man in charge asked if this was anyone's first time. I was the only one to raise my hand, which was comforting to know the others had survived. The ride was not that scary, and actually a lot of fun. And then I realized I would have never had experienced this ride, if I hadn't tried it. So I learned to always try new things.

A.J. Bratrud was born and raised on a farm outside of Weyburn, Saskatchewan. A.J. enjoys hockey, lacrosse, baseball, basketball, piano, football, track and field and reading. In hockey, he was awarded Most Sportsmanlike Player four times. A.J. is very active and has a lot of friends. He enjoys bringing joy and kindness to the many young people he teaches in CanSkate and 4-H. A.J. wants to become a strong hockey player as well as using his talents to achieve a college degree and become an electrical engineer.

Nolan Uhren
Third Place - Grade 6
South East Cornerstone Public School Division

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

Some people may think that football is just a game. It's not. Football can teach you hard work, dedication, teamwork and leadership. It can help you make new friends. This winter, football took me on an unforgettable journey to San Antonio.

I have been playing football since I was eight years old and it's always been fun, but this year I had an amazing experience in the heart of football season. I had made the Sask Selects 10u team and because of this, I was able to go to San Antonio, Texas with the team. My brother and I were competing against players who literally eat, sleep and breathe football. We were going to face a challenge.

Before I had made the team there were some obstacles I needed to surpass. First, I needed to persuade my parents as to why I should go to Texas. My dad was easy to convince. My mom on the other hand? She was tricky. All summer long I had been nagging at her constantly. Her reply was always a firm "no". I begged her to let me go. She needed some time to think. A few days later she asked me if I wanted to go. As if she didn't know I wanted to!

The next obstacle was that I needed to beat out five other quarterbacks for the starting position. If I made the team, I needed to make sure I went to practice every second weekend in Moose Jaw and the practices were all weekend, for about 4 months. During practices I had to show hard work by always doing my best. I showed dedication when my coach asked me to juggle. If I were going to be the quarterback I needed to be a leader and I needed to work with my team. It all paid off. I made the team!

In San Antonio we practiced twice, then it was game time. We won all of our games and we won the championship. We were all really excited, but in San Antonio, I didn't just win. I learned some valuable life skills, such as dedication, teamwork, hard work, leadership and many more values that have changed my life for the positive.

Nolan Uhren was born and raised on an acreage outside of Weyburn, Saskatchewan. He enjoys football, basketball, lacrosse, reading, writing and his PlayStation. With Sask Selects Football, Nolan recently won the 10u Pigskin Classic Championship, receiving a trophy as tall as he is! With this team, he was named the 10u Champions Offensive MVP. Nolan contributes to his community by donating money to different causes when he can. His future goals are to write a good story that will hopefully get published.

Grade 7/8

New Brunswick

Owen Flynn

First Place - Grade 7

Anglophone West School District

MORE THAN JUST A “LOSS”

Jackson and I had that kind of friendship that you thought you couldn't live without, but I had to, for now and forever. We were cousins, but in reality we were more than just cousins: best friends, teammates, “the trouble bunch” as our parents would call the two of us. He would always be there for me, and I would be there for him. But he's not here anymore. I remember the day he left like I could remember any set play in hockey. Our family was spending the weekend at our cottage in Shediac. I was lying down on the couch in our sun room playing on my iPad like an average eight year old while the late afternoon sun was covering me like a big yellow jump suit. It was a Sunday afternoon and on our average weekend we would leave the cottage around six o'clock so we would have enough time to get ready for school in the morning. I could hear rushing behind my back, the packing of bags, feet pounding the floor like a herd of rhinos. All of a sudden I heard a yelp of distress from my mom who said with a short breath, “Quick, let's go, now,” and being the eight year old I was, I obeyed and we packed everything into the car.

The car ride home was a complete blackout to me, with only memories of feeling sick because of the speed we were going. As we arrived in Fredericton, I popped the question, “What's going on?” My mom replied with a shaky voice, “Jackson was hit by a car.” No details, no what, where, when, how, just that. We picked up Jackson's little sister, Abby, who looked like she had just seen a ghost. She was pale with fear, which I understood. My sister and I were just as scared. Something hit me seeing the bright yellow “do not cross” tape stretched across the road. I immediately thought of all the times I'd seen this in shows, the news, and even real life. That's when panic and thoughts raced through my head kind of like the Indy 500. Could this really be it?! Were these the last moments of his life?! Was this my last moment with him?! I let my thoughts slide, trying to think it was going to all be okay, you know, maybe he'd come out of it with bumps and bruises, or maybe a broken bone or two. But, oh boy, was I wrong. That was the night Jackson passed away.

I still miss him to this day; everyone who knew him does, too. Ever since his passing it's given me motivation for almost everything, whether it be powering through something I don't like or finding that little bit of extra energy on the ice. He makes me want to do a little more than “enough” now, if enough is even a thing. Because Jackson didn't get to do enough of anything.

Owen Flynn was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Owen speaks English and French, loves all sports and enjoys the camaraderie and friendships he's made on his young athletic journey. He plays hockey, soccer and volleyball at an elite level and enjoys the discussions and conversations as his Grade 7 class representative. He hopes one day to play at the highest level of hockey possible and with hard work, acquire a university athletic scholarship along the way.

Summer Hirschfeld
Second Place - Grade 8
Anglophone South School District

BUTTERFLY KISSES

Lost. I felt lost as those dreadful words bled from my mother's mouth. My head pounded at the thought that someone so delicate and sweet could be taken by this awful disease. She was gone; death had stolen yet another person from my life.

Walking into the musty, dark room, my eyes filled with tears. It felt as if there was a ball in my throat as I tried to hold back the waterfall of tears that could have plummeted down my face at any given moment. A sea of black flooded the room. Broken voices muffled around me. It was finally happening...the day I had been dreading. The day I was forced to say goodbye to my beloved aunt.

"And now, a reading of Butterfly Kisses, being read by Anne's great-niece, Summer Hirschfeld." I rose with a heavy head. I faked a smile to everyone around me and continued my way up to where the microphone was. I then began to recite the poem. "Don't cry for me, please don't be sad, hold onto the memories of times we both had..." as those words spilled from my mouth, I began to remember the last time I saw my loving aunt.

Auntie Anne, please wake up. Tears plunged down my face, I love you. As I leaned over to give my aunt one last hug...she opened her eyes, and that was the last time she ever did.

I fell back to reality where I was no longer face to face with her. My hands were shaking as I tried not to drop to the floor and let all my emotions out. I looked down to see my aunt's face. To everyone else she was pale and emotionless, but to me, I could see a smile spread wide across her face. She would have been proud of me. I had always been afraid to read in front of people, but she always believed I could do it. She believed in my dreams. She believed in me.

I will never forget that day. When we walked out of that church, it felt as if she was walking out with us. In the corner of my eye I saw her, my aunt. I then heard a faint whisper, "You did amazing." I turned with a jolt to see no one standing there. But there was something, a butterfly, flying into the sky. I knew it was her, my Auntie Anne. She taught me that no matter how far you may be from someone, they will always be with you. In your memories, your heart, and the butterfly kisses.

Summer Hirschfeld loves to sing and is an All-Star cheerleader on Sky Athletics. Summer enjoys volunteering at animal shelters and dreams of becoming an actress.

Anderson Burns
Third Place - Grade 7
Anglophone West School District

THE GIFT

Life is a gift and throughout the history of the Earth, it has been given billions of times. Many people abuse this gift, some people take it for granted, and some people lose it. This summer, I lost a part of my gift. We all did.

On August 10, 2018, I lost my mother.

I still look at the door, hoping she will walk through and give me a hug. Life may be a gift, but it's not always fair.

Is there an impact? An enormous one. I know that my life changed drastically and it will never be the same again. That one person I cherished all my life lost her gift. The gift of life. However, she's still here. Guiding me through my life...my gift.

Sara Mae Hellen Burns was an amazing mother and a top-notch police officer. Her spirit and courage will never be forgotten. No matter what I do and no matter how long I live, she will always be my mother.

Wherever there is dark, there is always a little bit of light. That dark may overcome the light, but there is still light no matter what.

So what have I learned from this? I know that we are given only one gift, one life. So, you better make it count. The clichéd saying "yolo" is tacky, but true. You only live once. Do everything in your power to make it be the best life ever. Do what makes you happy. Take risks. Laugh. But most of all, love and be loved in return. If you ever experience what I did, I will tell you, it is going to be tough. But with the support of friends and family, it does get better. Trust me.

Was this a turning point for me? Yes, but I think it was also turning point for our community, for Fredericton. Thousands of people have rallied around us in an attempt to help heal the pain. The catchphrase, "Fredericton Strong," is not just a slogan. It's become part of our culture and our identity as a community. I think my mother would be proud of that.

Life is indeed a gift. Don't waste it. Don't take it for granted. I know that's what mom would have wanted.

Anderson Burns is a student at Bliss Carman Middle School. He enjoys playing basketball and hockey.

New Brunswick - French

Allie Dunnett

First Place - Grade 8

Anglophone South School District

MA VOIX COMPTE

“Not being heard, is no reason for silence.”

Tout a commencé en troisième année. Personne ne me connaissait assez bien pour savoir ce qui se passait dans ma vie personnelle. L'anxiété, l'insécurité, et beaucoup de larmes sont des choses que je ressentais quotidiennement. Ce n'était pas facile de me sentir inutile. C'était un combat quotidien et j'étais épuisée. Mes performances sportives et mes notes scolaires souffraient. J'ai commencé à avoir des problèmes de santé. Je ne mangeais pas et je ne dormais pas assez. J'avais des cauchemars et je perdais mes cheveux.

Il y avait un temps où j'aimais beaucoup passer du temps avec mon père, mais les problèmes ont commencé quand il s'est marié avec une femme qui avait comme objectif de me rendre la vie misérable. Je craignais les visites hebdomadaires chez mon père et sa femme. J'étais menacée et maltraitée verbalement et mentalement. Aucun enfant devrait vivre comme ça. Je n'avais plus une bonne estime de moi-même. Je n'étais pas heureuse et je ne me sentais pas en sécurité là. Ils m'écoutaient quand je leur parlais, mais ne m'entendaient pas. C'était comme si j'étais invisible et que ma voix n'était pas importante. Ils m'empêchaient même d'aller à mes pratiques et mes jeux. Ça me tuais car je suis une accro du sport.

Un jour je me suis dit « assez c'est assez. » J'en ai finalement discuté avec ma mère. Les rendez-vous avec des conseillers en santé mentale, et services sociaux avaient commencé. On a eu beaucoup de réunions, mais rien ne changeait. Ma voix ne comptait pas. Le 9 avril 2018 était un grand jour. Je me souviens que j'étais assise avec ma mère quand je me suis confiée à elle. Je lui ai tout dit. Ma mère m'a cru et a vu qu'il y avait un grand problème. Elle m'a immédiatement inscrit dans un programme nommé « la voix d'un enfant .»

C'était long, et pas facile. J'ai dû écrire une lettre de plusieurs pages expliquant tout. Les juges, les conseillers et les travailleurs sociaux l'ont tous lue. Des semaines s'étaient écoulées avant que nous ayons finalement eu des nouvelles. Nous devons nous présenter en cour le 7 juin 2018. J'ai attendu dans la voiture, les mains moites et la respiration difficile. Je pensais à toutes les choses négatives qui pourraient arriver. Après des heures d'attente, ma mère est finalement sortie du bâtiment. Elle m'a dit que je n'étais plus obligée d'aller chez mon père. Nous avons pleuré de joie.

Ce moment difficile est devenu un moment tournant pour moi. Ça m'a ouvert les yeux sur l'importance d'une bonne santé mentale. J'ai appris qu'il y a différentes formes d'abus. Même si je n'étais pas abusée physiquement chez mon père, j'étais une enfant

abusée. Aujourd'hui je suis plus confiante que jamais, je fais bien à l'école, et je suis heureuse quand je suis sur le terrain de jeux. Ma voix compte. Je suis très reconnaissante pour tout ce que ma mère sacrifie pour moi. Merci maman pour être ma roche.

Allie Dunnett is a French Immersion student who lives for sports, and spending time with friends and family. She is a valuable member of her school's leadership team. She strives to make a difference.

Jaime Wallace
 Second Place - Grade 8
 Anglophone South School District

UNE COMMUNAUTÉ QUI SE SOUCIE

« Small Town, Big Hearts »

Je n'avais jamais compris comment un moment pouvait changer la façon dont vous pensez ou percevez quelque chose. Je n'appréciais pas du tout le petit village que j'habitais, ni le gens qui y vivaient aussi. Je disais souvent à ma mère que c'était ennuyant ici, qu'il n'y avait rien à faire, et qu'un jour quand je serais plus vieille, j'allais vivre dans une grande ville.

Ma perception a changé il y a quatre ans quand mon papa avait été diagnostiqué avec le cancer. Cette nouvelle s'est rapidement propagée à travers notre petite communauté. Je n'aimais pas que les gens parlaient à propos de ma famille. C'était une période de temps très difficile pour nous. Je n'aimais pas parler de la situation, alors je mettais un faux sourire sur mon visage et faisais semblant que tout allait bien. Des gens de la communauté ont fait une grande différence pour ma famille et moi. Il y avait même des étrangers qui faisaient preuve d'empathie et de compassion. Ils étaient tous tellement gentils. Des gens venaient à ma maison avec des repas et assez de soupe pour remplir notre congélateur. Une organisation locale a même apporté une couette pour garder mon père chaud quand il subissait ses traitements de chimiothérapie.

J'ai vite appris qu'un des plus grands avantages de vivre dans un petit village est d'avoir le soutien des membres de la communauté, même s'ils sont des étrangers. Les personnes s'entraident. Je ne pense pas que ceci se passe dans les grandes villes. Nous avons de la chance de pouvoir connaître nos voisins et de se fier à eux si jamais on a besoin d'aide. Pendant que mon père luttait sa lutte contre son cancer, ma mère, mon frère et moi étions tellement reconnaissants pour notre communauté.

Cette tragédie est devenue très bénéfique pour moi. Elle m'a appris à ne jamais prendre ma famille et mes amies pour acquis, et de profiter de chaque moment que j'ai avec eux. Parfois, les plus grandes leçons de vie viennent de moments difficiles. Ils peuvent nous aider à devenir de meilleures personnes. Peu importe ce que vous passez à travers, il y a toujours quelqu'un d'autre qui vit une pire situation. C'est important de toujours se souvenir de cela. N'oubliez pas que vous n'êtes jamais seuls quand vous habitez dans un petit village. J'aimerais toujours vivre l'expérience d'habiter dans une grande ville un jour, mais quand viendra le temps pour élever mes enfants, je sais que je retournerai à mon petit village. Je voudrais que mes enfants expérimentent la même quantité d'amour et de confort que je connais dans ma petite communauté.

Jaime Wallace is a French Immersion student who loves to be involved in her school. When she is not at the dance studio, you can find her spending time with friends and family.

Kyra McLaughlan
Third Place - Grade 8
Anglophone South School District

PETITE MAIS PUISSANTE

“Do not doubt my... motivation, determination, toughness, commitment, mental ability, nor my desire. Most of all, do not under-estimate what I can achieve.” – Kyrie Irving

C’était une nouvelle année et je l’avais commencée avec un beau sourire, mais un sourire ne peut pas durer pour toujours. J’étais en septième année et j’étais tellement excitée car la saison de ballon panier commençait. Pendant les essais pour l’équipe de l’école, je travaillais extrêmement fort. Je donnais 110% à chaque pratique. Je suis une véritable accro de ce sport.

Je n’oublierai jamais le sentiment que j’ai ressenti quand mes parents m’ont dit que mon nom n’était pas sur la liste de joueuses choisies. Je n’avais pas fait l’équipe. J’étais bouleversée et ne pouvais pas arrêter de pleurer. À l’école chaque fois que j’entendais des élèves parler de l’équipe, ça me cassait le coeur. Mes notes scolaires ont baissé un peu et je pensais que le monde était à l’envers. Les jours qui ont suivi étaient remplis de tristesse.

Un matin, après mon rendez-vous chez l’orthodontiste, nous sommes allées à une pâtisserie avant d’aller à l’école. Je suis restée dans l’auto pendant que ma mère était allée nous chercher du chocolat chaud. L’entraîneuse de l’équipe était là et elle a profiter du moment pour parler avec ma mère. Quand ma mère est retournée dans l’auto, elle m’a dit que je n’avais pas fait l’équipe parce-que j’étais trop courte. Ils avaient peur que je me blesserais. J’étais très habile, mais trop petite. Je me demandais souvent, si j’avais essayé pour l’équipe de l’école pour rien? J’ai commencé à croire que tout dans ma vie avait été un mensonge.

C’est à ce moment-là que j’ai eu mon moment tournant. C’était leur perte et mon gain! Ma mère m’a beaucoup aidé à surmonter cet obstacle. Je suis reconnaissante pour ma mère. J’ai appris que dans la vie, il y aura toujours des personnes qui vont essayer de nous abaisser. C’est important de rester loin de ces personnes négatives, et de s’entourer de personnes qui croient en nous. Des personnes qui vont nous encourager à faire le mieux qu’on peut pour atteindre nos objectifs. Il faut toujours donner son 100%, et ne jamais perdre sa confiance. Parfois, un moment difficile peut ouvrir nos yeux.

J’étais fière d’être petite, avant que j’ai su qu’il y avait des désavantages. Ma taille ne me définit pas comme personne. Je sais que si je veux, je peux. Mon attitude joue un rôle important. Je suis toujours passionnée du ballon panier et je n’ai pas beaucoup grandi depuis l’an dernier. J’ai continué à travailler fort, et cette année, j’ai gagné ma place sur l’équipe. Je dois travailler plus fort que mes coéquipières et j’ai encore beaucoup d’obstacles à surmonter. La leçon que j’ai apprise est que vouloir c’est pouvoir.

Kyra McLaughlan is a French Immersion student who enjoys playing basketball, soccer and volleyball. She loves spending time with family and friends. One day, she would like to take pictures while traveling the world.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Matthew Kane

First Place - Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region

THE KEY THAT STARTED IT ALL

“Maturity doesn’t come with age; it comes with the acceptance of responsibility.”
- Dr. Edwin Louis Cole

I will always remember the day Dad took me to Home Hardware to get my house key cut. I remember the man putting on his safety goggles and the grinding of the machine. With a wink and a chuckle, the store clerk said, “Good luck, kid.” Funny, I thought, he should be wishing me, congrats not good luck. Doesn’t he know this is an important day in my life? With a smile beaming from ear to ear, I held firmly onto my very own house key.

To some, this piece of metal signifies nothing except to unlock a door. But to me, it symbolises my freedom. First of all, it means no more after school program because I am now permitted to walk home and let myself into the house. My days of lining up with the primary kids to go to the after school program were over. I would never have to wait on the bus for the daycare worker to fasten car seats anymore! There was a whole new adventure waiting for me and it would start as soon as the school bell rang. I could walk home as quickly or as slowly as I wanted, chatting with friends, kicking rocks or jumping into puddles. Instead of being supervised in a structured facility learning to make slime, I could play video games, watch TV and even raid the cupboards. The possibilities were endless.

Ok, so my freedom wasn’t exactly as I had pictured. To be honest, my parents didn’t give me the house key to end my daycare nightmare. There were strings attached, namely rules and responsibility. They were quick to remind me that my house key was a privilege which I would lose if I didn’t obey certain rules. Firstly, I was to come straight home after school. Secondly, I was to take care of my house key and not lose it. Thirdly, I was now responsible for the supervision of my little brother. They registered me in a Home Alone and a babysitting course to learn safety tips. Lastly, my brother and I weren’t permitted to raid the cupboards and play video games for hours. Instead, once we have eaten our snack, we have to do our homework.

In conclusion, I didn’t get my house key because I turned a certain age or because I complained about daycare. My parents explained that my behaviour had been observed throughout the year. All those times I helped with the gardening and chores around the house, they noticed. I treasure this piece of metal that cost less than five dollars to get made but what it symbolises to me is priceless. In fact, if I maintain my parents’ trust and act responsible, the next key I’ll get will be the key to the car! Now, I only have to get Dad to buy a Lamborghini and I’ll be all set!

Matthew Kane is in Grade 7 Early French Immersion at Cowan Heights Elementary in St. John's and plays the alto saxophone in his school band. In his spare time he enjoys playing hockey. He is the captain of the Avalon Celtics Mighty Pucks and a member of the Avalon Celtics Peewee C All-Star Team. Matthew is also a blue belt student at Dave Jackman's Kenpo Karate.

Anna March-Mulrooney
Second Place - Grade 7
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region

MONSTER

The average person feels happy when they meet someone new, sad when their dog dies, and excited when they go to a concert. I feel anxious when I meet someone new, stressed when my dog dies, and an unbalanceable weight on my shoulders going into a big crowd like a concert. Everyday my head throbs with stress, and unwanted feelings overcome my body. This is what it's like having a mental illness. I have a story, one of a big, bad monster that wanders over me like a rain cloud on a sunny day. That monster has made me realize what defines me.

It was only two years ago when I realized I was not like other people. Everyone else was happy and involved. Although I, too, was involved, I always had a desire to leave an after school activity because my head would pound with overwhelming thoughts. This was a turn – a long, dark and treacherous path that I was walking alone. I refused to talk to anybody and instead I held everything in behind a sorrowful smile. No one could ever see the troubles I held inside. My stress grew everyday and ran rampantly around my head destroying any good feelings in its way.

I had held in too much and my stress, anxiousness and frustration began pouring out. My happiness was zilch. I had regular anxiety attacks and stopped myself from breathing for minutes at a time. I had lost myself in this battle with my monster, and I felt like anxiety now controlled my every movement. At this hard time I found a home in a sport I loved more than my own life, basketball. I took the time to practice and it really helped me stay calm. I participated in a basketball tournament and played straight through three games without any problems. Our small team was ranked as the top two teams out of ten, and we went to play our finals round. I was guarding a girl who would purposefully shove me and say mean things to me. When I finally got the ball I ran and she tripped me up; I fell completely flat on my face. She had purposefully humiliated me in front of nearly 70 people! I was ashamed, I was nervous, I was angry. My monster inhaled me. I just left. No words, no nothing. I left and I went into the washroom, my mom came rushing in after me. I stopped breathing, I had my largest anxiety attack yet. Then all of a sudden I stopped. I walked back onto that court and I played my heart out. I was stronger, I am stronger.

I defeated my monster. Every now and then it comes around to annoy me, but I can defeat it. I thought my mental illness defined me, but it doesn't. It affects me but will never control me. I have learned not to be my own monster, to talk about it, to go back as a stronger person. I have learned to leave the monster.

Anna March-Mulrooney is a student at Baccalieu Collegiate. She is very involved in both her school and community as she plays many competitive sports, is a member of the school's drama troupe, a choir member and part of the local sea cadet corp. She is an avid public speaker and is a part of the school and regional heritage fair. Anna has been a dancer for 10 years and is a returning member of the Junior Miss Newfoundland and Labrador Pageant Awards receiving the title of Junior Miss Public Speaking funded by Early

Acheivers NL. Anna is very interested in science and wants to help find a cure in gene-related diseases.

Ariel Bailey
Third Place - Grade 7
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region

MY DOSE OF REALITY

A couple of years back, when I was in the third grade I took a trip with my family. We don't normally go on the typical type of vacation you would picture if somebody said they were going on a trip and, this time, we went to Uganda, Africa.

When we were in Uganda we spent two months volunteering at an orphanage building animal enclosures, buying the children clothes, food, and toys, cooking, cleaning, and even installing a playground. At the time I thought there was no difference between home or Uganda until I saw the way things were over there. The children never had enough food to fill their stomachs and the food they had was either pocho (a type of starchy mashed potato-like substance) or cups of runny grey porridge.

The way the kids were treated there was also very different and it was shocking. The children would eat only after the adults did and even at age six they had to take care of their younger siblings as if they were already parents. On top of this, they would be beaten if they got the slightest bit out of line. I hated how it was in the orphanage; there was nothing good about the place and I felt guilty that I had ignored the fact that something like that could be so real.

Their home economics class was basically child labor; they had to plant, water and harvest a ten-acre cornfield. I could barely tolerate the living conditions in the orphanage and when I saw a little girl picking stale bread crumbs out of the dirt and eating them because it was all she had, I hit my breaking point. It felt like something snapped into place in my head and it kind of sucked to know that eating crumbs from the dirt was that little girl's life. I couldn't stand that there was never enough for them there and I couldn't stop thinking about it, so I had my mom take me to the market to buy that girl some bread and fruit.

When we left Uganda for St. John's I still couldn't help but think that nobody else was helping them, which, I feel is true, but I guess that was just a much needed little dose of reality. Once I readjusted to the time and state of Newfoundland I decided to be more involved in charity work and community engagement so I decided to sponsor a child. I made fundraisers for the less fortunate, I subscribed to organizations dedicated to helping others and to making the world a better place. I also tried to get other people involved in things like that as well. I find helping others very important and I continue to try to help my community and other people's communities. I know that I cannot change the world by myself but I think that helping even one person is worth more than all the effort I put in.

Ariel Bailey attends Brother Rice Junior High. She performs in circus aerials and improv, and volunteers at soup kitchens. Her grades and academic achievements are very important to her and she tries to keep all of her grades above a ninety. She has participated in The Telegram's Regional Spelling Bee twice. In her free time she likes to bake and try new recipes.

Alexander Power

First Place - Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Central Region

DARKNESS TO SHOW THE LIGHT

Death. One word that has so much power, but leaves us at such a loss of power. We never truly understand this sensation until it comes to us, and it's always the most excruciating when it arrives early.

Life was good. Until one awful, unforgettable moment. My mom told me my nan had been diagnosed with leukemia. My heart plummeted as if it had been dropped into a bottomless pit of despair. Of course, not all hope was lost yet. It was still early, and chemo could still bring her back. I hoped it would with everything I had.

My nan was the best. She gave me everything, and cared for me like a mother bear would her newly born cubs. Even under the strain of chemo she tried her absolute best to give me all the attention she could, but her strength was limited.

Throughout the summer, she was improving. Things were looking hopeful. She was even allowed out of the hospital. Then, all it took was one snowflake to change the tides and start a despicable and uncontrollable avalanche that hammered down a snow covered mountain at the speed of light.

My nan had to return to hospital. She started intensive chemo again; my nan was completely exhausted. One day, while we were in St. John's to see her, I mustered up every ounce of strength I had left and asked my mom the question that had been scorched into my head like a wildfire in the middle of autumn. "Will Nan be okay?". I saw my mom's eyes welling up with sadness, "We don't think so..." In that moment, I stopped breathing, a massive lion clamped onto my throat, and started draining me of my very soul.

I vividly remember the last time I saw my nan. As I walked towards her hospital room, my emotional wall started to deteriorate, being torn apart brick by brick. The moment I laid eyes on her, everything gave out, and I could barely enter the room. After a while I gathered myself up and slumped into the room. My brother and sister left, because my mom hadn't told them yet. My nan and I talked about the situation. She told me everything would be all right, and that all she cared about was me. Throughout the whole visit she stayed so calm, and talked in a soothing voice that I still treasure to this day. I gave her one last hug, and she squeezed me warmly, sending all her strength over to me.

My nan passed away a week later, on November 18, 2017. This entire event changed me. I realized that there are two factors that determine how long life will be. The first is simply random chance, like my nan unfortunately fell victim to. The second thing is our decision, our desire. We can't choose how long we literally live, but if we give everything our best, like my wonderful and always joyful nan did, we can seemingly extend our existence a trillion fold. This experience has taught me not to worry about the future, just to be in the present and live each moment to the fullest!

Alexander Power attends Clarenville Middle School. Alexander adores sports, such as hockey, volleyball and softball. He also enjoys spending time with family and friends. In the future, he hopes to become a doctor, because he loves helping others.

Margaret Ann Anstey
Second Place - Grade 7
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Central Region

BEING DIFFERENT

For awhile now, I've known there's something odd about me. I've never really liked the way I look, my self esteem isn't as high as I'd like it to be, and whenever anybody tries to uplift my sense of self-worth, it flies in through one ear, then out the other. I realize that this is the case for most of my peers, but there's also this: I can't stand being called 'she.' Being called by my birth name is like being called that of a stranger. Wearing female clothing makes me terribly awkward, and I get nervous when I have to introduce myself to anybody, because I know that they'll see me as who I am to the entire outside world: a girl. This is all because I'm transgender.

If you didn't know, being transgender means that your biological sex doesn't match the gender of your brain. When this happens, it causes gender dysphoria: the distress that a transgender individual gets from not looking like or being treated as the gender that they actually are. It can provoke many mental health problems, such as depression, eating disorders, anxiety, and more. Gender dysphoria is something that I, and many others, face on a daily basis.

When I was little, my parents say I showed no obvious signs of being transgender, but as I got older, that wasn't the case. I began to resent my name when I was around four years old. I only hated it then because I thought it made me sound like an old grey-haired lady, but later on, that morphed into the hatred of having a girl's name.

I started to dislike my body around fifth grade. Being in the midst of puberty and all, that's understandable. But unlike other girls my age, I didn't want wider hips, or a bigger chest. I found myself envying the boys rather than the mature, pretty girls that all my friends looked up to.

All this discomfort that supposedly was 'a normal part of growing up' was confusing me, and that was when I learned about the term 'transgender,' and had my turning point. I read countless stories that really reached out to me, coming from other trans kids, and saw a lot of the thoughts and insecurities that they had in myself. I realized that I might also be transgender. I knew about this for a couple months before I told anybody other than my closest friends. After a while, I told my parents, and thankfully, they were one-hundred percent supportive of me. I'm especially grateful for that, because some kids aren't as lucky. After I came out to my inner circle, I felt a billion times better.

Don't get me wrong, the dysphoria is still terrible, however now, I don't feel as threatened by it because with support from family and friends, I now am able to fight it.

This awareness of who I am was undoubtedly the most significant turning point in my life so far. Now that I have found who I want to be, I can move forward to focus on achieving my goals, getting the most out of life, and doing what I do best: being true to myself. I may be out of the ordinary, but who's to say that's a bad thing?

Margaret Ann Anstey is a student at Leo Burke Academy in Bishop's Falls. She enjoys drawing, volleyball and soccer. Margaret Ann is also looking forward to going to cadet camp this summer in Nova Scotia.

Joshua Stacey
Third Place - Grade 7
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Central Region

TURNING BAD TO GOOD

Have you ever been sure about something but end up being wrong? It was a chilly October's night. Anxiously I was refreshing my iPad, awaiting the hockey team announcement. I didn't think I had much to worry about. I was convinced the A team had my name. Finally my iPad went bing! Without hesitation I scanned the list, focused my eyes on the 'S' section, knowing my name would be there. I was in disbelief. I scanned the list again. My name wasn't there. Devastation immediately set in! I was listed as a B player.

Most people would see this as an issue, but they just don't understand. The A team is everything. Not making it meant I was second best. I didn't know how I felt. I wanted to run and hide. I wanted to punch something. My mind was racing. Was I as good as I thought? What would people think?

Tears flowed down my cheeks like rain as I repeatedly said, "I don't have a single friend on this team."

Despite the reassurance from my parents, all I wanted to do was quit! Thank goodness for their support. They offered encouragement, and promised we'd find the little things I needed to improve on. I remember Mom stating, "Everything happens for a reason. We may not understand why. It may be difficult, but something good will come out of it." Later that night, I had a surprise visit from my cousin. He heard the news and came over to cheer me up. Family is so important and supportive.

The next day, I had to face what I dreaded the most, school. Feelings crept inside but I couldn't avoid them. Full of emotion, I held my head high. The reaction in school was not what I had expected. No one laughed or left me out. My friends were supportive. They told me how shocked they were and how badly they felt for me. True friends will be there, no matter what.

As much as I dreaded that hockey season, things didn't turn out that badly. I made new friends and had a tremendous time. I worked hard improving my skills, becoming one of the best players on the team. I was named team captain. Throughout the season, my A-team friends still included me and we spent time together when possible.

Although, I was only ten, this was a huge turning point that taught me great life lessons. There will be ups and downs, but I learned to stay positive. Secondly, life throws curveballs and I may not always get everything I want. Thirdly, this event taught me to work hard for what I want. It paid off as I made the team this year. One can't always change what happens but how one accepts it is everything. I've decided that whatever life throws at me I'll face it, not give up, and make the best of it. In every situation, there is always some good.

Joshua Stacey lives in Grand Falls-Windsor and attends Exploits Valley Intermediate. He has two loving parents and a brother, Aaron. He is a multi-sport athlete who enjoys hockey the most. He is a huge fan of the Toronto Maple Leafs and Blue Jays.

Lincoln Campbell
First Place – Grade 7
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Labrador Region

FROZEN TEARS

I remember the feeling of tears freezing to my face like tiny daggers that stung horribly, piercing through my soft skin as I watched our one and only way of getting home teetering on the edge of the ice, soon to be disappearing to the bottom of the ocean. I was five and my family decided we would go for a ride on our snowmobile since it was such a nice day. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, and the hot sun was just starting to melt the ice and snow that accumulated during the cold, hard frost of winter. I remember every detail about the experience, the fear, the memory, and the near loss of our brand-new snowmobile. I thought that we would have so many happy memories on it ... but boy, was I ever wrong.

Things were fine until shortly after reaching oceanside. We were cruising across and all at once it started... we started sinking! I could tell by the grim look on dad's face that there was something seriously wrong. I looked under us and there was nothing besides water! We came to a complete stop and started sinking even faster until my legs were completely submerged in the frigid water. Dad grabbed me and threw me to safety so that I would not sink along with the snowmobile. I struggled to run to a small island, and sat down and cried. Now I know that to you this may not seem like that big of a deal but as a five-year-old I can honestly say I was terrified.

I sat crying in the snow as I watched my parents struggle to get our snowmobile out of the water. They were both covered in snow and soaked with freezing water from head to toe. Then suddenly my dad reached too far towards the snowmobile and he slipped in. Mom quickly grabbed Dad and helped him out before he could get his full body wet. They decided to give up trying to get the snowmobile out because they knew that we had a better chance of getting rescued if we just walked back to a cabin we had passed a few kilometers back. On our way back, two men finally came along on their snowmobile, gave us a phone to call for help, then gave us a ride back to the cabin. I couldn't have been more relieved! We arrived at the old cabin and my grandfather was there waiting to bring us home. I was so happy that this day was over.

This terrifying event changed me so much. I have a new appreciation for vehicle safety, especially on snowmobiles. I also have a new-found appreciation for all that my family does for me and the sacrifices they make. I couldn't help but think that if that ice was a little bit thinner or if the snowmobile was a little bit heavier I could have lost two of the most important people to me or even my life.

Lincoln Campbell is a student at William Gillett Academy. He was born in Happy Valley Goose Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador but currently resides in Charlottetown, NL with his mother, father and older sister. In Lincoln's spare time he likes to play sports such as floor hockey, volleyball and badminton. He also enjoys video-gaming and his future plan is to work in the military.

Adèle Walsh

Second Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Labrador Region

10-33

It was a cloudy summer day, with small warm rays of sun trying to break through the heavy layers of clouds. The beautiful mild evening was not enjoyable like every other typical cloudy evening; the real storm was only building itself up. The empty streets of my neighbourhood, the closed shops and cafés downtown, and the loud bursting sirens, coming from the incredibly fast cars, breaking every single moment of silence was a constant reminder that panic and fear had taken over the peaceful city I called home.

That Friday night, my best friend Ève Beliveau, her older brother, Jonathan, and my brother and I had a volleyball tournament in my backyard pool. It was a super fun time until the phone rang, and both of my parents, who are RCMP officers, dropped everything in disappointment and shock. My father rushed to get his heavy work bag and sprinted out the door into his truck. Without even waving goodbye, the black vehicle rolled down the street at incredible speed. My mother hurriedly packed my brother and me a weekend bag. I asked her, what was going on. She explained to me that there was a crazy man, who was attempting to shoot innocent civilians and police officers. I didn't understand. Why would someone do such a thing and create such chaos for no reason?

I don't remember what happened next; I was putting on my shoes to go and spend a weekend with the Beliveau's and then I was at their house. Before we stepped out of the car, my mom told me that she didn't know if she would come back home, or neither did dad. She then gave us big hugs and kisses and slowly drove away in tears. We went into the house, filled with confusion and fear. The rest of the night was an unforgettable memory, the news kept changing and changing and my tears kept flowing like waterfalls. Nothing was completely certain.

The next three days were bitter and miserable. Everything was on lockdown; we didn't hear a single word from either of my parents, and in between those days, announcements were made that five officers were shot, and only two survived. The deaths of the three policemen were critical and made huge statements in the area. One of the police officers who passed away was the father of my babysitter. The crazy man surrendered late Sunday night.

Monday morning, I woke up with different thoughts going through my mind. I had changed. I realized that my parents didn't work for anything casual and simple and that their lives could always be at risk. Another thought crossed my mind, a thought that left me perplexed: the world wasn't as pretty as I thought it was. It was cruel and unfair and I could do absolutely nothing about it. This event changed my naïve, gullible, innocent mind, into a more understanding and careful one.

Adèle Walsh is a student at Queen of Peace Middle School. In her free time, she loves to swim competitively, play hockey, soccer, and basketball. Adele lives with her Mom and Dad, her brother, and her dog, Lexie. In the future, she hopes to become a lawyer.

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

A MOTHER’S LOVE

I’ve never had anything big happen in my life. Well, my sister was born and my parents bought a store, but there were no drastic changes. My life was my life. Plain and simple... which is how I liked it. My sister went to activities, I’d work at my parents’ store or just hang out at home. I’ve never had a big thing happen in my life. Until my dad helped me notice something...

This took place in the car that my dad had just bought for my mother. We were driving back from getting food for all of us. I was looking out the window as the trees and buildings passed with music blaring through the car speakers. He looked at me for a split second. His eyes didn’t show a distinct feeling but they were a bright color of blue. He began to speak, “You know your mom loves you, right?” I remember it was just after I had argued with my mom. I said “Yes,” but then he told me again. He looked at the road with teary eyes. For the first time I saw my dad cry. I thought he never cried. He told me that my mom loved me so much she would do anything for me. I knew this already so why was he telling me now? I was confused. The river in my eyes started to flow along with my dad’s. Was he telling me this for a reason? It never hit me what he meant at the time. I couldn’t comprehend what he meant by those words. Of course, I knew my mother loved me and cared for me, so why?

It’s been a year or so since that day. And over that year I still didn’t get what he meant. I thought about it day in and day out. I know now. Back then it seemed like he was speaking a foreign language because I really couldn’t process what his words meant. I know now.

I didn’t appreciate what my mom did for me. I would say “thank you”, but those words can be empty. I didn’t show my mom how much I loved her. I would say, “I love you”, but those words can be empty. I didn’t hug her enough. I would hug her tight, but those hugs can be cold. My dad knew I loved my mom, but he wanted me to show it more. The words he spoke in the car that day now make sense to me. Even now he tells us to appreciate what she does. I now know to thank her with real emotion. I now know to say, “I love you, too”, with a big smile on my face. I now know to hug her with a tight hold and warm arms. Most of all, I now know that my mom is an angel who deserves kindness. I love my mom and I finally know how to show it.

Mya Tobin is a student at J.R. Smallwood Middle School in Wabush, NL. She enjoys reading fiction novels and writing song lyrics and short stories. In her spare time, Mya also enjoys listening to music and spending time with family and friends.

Lauren Pike
 First Place - Grade 7
 Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
 Western Region

I MISS YOU

People always told me that when someone leaves they will always be with you. For me, it did not feel like that at first. It felt lonely and unfair that I lost him so quickly. He was only fifty nine and he died before his own mother.

His name was Herbert Maxwell but everybody called him Herb. He was my Pop and we had a lot of fun times together. Making pillow forts, sleepovers, and most of all making pancakes for breakfast. Pop made the most fluffy and light pancakes and they always tasted so good. They tasted like doughnuts. We also made touts together. I can picture him now with his long white beard saying, "Have a touton; can't live without em." I laughed at that so much when I was young.

A lot changed when I lost my Pop; those pancakes didn't taste quite as good anymore. I lost him four years ago to brain cancer. He had a hard life. He had a stroke, a seizure, a part of his heart was metal and every time it beat it sounded like a watch ticking the seconds by. He had beaten cancer once for about a year but it came back and stayed. Even though he was suffering from this sickness he still put a smile on his face and acted like there was nothing wrong. You would not have ever known he was sick unless he told you.

To make it even worse, my family and I were on our way back from our amazing trip to Florida. We didn't even get to say goodbye to him. When I heard he passed it felt like someone ripped out a piece of my heart. My dog, Ali, also loved my Pop. Pop was Ali's favorite person. When Pop stopped coming to the house it was almost like she knew he had passed. She was hurt, too. When he left, my Nan felt it the most. She cracked under the pressure. All her muscles tensed up and she had a lot of lower back pain and hip pain. She couldn't move for a while but then she got better. She said she would not have been able to make it through the loss without her family. A couple of months later my dog passed. It almost seemed like she wanted to go up with him to see him again. To me it felt like the constant pain would never end but after time, it did.

My point is...pain will fade; you will still feel it, but it will fade. Love all your family and be thankful that they are still with you. Make the pancakes, make the pillow forts, have the sleepovers... do the things you want to do because you never know what could happen.

Lauren Pike was born in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. She entered the French Immersion program in junior high. She is a very athletic person and loves to play sports such as baseball, hockey, basketball and volleyball. She has a lot of hobbies such as drawing and skiing. She loves to spend time with her friends and family. Last year she won the Best Batter in Baseball Award. She loves to ride her bike in the summer.

Mya Companion
Second Place - Grade 7
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Western Region

MY ADDICTION

When you think of an addiction you would often think of drugs, alcohol, or smoking. My addiction was none of those things, I was addicted to self-harm. There are many ways to self-harm, but the main ones I did were starving, bruising, scratching, and cutting.

It started around the end of Grade 6 when I started getting bullied about my weight and my choice of clothing. I felt sad all the time and I was anxious about what I was wearing, how I sounded and even how I smiled. I often fake smiled and pretended everything was fine when I started feeling urges to take the pain I felt inside out on myself. The sadness was only temporary and it was easy to make me genuinely laugh and smile. More recently it's been a lot more difficult to smile or laugh; I'll often turn the sadness I feel into over-excitement and turn into a giggling mess.

I started with starving. At the time I didn't know it was self-harm. I would go a day or two without eating anything because I felt I was fat. I was told I was ugly and fat and thought that maybe not eating would help me lose the weight I was being bullied over.

A little while after the starving began I realized that wasn't enough, so I started hitting myself and bruising my skin. I had excuses for all of these. With the starving, I could say I had already eaten, the bruising I could say I hit my arm on something.

It moved quickly from bruising to scratching. One day I found a tool used for poking blackheads out. I started scratching the surface of my skin. I started poking myself enough to draw blood which sparked the cutting.

The first time I cut I remember I took the blade out of my sharpener and pressed it to my skin. After one cut I realized it felt so much better than poking myself. The cutting brought a sense of relief that lasted longer than poking ever did. I remember the first time I cut I made about 20 cuts - 15 were the depth of paper cuts and 5 were half a centimeter deep.

Now I am seeing the school counselor and finding ways to cope such as flicking myself with a hair band or playing with a fidget spinner. It has helped but with any other addiction I want to do it again. I've been a lot sadder since I stopped and I've had a few panic attacks in class; I've cried a few times, but I'm getting through it. It has been a turning point in my life because I realized it wasn't healthy and I knew I needed to speak to someone. Learning to deal with self-abuse has been a huge turning point in my life.

Mya Companion is a student at St. Peter's Academy. She likes reading books about the

Holocaust, texting her friends and spending time with her family and pets. When Mya grows up she aspires to be a tattoo artist.

Cole Philpott
Third Place - Grade 7
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Western Region

PARENTS SEPARATE, LIFE CAN'T

Have you ever thought that nothing devastating could ever happen to you? Well, that's what I thought, until my parents sat my sister and I down for our first and last family meeting. This is my turning point, and I haven't stopped spinning yet, but I know that when I do, I won't be left dizzy. I'll be left as a steady young man.

It left an uncomfortable feeling in the house when Mom and Dad argued. It made me want to leave, imagining that when I came back everything would be fine. But, deep down, I knew that wasn't realistic. My parents never spent time together and when they did, they argued.

I remember once, a nice while ago, I heard Mom laughing at Dad. He had accidentally bumped into her and they both found that very amusing. It was so nice to hear them laugh it made me feel complete inside, that everything would be fine. But that wasn't the case, and that was the last time I heard Mom and Dad laughing together.

One dreary evening, my parents called a family meeting. It was strange because it was the first time a family meeting was ever called. Mom started, "Your father and I are separating..."

My sister broke into tears immediately. But it was different for me. Yes, I cried, but not as much as my sister did. The word "separate" kept flowing through my head. It slowly shoved me down over time. Whenever I came to the realization that the divorce was real, fear knocked me off my feet. I just needed to find the old me again, but where was he?

"So this is really happening, huh?" I thought to myself. I'm moving out. Mom and Dad always said that we would move out of that crappy apartment, but I wanted to move together, not in pieces.

Wolves travel in a pack but when a wolf is singled out it doesn't stand a chance. I felt like that lone wolf, out in the wild, no sense of direction, just slowly getting weaker day by day.

Until one day it finally clicked. I noticed something, a change for the better. A change for happiness, but I couldn't put my finger on it.

The weeks passed by. I was moving from house to house, back and forth to see my parents equally. Then one day, I was sitting down on my bed lost in my mysterious thoughts when it hit me, knocking me back into reality. Maybe the divorce wasn't all rage and depression.

I saw that Mom and Dad were happier now, and even though they might be

split, it didn't mean that their love for my sister and me was. We were still a family at heart.

I learned that when I feel alone, I can peer through the darkness because there is light on the other side. It's just a matter of finding it.

Cole Philpott is a student from Baie Verte, Newfoundland and Labrador. He enjoys playing sports like soccer and ball hockey. He also spends some of his free time enjoying video games and watching movies. Cole is a high achiever and works hard to maintain excellent grades in all of his school subjects.

Ontario, Greater Toronto Area

Tal Segev

First Place – Grade 8
York Region District School Board

A.D.D - SO WHAT?

Attention Deficit Disorder. More like A term that Doesn't Define who I am!

In my younger years, school was just an institution, a building I roamed aimlessly. Words were just sounds that drifted over me, and tests were like mazes I couldn't escape. School was the "routine" I dreaded the most. Thankfully, my daily struggles were well disguised with a smile and a laugh. However, the one thing I couldn't hide were my grades, as they were clearly on a free fall down an endless cliff.

By Grade 5, I remember feeling a sense of frustration, as if I was struggling to swim my way back to shore. But, with every new wave, I was constantly being swept away and found myself working 100 times harder to get to back. Despite all the extra help, most of my lessons went in one ear and out the other. So it was time to uncover the mystery of my horrid performance.

This was done by a series of tests that determined what was behind the curtain in my mind. But these tests were different. They were masked as games, no paper, no pencil, no time limit.

When I first found out I had A.D.D. I felt broken, like a shattered mirror. If this was a disorder, did that mean something was terribly wrong with me? Or did that mean that Mental Health Day was about me now? I felt defeated and exhausted, as if I had just run a marathon that never seemed to have a finish line.

Despite this earth-shattering revelation, I never gave up on myself. Recently, I've come to terms with my "uniqueness". This so-called "disorder" did not ruin my life, but has actually enhanced it for the better. It empowers me. It's as if a spotlight was shining on me from above and I'm the star of my own production. I realize that the shards from my broken mirror reflected me in many different ways I couldn't see before. I find myself asking, "why am I the odd one out? Why am I the different one?"

I think that the word "disorder" should not be classified as a "dis" but rather be classified as a "do" because the "do-order" makes people believe that they can do anything. Just because a person has a label, it should not take over their life. One should still continue to strive to be their best self instead of having the disorder drown them in a pool of sorrow.

As you can see, I realize that A.D.D. does NOT define who I am. It is not a label, rather it makes me unique and curious. I no longer feel inadequate or ashamed, but grateful because it makes me who I am today.

Tal Segev is a student at Wilshire Elementary school who loves science, track and field,

volleyball and skiing. She enjoys spending time with her family and friends and aspires to be a psychologist. Tal spends her spare time playing sports, meeting up with friends, or listening to music. She loves to travel and explore new places by hiking, biking, and learning new things about different cities and countries.

Chelsea De Francesca
Second Place – Grade 8
Toronto Catholic District School Board

ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER

I love to dance. The feeling of music flowing through my body. The way my feet push off the floor. The way my heart becomes the rhythm of any song. There is nothing better than getting lost in the music, without a care in the world.

I have been dancing for only two years. When I first started ballroom dancing I was petrified of what the other dancers would think of me.” Would they think I was foolish because I didn’t know the dances? Would they laugh if I couldn’t get the dance moves right? Or what if I fall, would they judge me? Wait... Chelsea that’s just all in your head.” To my surprise, I felt very comfortable and welcomed. Everyone was so hospitable and loving. They didn’t care if I didn’t know all the dances. I was so ecstatic to be part of such an amazing family. They treated me as if I had been dancing there for many years.

Before I had ever thought about dancing, I had been suffering from anxiety. My anxiety prevented me from taking many opportunities. At that point in my life I was lonely because my friends didn’t really know how to help me, so they became distant. I was also sad and mad because I felt that no one knew what I was going through. Even though people said they understood, they didn’t. I tried to overcome my anxiety anyway I could. I used so many different techniques that were suggested to me, but nothing seemed to work. Then everything changed because of dance.

When I’m on the dance floor, all my thoughts and worries instantaneously vanish. It’s an unexplainable feeling. I feel like a different person. It feels like my anxiety was never even there, and the only thing my brain is worried about is making sure I am not stepping on my partner’s feet. At that moment, nothing else matters.

Ballroom dancing has taught me more than just Latin and ballroom dances. It has also taught me to be patient, to trust others, to be responsible and be understanding. These four words will stay with me and remind me that anything is possible, and these dances will remind me to have fun. When things in life get stressful and just don’t make sense, I’ll remind myself to just dance and get lost in the music.

Most of all, dance has taught me to put one foot in front of the other, not only on the dance floor, but in times when my worries get the best of me . Dance boosts my confidence and puts a smile on my face. I will never forget what dance has done for me. I will be eternally grateful for all the unforgettable experiences I’ve had and I can’t wait to see where my new love will take me.

Chelsea De Francesca enjoys all types of music. In the summer she loves to swim in her pool. She has been taking sewing lessons for the last three years at an art school.

Justin Xu
Third Place – Grade 8
Toronto Catholic District School Board

A JOURNEY OF FIVE HUNDRED MILES

What is five-hundred miles? For me, five-hundred miles was not just any ordinary number or distance. It was truly an extraordinary number that could not be described in words and was a distance that I learned so much from. It was also this unforgettable night of October 26, 2012, that was a total game changer, because of this journey of five-hundred miles....

In my personal opinion, I believe that whatever behaviour or attitude you have symbolizes your character towards life. For me, behaviour is my number one priority and my behaviour has always been acceptable. But my attitude towards learning has repeatedly been a dilemma for me. The one attitude that I have trouble with is giving up. I used to give up so easily that I never gave it a second chance and sometimes I didn't even give it a try. I thought that it was a waste of time. But that way of thinking always came back to bite me and I never learned anything from it, until one night.

I grew up in China and I was just like any other ordinary five year old. I lived there, I learned there and I got used to the lifestyle there until my grandma decided to move to New York to live with my uncle, aunt, and my cousin. It was also my first time experiencing a ride on a plane. On the plane, I looked at the scenery of China one more time before I noticed that the wheels of the plane had started to move.

I arrived in the bustling city of New York as it was nicknamed "The City That Never Sleeps." I stayed in New York for two months but it never felt like home to me. Almost everywhere I went was dark or there were suspicious teenagers doing drugs. Once, we had to stay at home because of shootings; it never felt safe. The time I stayed in New York was not a pleasant time, so my grandma decided to go to a better, safer place and that is why I was packing my luggage to leave New York for Toronto with my uncle, sister and myself.

Chaos. Chaos was everywhere when we arrived at the bus station. There were people who were running and people who were saying goodbye to their family members. But we were late for our bus so we had to shove through everyone. The moment I stepped into the bus, my heart pounded faster than ever. Right when I sat down, the coziness made me fall asleep. Suddenly, this person woke me up asking if this bus was going to Toronto. I did not speak or understand English, so I nodded at everything he asked.

Time passed and we were at the gas station for gas and food. My uncle told me that I had to learn English to make friends. My uncle spoke English so he taught me. I gave it a try and the first two words that I ever said in English were "yes" and "tiger". But then, my attitude changed. I did not want to master another language so I gave up and told my uncle that I would learn it once I arrived in Canada, no worries. But my uncle was a strict and serious person. He gave me a lecture about how if I gave up, I could be

wasting something wonderful that I may find. That lecture was not just any lecture, every word he said had meaning and it stuck inside of me. I still remember when he said, "life is all about trying." Those few simple words motivated me to try again. I was so inspired by the lecture that I pushed myself to learn fifty words that night.

Time flew like a whirlwind, once we got to Toronto. I was ready to take on the challenge. But I would certainly never forget my uncle's lecture about giving up. Without him, I would not have picked up the language so quickly, and without my dedication, I would not be who I am today. I packed my things and went to my new house. This journey has left an imprint on my life and I know that more is to come. October 26, 2012 was not just any ordinary day thanks to that journey of five-hundred miles...

Justin Xu was born in New York City and raised in China. He speaks 2 languages, Mandarin and English. Justin enjoys reading and listening to the radio. He has won numerous awards such as, Academic Awards, Music Certificates, Altar Server of the Year Award, and Junior Soccer Champion. His biggest goal is to develop empathy and compassion, and to have a proper mindset of things.

Ontario, NPAAMB

Kenan Hadzic
First Place - Grade 7
Toronto District School Board

A LITTLE KID'S JOURNEY TO A HEALTHIER LIFE

My life changed drastically when I was two years old. I started having bloody stools and my parents did not know what was happening to me. They took me to so many different doctors to try and figure out what was going on, but nobody knew what the problem was. They took me off milk, gluten and a several other foods. I was basically living off of Pediasure. The bleeding did not stop.

The investigation continued, I saw a pediatrician, a stomach specialist and a naturopath all at the same time. Some thought I had a wheat allergy, others thought I was lactose intolerant and then some were unsure. When I stopped eating dairy and gluten my stomach was still in pain and everyone was puzzled. At the young age of 2, I had to have a colonoscopy and endoscopy. My parents told me it was very difficult because I had to drink two litres of a very sugary drink that makes your bowels clean. It was hard for me to drink all of that liquid and it took a while, but I drank it all. I felt like I had to, because I could see that my parents were worried. After that procedure the doctors determined I have IBD (Inflammatory Bowel Disease).

I started Junior Kindergarten at Wellesworth Junior School when I was four years old. It was just my second week of school when my stomach problems started to get worse. My parents had to take me out of school. My pain and bleeding were so severe that my parents took me to Emergency at Sick Kids Hospital. That was when I got admitted and was placed on the fourth floor which is the Gastrointestinal floor. This was just two weeks before Christmas. I never went back to Junior Kindergarten, because that was when the sickness got worse.

I had so many tests done on me and blood work every three hours. I hated every moment of it. I was so scared of needles and I only wanted to go home. I saw some of the best doctors in the world, and they did many tests to determine if I had Crohns Disease or Colitis. They determined that that I had Colitis. I was in the hospital for over three weeks and this was during the Christmas holidays.

Then something amazing happened on Christmas Eve, the Toronto Raptors came to the hospital. All the kids went to the Atrium to see them, but I could not go. My amazing nurse asked a special favour for the players to come to my room. I was playing my Nintendo 3DS when they walked into my room. Three Raptors players and the coach came to see me, and they gave me a basketball that was signed and a lot of other souvenirs. It was such an amazing moment.

On Christmas Day Santa and his elf came to visit me. Santa gave me a sack filled

with presents, such as a speaker, books, toys, crayons and a skateboarding game.

When I found out that I had a lifelong disease at a young age, it was very shocking for me and my entire family to accept. Everyone was scared and worried about how I would live with this condition, because I was diagnosed at such a young age. My life would involve having to take medication to control this illness and also watching my diet. It's important that I see my doctors at Sick Kids every six months to get a health checkup. They monitor my height, weight and then do blood work to ensure that I am healthy and able to do all the things I love in life.

This disease has had a huge impact on the way I look at life. I am stronger, braver, and always positive. I have had to grow up and deal with very hard medical issues at a very young age. I was grateful to have my grandpa to talk to about colonoscopies and different types of procedures, because he was going through it at the same time. He made me feel reassured about having to take needles and dealing with all of the things that gave me stress.

I am very private about my struggles, but my struggles have made me the kid I am today. In 2016 when I was in Grade 4, I organized a toy drive for Sick Kids Hospital, and we were very successful. I was even featured in a Newsletter by Public School Trustee Chris Glover. It was a good feeling, but I didn't do it by myself and I didn't do it for recognition, I just wanted to give back to Sick Kids.

I have been living my life to the fullest. I love snowboarding, skating, riding my dirt bike, skateboarding, playing soccer and just being outside in general with my family. I never let my illness get in the way of having fun. I just know that it is something I have to live with for the rest of my life.

Kenan Hadzic likes to be active playing soccer, biking, skiing and snow boarding. He also likes to spend time with his family and friends.

Chance McDonald-Wheeler

First Place - Grade 8

Toronto District School Board

'MIIGWECH'

Coco, that is what we used to call her. A strange name made of an Ojibwe word that we couldn't quite pronounce when we were young. She came with many teachings and she was the last string I had that was tied to my native culture. Her passing away left me feeling lost and detached from my culture. Luckily, her teachings have 'stuck' with me like a tongue on a freezing pole. They have guided me through the toughest moments in life, they will never leave me. My grandma has deeply changed my life.

I was at her humble, self-built house, when she started telling me about a sort of pow-wow drumming lesson we were going to. Interrupted by shallow coughs, she said we would learn prayers through song. Something I couldn't quite understand as I don't speak our half-forgotten language. She always said how much her language always meant, but I never truly put much thought into that statement. She explained how song and dance was a means to praise the creator for blessing us in whatever situation we were in, and helping us through it.

When we got there, I was blown away. Everyone was ecstatic to see Coco, saying things like, "We are delighted to have an elder with us today!" I was confused so I faintly whispered in her ear, "Why are they so happy to see you?" She gave a little chuckle and replied by saying that elders were highly respected because of their life experience. I felt a warm sense of pride flow through me to be with her. We started drumming and singing, while I just quietly tapped the drum like the pulse of a heart, listening to the foreign lyrics. This continued for quite a long time, and everyone kept smiling, which I thought was bizarre as my non-experienced self was tired.

At the end, I gave her a hug goodbye, knowing I wouldn't see her until next year as she lived so far away. Her scarred body gave me a tight hug and handed me a gift she picked up before my visit. "Thanks," I said, as one of the singers walked up to her and gave her a hug, and said 'miigwech' in a warm, meaningful voice. She responded with "You're welcome, anytime," and hugged her back.

A few years later, Coco was diagnosed with cancer for the fourth time, only this time she wouldn't make it through. My last words to her were through a hand-written letter. But when I visited her, it was too late. She had been asleep for a few days and wouldn't wake up. Her Ojibwe open-casket funeral was full of tears and Ojibwe stories. I must have heard 'miigwech' that day more than any other word, but it had more meaning to me than any other word, as I finally understood why our language meant so much to her.

Her teachings weren't through actions, or words, but something that meant much more. Something my young and happy-go-lucky self couldn't quite grasp. She taught me many life-lessons through native songs, and stories of her past, including the brutal residential schooling. Her teachings taught me to persevere and not give up especially when life gets challenging. My grandmother taught many people our language

through song. She was the most generous and strong person I have ever met, and the best part is that she never stopped trying through every challenge. I will continue to do the same, thanks to her.

Chance McDonald-Wheeler enjoys playing basketball. He spends his free time playing with his friends and watching Netflix. He has two sisters who are both older than he; one who has moved out, and the other in grade 12.

Ontario, North Bay

Isabelle Aultman

First Place - Grade 8

Near North District School Board

TAKE THE EXPERIENCE

Ten whole days of worry, ten whole days of pain, ten whole days of heartache, ten whole days of waiting, for her to come home.

March 15, 2015 was the day that she came home, the day I felt a breath of relief come over me, when the weight on my shoulders slid off. I remember the day of the accident, like it was yesterday; it was a lot for a nine-year-old. The feeling of almost losing someone you love dearly by the same thing that took me to places such as the Toronto Zoo and Canada's Wonderland was almost too much to bear.

"Slam"

I heard the truck door shut on our old black Dodge Ram 1500. I ran to the top of the stairs, in excitement. It was finally the day I'd been patiently waiting for. The day she was to come home. I was told to be calm and very helpful. She had to take many pills because of all the pain she was in. The door swung open and my first sight was of my father wearing his usual work clothes. That day was a big day for all of us; especially for my mother. I then saw my mother struggling to get up a step into the house with her dark red walker that I had put some stickers on to remind her of us when we weren't there with her.

My father rested his hand upon her back for more support. It took her a bit, but she finally managed to get up the step. She looked at us as she saw the upcoming steps. She kept her focus on us, as her motivation. She slowly made her way up the stairs with the help of her walker, my father, and the railing that he had installed for her coming home. Although she was struggling, she was still positive, as always.

I remember the day of the accident; she had been in the emergency room and was stable enough to have guests. I had hesitantly walked up to the hospital bed and she could see the pain in my eyes. She had told me to come over to her, as I watched her smile broaden, she looked at me with her ocean blue eyes and started to sing. She sang "Shake it Off", by Taylor Swift, as all she had wanted was for me to be happy. It made me realize how lucky I was to have someone in my life that was such an altruistic person.

I take this experience and I hold onto it tight. It has helped me gain traits such as bravery, kindness, strength, humility and courage. It has taught me that life is more than staying alive, it is about what kind of person you should be in your lifetime and the impact that you have on the world. It is about learning and loving. I take this experience as positive development in my personal growth.

Isabelle Aultman is from Redbridge, Ontario. She loves to dance and is on the competitive dance team at a local studio. Isabelle also enjoys reading historical fiction novels. Her

favourite subjects in school are Language, Science and History. She aspires to one day become a surgeon.

Hezekiah Guy

Second Place - Grade 7

Near North District School Board

MOTHER, OR MOM?

“You can carry the past on your shoulders, or you can start over.” - NF

There’s a big difference between the words mother and mom. Mom is someone who’s there because they love you, and because they want to make you feel good about yourself. Mother is a parent who’s there because they must be, because they’re your biological parent. I spent the first seven years of my life with a mother, someone who really didn’t care about me.

Everyone makes jokes about drugs, but when you’ve witnessed them tear your life apart and destroy your little brother’s life chances by diagnosing him with FAS (fetal alcohol syndrome), drugs aren’t a joke. I’ve seen cocaine multiple times in my own household along with, “adult drinks,” as I was told. I hated what drugs were, and I hated what they did. Now I know what drugs can truly do, and why not to do them.

I knew men that I had never met before, better than my own father, who didn’t get the opportunity to meet me until I was nine years old. I persevered through the lies that my mother told me about my dad not wanting to meet me, and held on to hope that there would be a day that I got to meet him. This taught me that anything good can happen, even if all your goals seem to be lost.

That hope stayed in my heart because of my brother, Hosea, who was there for me through an uncountable number of times. No matter the number of tears that were shed in that house, he stuck by my side. We were like most brothers at times, and fought lots, but overall, I think that we stuck together. I learned that when you’re looking for a best friend your whole life, and you think that you’re on your own, that best friend could have been with you all along.

I don’t know if I would be who I am today if my grandparents hadn’t stepped in and taken me as their own. I’m so lucky that I didn’t have to spend my time in foster care. It’s just not the same as home. I heard plenty of lies about how horrible my family was from my mother, but from that I learned that just because you can’t trust one person, it doesn’t mean that you can’t love somebody else.

Through my life, I’ve learned a lot about family and moving on. I have realized that even though you may disagree sometimes with a loved one, they’ll always be there by your side. A strong point made to me by my Nana is that, even though life may not always give you what you planned, if you spend your time thinking about all the negatives, you’ll never realize all the wonderful things that you’ve been blessed with. You would never find the good in the world that might have just been around the corner.

Hezekiah Guy grew up with his two brothers and uncles. He lives with his grandparents at the edge of North Bay, near Redbridge. Hezekiah has always loved any sport that he tries, and is willing to try anything new. He enjoys visiting his father in Regina, Saskatchewan. Hezekiah has loved writing his entire life. In the future, he wishes to become a surgeon.

Isaac Guy
Third Place - Grade 8
Near North District School Board

HOME

“One of the happiest moments in life is when you find the courage to let go of what you cannot change.”

Have you ever heard of the ripple effect? It's one-hundred percent like water. When you disturb something in any way, the whole body will be affected. If you throw the smallest pebble into a pond, the whole surface will shake. The ripple effect is what changed my life.

When my life was changed, it was before I was born. My oldest sister was an alcoholic, and she has had three children that we know of. Due to complications, they no longer live with her. One is living with his biological father, another living with us, and another, Tydus, my parents have permanently adopted due to his mother's complications to care for the three-year-old. When they first came, it was hard. I was only eight or nine.

It was a Sunday morning and we were preparing for a drive, when the phone rang in our home. Everyone stopped, like it was a gunshot. One of my parents picked it up and told me and my brother to leave the room. My two parents then started speaking urgently; I could tell that they were upset. Their voices wavered in an unsettled way. After this, we resumed preparing for the drive.

As we drove, the car took a different road than usual, and we ended up on a one-way street. We then parked beside my sister's apartment. There was a full spot of graffiti designs on the side of her house, the sign that I used to know that it was hers. We then entered the home and an odd scent hit me; it was like I was walking through mold, the air was warm, too warm. I felt like I was being smothered in a horrible damp blanket.

My brother and I stood in another room with our two nephews, while our parents talked with their oldest daughter. The air was still warm, and none of us spoke. We could all hear my parents arguing with her. The aggression seeming to come from my sister's side. After what seemed like eternity, we left with two more passengers in the car. There were numerous bumps in the road, but they soon evened out.

There are still bumps in the road, but that's life. You take the good with the bad, in an odd, messy bundle. Because of the sudden, quick addition to our family, I understand a great deal more about what exactly family is. It isn't perfect, but that's why you have each other. If no one made mistakes, what would be the purpose of family? What would they be there for? There are red lights, traffic jams, and lots of potholes, and they're always going to be there. It doesn't matter how many bumps in the road there are, it just matters how many you let shake you, and who you become because of them.

Isaac Guy was born in Orillia, Ontario. He enjoys running, basketball, and any other physical exercise. He also enjoys reading, writing, sketching, and pizza. He wants to visit the east coast someday.

Ontario, Sudbury

Anjali Hans

First Place - Grade 8

Sudbury Catholic District School Board

BUTTERFLY

As I stood in front of my body length mirror, I stared at myself as tears slowly ran down my rosy red cheeks. My insecurities rushed in at once penetrating my body and mind like water filling a sinking boat. The negative tingling that took over my body was a feeling I'd never forget. "Fat, hideous, horrid, unpleasant" are the words that repeated over and over in my head, while a flood of tears gushed down my face.

I thought about the other girls in my school. They were perfect in my mind. With their flawless skin, hourglass shaped bodies and perfect smiles. I was the friend left out. I was the one who got called names, I was the one whose feelings got put aside to deal with everyone else's problems. No one noticed my pain. I was just the girl who always smiled. Little did everyone know that underneath that façade was an insecure, heavy hearted-broken girl.

A cold breeze gusted through my window, while I covered myself up with my velvet grey blanket. I thought to myself about how I wanted that negative tingling to go away. I wanted the harsh words that ran through my head to leave. I wanted to feel a rush of confidence instead of insecurities. I didn't want to feel like the one "left out" anymore. I wanted to feel strong enough to put myself out there and make people notice who I am, to show myself that I can be the girl who truly does only smile. I needed to make myself happy. So, I ran.

I ran from sunrise to sunset. It became my passion. The gym became my happy place and my home away from home. I fell in love instantly. At the track my heart would race, but my mind would be as calm as the sea after a storm. My head was clear, no longer full of negativity. I had a breathtaking, tingling, sensation of confidence.

Three months of this had past. I was on top of the world. I stared back into my body-length mirror and I saw achievement, dedication, confidence and bravery. If someone told me 1 year ago, I was going to lose 30 pounds and feel like a queen, I would've laughed. 1 year ago, I was a shy, hurting, insecure, broken-down girl. Now, I'm a strong, confident, outgoing, joyful woman. I feel like I found myself and who I really am.

Blood, sweat and tears is what I gave for this. I wanted to make myself happy. I didn't do it for other people. I did it to make myself feel amazing, to feel like I could be confident with my body and to know that I have become the girl who truly loves herself.

Anjali Hans is enrolled in the French Immersion program at St. Anne School. He lives with his younger brother, mom, and step dad in Sudbury. His dad lives in Scarborough, the first place he lived since immigrating to Canada from India. He enjoys going to the gym and playing all kinds of sports and has a passion for writing. He enjoys using writing as an art form to showcase his feelings.

Madison Coutu
Second Place - Grade 8
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

YOU'LL REMEMBER ME, WON'T YOU?

I sat tracing the edge of an empty canvas, waiting for any morsel of inspiration to come. The milky white paint I had poured glistened in the sun. I jolted from the sudden buzzing of my father's phone. Hesitant at first, he reluctantly grabbed it. On the other line was my mom, who sounded shaken. My dad's facial expression alternated from calm to anxious swiftly. With a heavy sigh, he ended the call. Not knowing the tragedy that had been set in place, I energetically questioned him. My dad nervously tapped his finger on the table before shifting his gaze upon me.

"One... second," he stammered, "Let me get your sister." He sat us both down at the table I had claimed as my art studio. "Over the weekend," he started, "Your grandfather had a brain aneurysm. He is now at the hospital and is being taken care of."

Those words pierced my heart. I glanced over at my sister who had a confused, and scared expression on her face. My father tried to explain to her what this meant, but my thoughts drowned out his voice. "Will he even survive this?" I thought to myself as I leaned back in my chair, emotionless and stiff. I heard sobs from my sister, as she came to the realization that our grandfather was near death.

More thoughts flooded through my brain faster than I could possibly register them. What if he never makes it out of the hospital? What if I never get to see him again? What if I don't get to say goodbye? The only thing we could do was wait; waiting for some sort of answer to the questions we all had. Waiting to see if he would make it out.

Though he had survived, the aftermath of the aneurysm followed him out of the hospital. It was as though his brain had reset and he had forgotten everything he had learned. He was facing a long road to recovery.

My grandfather only wanted the best for us, he just wanted us to succeed. I can remember spending hours with him telling stories. I could have stayed in his office all day listening to him talk. Sometimes, I wonder if he remembers those times too. Despite having those memories of him to hold on to, I was devastated, wishing that my siblings could have spent the same amount of time with the grandpa I once knew.

You only realize how precious something is once it's ripped away by the hands of time. We could have never seen the aneurysm coming, which made this event even more devastating. This made me fear that everyone will one day suffer a similar fate and be torn away from me.

Though it might be scary, this helped me learn that life moves on. There will be tragedy, but it's really a lesson teaching me to be stronger, to keep moving forward and to always find the beauty painted into the canvas we call life.

Madison Coutu is a student at St. Anne Catholic School. She is a creative individual who enjoys doodling in her sketchbook or catering to her plants. Madison would like to use her ingenuity and determination to pursue a career in computer coding.

Rawley Roelink
Third Place - Grade 8
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

“SEIZED” FUTURE

It all happened early on a Sunday morning at Fawn cabin, our family's camp. My family and I went there for an amazing weekend of quading, fishing and pure relaxation. It was such an amazing place, but something happened there that changed my life forever.

I woke up extremely early in the morning, 4 am to be exact. I could hear my brother tapping away on his iPad screen. After watching him play a game, I was tired and bored and began to drift back to sleep. But this time, sleep didn't come so easily, I was restless, and I didn't go back to sleep at all. I started to get a huge vibration feeling coming from my leg. At first, I thought I was be electrocuted. I was unaware of the situation. What was happening? Why could I not control my leg? My leg continued to tremble. I was trying to get my brother's attention, but I couldn't move when I tried. I felt completely helpless. I felt scared. I felt trapped and couldn't speak to get help. I began to shake uncontrollably and couldn't stop. I could hear my family at times, fear in their voices as they tried to help me. Fear because they didn't have the power to stop it.

They quickly carried me to the car and I laid on my aunt's lap. They flew down the road to meet an emergency helicopter that was called because the area was remote and far from the hospital. I flew to Sudbury Hospital. I had an MRI so they could assess what was going on. My dad told me what happened. He explained that I had had a seizure and they were trying to determined what caused it. I had so many thoughts race through my mind. A seizure? Why would something like this happen to me? I spent several days in the hospital with my Dad to keep me company while the doctors observed my condition.

To this day, they have no answers as to why I had a seizure that day at our cabin. They do not know why the seizure began or why they continued to happen here and there every few months. My doctor at Neo Kids in Sudbury has prescribed some medication to control it and I have been seizure-free for over a year now. My life changed in a snap. I appreciate things more, especially my family and friends. I have trust in everyone. They were able to care for me when I couldn't help myself. Life is short, and life is precious. Remember to be thankful every day for the people and things you hold special. You never know what will "seize" your future.

Rawley Roelink is a student at St. Anne Catholic School. He enjoys playing sports and video games with his friends. When Rawley grows up, he would like to be an electrician.

Saskatchewan

Navy Gudmundson

First Place – Grade 7

South East Cornerstone Public School Division

AN UNKNOWN HOME

Mountains. Standing brave and tall. Guarding the world. I've lived in beautiful British Columbia my whole life, at least until the summer of 2018 when I found out my dad had been offered a job in Saskatchewan. I knew I didn't want to move right away. I was afraid I wouldn't make any friends, and I wouldn't like my new school. I had to leave my best friend, my sister, one of my dogs, and other members of my family behind. The world I loved had vanished, and everything was new, like being reborn, or losing your memory. I didn't like Saskatchewan at first. There were no mountains. There were no rainy days. There were no forests. Everything I knew was gone. All that was left was grassy plains, dwarfish hills, and dusty gravel roads. My life had gone from a perfect book, to a puzzle with about a million pieces, hidden from my weak eyes, like a mole during the day.

I felt like part of me was missing; an empty hole rotting in my lost heart. Soon I had to start school. I was nervous, but that's when I met so many nice people. My first weeks weren't the best. I would often stand on the hill of the schoolyard at recess, and stare in the direction of home, B.C., and I would pretend I could see it. The huge grey mountains, and the town I lived in. I was lonely - an unexplainable lonely. The best way I can describe it is, I felt like part of my heart was gone. I wasn't me. After a couple weeks, I started to hang out with some of the people I had met. They were truly kind to me, and slowly I started to become my old self again.

Deep down, I still missed the wet and rainy afternoons in my old home. Sometimes when it rained there, I thought it would flood. I remember the sleepovers I had with my kindhearted and caring bestie, and when my sister and I would take our dogs to the huge field with soft green grass that was near our old house.

After a while Saskatchewan turned from a nightmare to a home; a home I never thought I could ever have the courage to trust. It was too different and far from where I was born and thought I belonged. I don't exactly understand what made me accept Saskatchewan, but I love it now. The hole in my determined heart has healed, and if it ever opens again, I'll remind myself that my family, friends and old life are still, and will, always be in my mind and memories. I could never forget that.

Plains. Filled with scattered bales of hay. Welcoming me to my home. I soon learned to love them. I will now and forever consider these wonderful plains home. I hope to find more laughs, memories, and adventures in my new home, which isn't so new anymore.

Navy Gudmundson is a student at Hillcrest School in Estevan, Saskatchewan. She recently moved from her home in British Columbia. Navy misses British Columbia, but has made new friends, and has become an active part of the school. Navy is part of the badminton team, school play, and helps with the younger students. Navy loves to read and write!

Ryn Lubreo
Second Place – Grade 8
South East Cornerstone Public School Division

ADAPTATION

It was just an ordinary day. I was at the beach Inabanga Bohol, Philippines, chilling under the hot smoldering sun. Savouring the feeling of the salty waves splashing through my legs and the cool breeze of wind coming from the heart of the Pacific, there was no place I would rather be. But all good times must come to an end. It was Sunday afternoon when my dad called from the Canadian Embassy and told us that the Canadian government had approved our papers to become permanent Canadian residents. At first the news fueled me with gladness, excitement, sadness, and that creepy feeling in your stomach when you ride a rollercoaster for the first time. Going to Canada was my father's biggest dream. He had been working in Canada for almost nine years trying to create a better life in a country on the other side of the Pacific. His dream had come true.

We flew away from Manila to Japan. From Japan we flew to Vancouver, then from Vancouver to Calgary to Regina. 21 hours. Exhausting. But it was worth it! October 12, 2017. 1:40 a.m. That time and day will be planted in my brain forever, as that is when we landed in Regina. When we got off the plane, we went to the waiting area to wait for our ride. The room was empty and silent. The only people in the waiting area were my family and the woman in a Subway stand. The person who was supposed to pick us up couldn't make it, so we waited for some time to rent a van. It was 8 a.m. when we finally got a van.

When we left the airport, a cold breeze of air invaded the warm interior of my thin clothing. On our way to Canada my dad had talked to me about the cold weather. But I did not look at the dark side of my dream of winter. I only looked at the lighter side. Like when there is snow we'll be having snowball fights and we can finally make a snowman. But, it was still fall, and it already felt like somebody forced me to get inside a very big freezer. "Now I must deal with this, too," I said to myself.

It was the third week of October when we first went to school, and when I experienced the new culture to which I needed to adapt. It was very different from the culture I grew up in. Back in the Philippines almost everyone in my neighborhood knew everyone else, but here I barely knew anyone. Although my family has been living in Canada for one and a half years now, I'm still getting used to the new culture and climate. I am still learning the slang of everyday English language. I am still adapting to the culture, and meeting new friends, but the good news is I survived the cold winter of 2018-2019!

Ryn Lubreo is a student at Hillcrest School in Estevan. His teachers and friends call him RJ. RJ loves to draw and is a part of the school play this year. RJ has a great sense of humour and is an active member of the school community.

Ryza Lubreo

Third Place – Grade 7

South East Cornerstone Public School Division

TOO LATE

I won't forget the three words she said to me, "Grandpa is gone." I hurried inside to my grandparents' room. I saw my cousins, aunts, uncles, siblings, and mom crying. I couldn't see much so I went inside squishing my way through the crowd. My eyes closed tight. I gasped for air as I arrived at the other side. Once I opened my eyes, I saw my grandpa lying on the bed. He was motionless, his hands on his chest, and his eyes closed. He was wearing a white t-shirt and dark brown shorts. My family was around him, their hands on their faces covering their tears as they dropped on the cement floor.

I felt my tears slowly gathering in my eyes. "No!" I cried. Covering my shaking lips, I pushed my way back through the crowd. I ran as fast as the wind and went in our own house (not too far from my grandparents' house.) I cried as my heart slowly melted in my chest, closing the door tight behind me. I cried and cried. I couldn't believe what I saw. I sat in the corner of the room with my hands covering my face. It can't be....

"Grandpa," I cried. My voice was shaking. I could feel my tears running down my cheeks as my heart beat in my chest. "No!" I whispered. He was a good man; he was kind to his grandchildren. As I cried, I heard footsteps heading my way. I covered myself with a blanket. I could feel its soft fabric tickling my ankle.

"Ryza?" a soft voice called. I closed my eyes, my hands covering my face, tears still dripping down. I heard the footsteps getting closer, and louder.

"Ryza?" the soft voice called again. Now I could clearly hear her, she was crying. I could hear her voice shaking. "R-Ryza are you ok?" she asked as her tears were dropping down on the blanket. I didn't answer. "Ryza? Do you want to see grandpa?" she asked. When I heard that, the tears slowly rose in my eyes making a waterfall of tears.

"Y-yes," I cried getting out from under the blanket. I looked up, and I saw my cousin. She held my hand gently and walked with me to my grandparents' house. While we were walking, I was looking down. I watched my tears as they fell on the ground making its color dark. I looked up in surprise. I was standing in front of a huge dark door with a spiral pattern on it. I looked at it and tears crashed down to the floor.

I held my breath as my older cousin opened the front door. The door squeaked as we walked in. I felt heat below my eyes as I looked at my grandfather. I felt a warm tear flowing slowly on my cheeks. I went beside him, I held his hand tight, feeling his wrinkly skin.

I wish I had hugged him; I wish I'd been nicer; I wish I had told him that I loved him... but it's too late now.

Ryza Lubreo is a grade 7 student at Hillcrest School in Estevan. Ryza loves reading and writing. She is passionate about art, especially drawing. Ryza is part of the school play and is excited to have a large role.

Grade 9/10

New Brunswick

Jonathan McDonald

First Place - Grade 10

Anglophone West School District

PATHS

Loss is a constant of the universe. A loss early in life will define a person if they let it. For others, loss can prove epiphanic. In others still, loss is simply a fork on the path that makes up life. For me, loss has been all three.

Several years ago, I wrote a piece about love and loss. I poured my heart and soul into a page's worth of writing. After a week of writing, revision, and typing, it was done. The short story was by no means perfect, barely a decent piece of writing, but I was proud nonetheless. My English teacher at the time asked the class for volunteers to present their writing. In that moment, I had a choice, one that would impact how I would think and feel for years to come. Of course, being the grade seven student who was overly proud of his work, I raised my hand to volunteer.

I was placed close to last in the presentation order. Because of this, I had several days to prepare and to practice reading the story I had written. Incidentally, I also had several days to ruminate, time that my brain promptly took advantage of. By the day of my presentation, I bore a deep-seated fear that it would go terribly in one form or another.

Finally, my turn came. The girl presenting before me finished her piece quickly, a short narrative about a fire in her home. The room swelled briefly with half-hearted applause.

A moment later, my teacher shuffled some papers and said, "Okay, Jonathan, whenever you're ready."

I quietly cleared my throat and started reading.

"People say that grief can fade. Perhaps they're right."

After just two sentences, I was already choking on my words, but I still tried to persist. I told the story of an old caregiver of mine who died of cancer. I read about her funeral and how the members of the Scout group she started saluted her one last time.

As I read, the dimly-lit classroom around me seemed to spin out of focus. The paper in my hand was the only thing that mattered in that moment. My desk, my chair, everything around me may as well have not been there. Tears began to well up in my eyes and roll down my cheeks as I read.

My teacher noticed my halting speech and the tears on my face, and hurried over.

“Jonathan, you don’t have to go on if you don’t want to. Do you want me to read the rest?” he whispered into my ear, taking it from my hands after a nod.

There was no applause after I read, half-hearted or otherwise. I sat in my chair, struggling to regain composure as various classmates walked by, some offering a light touch on the shoulder or soft condolences.

That presentation, botched as it was, was the first time that I had opened up about loss or grief. By allowing myself to feel the emotions that had torn me down for years, I let myself move on. I could finally, after over two years, take a weight off my chest. That relief allowed me to truly work on my own well-being, and be better than I was before. It let me make a change, one that would lead me on a much brighter path.

Change is a constant of the universe. Nobody wakes up in the morning and goes to bed at night the exact same person. To suggest that all changes are fuelled by grand epiphanies is ridiculous. Some of the most important ones are made in our daily lives. They are made when we sit beside a friend and ask what’s wrong. They are made in our reactions to the world around us, whether they be to incidents great or small. The path to change is a long and winding one, with infinite forks and tributaries, and without a true destination. A wrong turn can lead somebody down a path through a dark forest, and a right one can set somebody on the high road forever.

I’ve accepted the losses that made me who I am today. Thanks to that acceptance, I can pursue a happier lifestyle, one devoted to helping people around me as well as myself.

The piece that I wrote so many years ago was not fuel to some great change. When I sat among my peers and tried to choke out the words that I had practiced, it was not epiphanic. It was but a small choice, meant to show some small strength that I wanted to possess, but all the same, that small choice, that child sitting in his chair, trying to read through the tears, set me on the path that I’m on now.

Jonathan McDonald was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick. He enjoys camping with family and spending time with his friends. On top of the standard courses assigned to Grade 10 students, Jonathan often delves into obscure topics of study, most recently, Gaelic orthography and grammar conventions. He also studies music and plays clarinet with the FHS Concert Band and a clarinet quartet within the school.

Maddie Green
Second Place - Grade 10
Anglophone West School District

SIX LETTERS

“Life is 10% of what happens to you and 90% of how you react to it”

- Charles R. Swindoll

Who knew three words said from my mother's mouth could have the power to change my life forever. “I have cancer.” That is it...just three little words. What I have come to realize is one of those words is not so little.

C-A-N-C-E-R. In February 2018 I began to realize just how big this six-letter word really is. My brother, sisters and I were called down to the kitchen and sat at the table. Our parents had been gone all morning and we did not really know what was going on. All we knew was that they had been going to the hospital for the past couple weeks, but we thought it was because of kidney stones. Just as dogs pick up on subtle signs of danger lurking nearby, my gut was telling me that this was not another family meeting over who did not flush the toilet last night.

No amount of intuition could brace the blow of my mom telling us that she was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. I remember her saying that we just had to stay positive and spend more time together. The words that followed did not catch up to me until many weeks later when the fog lifted. I guess I did not want to believe my mom had a rare and extremely aggressive form of cancer that was about to spread into our lives. At first, I was terrified and thought that there was nothing that we could do to save her, but once I saw how positive she was about it I wasn't as scared.

I know the cancer was physically in my mother's body, however it felt like it metastasized into all of my thoughts; this gigantic tumor was invading all family conversations and functions, then quickly spreading to all of my interactions with friends, teachers, and coaches. It seemed like everywhere I went at least one person was talking about my mom's cancer or how they were there for us if we ever needed them. Our family plan of attack was to accept cancer was indeed a part of our life, but we would not let it become our life.

I truly believe that mantra kept my family and me strong, helping us through the tough times. Yes, the amazing advancements in medicines and treatment were important, but the real weapon was staying positive. Seeing my mother undergo six months of aggressive chemo therapy, a modified radical left breast mastectomy and twenty-five sessions of radiation and not let that knock her down, nor disrupt our normal day-to-day lives is a testament to the strength of a positive mindset. I honestly do not know what would have happened if we did not stay positive through everything that happened.

I will admit I used to view my mom's getting cancer as the turning point in my life, but that is incorrect. I will not give cancer that power. The turning point in my life is realizing our family's positivity conquered our battle with cancer. She is one of the 15% that had 100% response to chemo therapy prior to surgery and is now cancer free.

Here I am, exactly twelve months later and this six-letter word still has power in my life because my mom is at high risk of recurrence. But what I have come to realize is as powerful as the word cancer can be, an even more powerful word that I will take into all future battles is attitude. A-T-T-I-T-U-D-E.

Maddie Green is a student at Fredericton High School. She is enjoying her time at high school and enjoys playing the guitar, piano, and volleyball in her free time. She has two sisters, a brother, and two dogs.

Anjali Singh
Third Place – Grade 9
Anglophone South School District

DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER

I started Kindergarten like any other five-year-old child - happy, innocent, and adventurous. I was untainted and shielded. I walked through the large school doors clutching my father's hand and my backpack tightly and as we reached the classroom door I took a deep breath and reassured myself that everything would be fine. Little did I know that today my experience would change the way I think and act for the rest of my life.

When I entered the big classroom, I took a seat and glanced around and noticed that I was different from everyone else. My skin, my hair and even my eyes were different. Suddenly, I accidentally locked eyes with another girl. She stood tall, blue eyes, brown hair, fair skinned and looked at me with a look of repulsion. She sneered and walked over to me. In my five-year-old mind I was hoping she was going to say hello and introduce herself. Sadly, that was not the case.

The first thing she did was very harshly ask, "What are you doing here?"

Confused, I replied, "I am in this class."

In response, she said snootily, "Well, you don't belong here. You are different from everybody else."

"How am I any different from you?" I asked timidly.

"Well, you are not from here and are probably really dumb."

Offended, I was struck speechless. I thought that it odd because I was born here. Before I could counter her statement, she flipped her hair and declared, "You will never be as smart as me!" and then stalked off. While this was happening, my teacher was trying to console a crying student in the corner of the classroom and did not even notice the encounter.

Throughout my elementary school years, this same girl subtly bullied me. She would give me looks of disgust and treated me as an outcast. She excluded me and discouraged other kids who wanted to be my friends. One day she even pinched me on my arm. Her bullying was so subtle, and we were so young that when I told my parents and teachers, they would say "do not bother with her, she just needs attention." but in my young mind, I felt hurt daily. I struggled quietly for a long time feeling confused and alone.

One day, however, I made a friend. She was a girl with strawberry blonde hair and blue eyes, similar features to my bully, but that was where the similarities ended. She

was a year younger than I and had no siblings. She lived two houses down the street from me. She was someone who understood me and did not judge me based on how I looked. We started to hang out together, reading lots of books, watching movies and having playdates together. She gave me my confidence back and I thought if my new friend can accept me for who I am then maybe nothing is wrong with me. We have remained friends to this day.

One evening as I gazed at the sky thinking about all that has happened, I realised that I was excelling in my classes. I had even won six awards over the past years - three in elementary school and three awards in middle school.

Now I have rebuilt my confidence and feel much more comfortable with my differences. This experience has motivated me to do the best I can in everything I do so I can prove my bully wrong. It has also taught me not to judge people by the way they look. Once you get to know a person on the inside, you will be amazed at what you might learn. I am now empathetic to others who might face similar challenges. I try to make friends with new students who are not only different in appearance but personality as well. For example, I try to approach and speak to new students who might be shy to make them feel included.

As we progressed through school the bullying has stopped, perhaps because we are now older. I hope my bully has now learned that people should not be judged by their differences. Now I try not to judge people for how they look because that is what happened to me, and while this is hard in a society in which your appearance means so much, I encourage others to do the same. As the saying goes "do not judge a book by its cover."

Anjali Singh lives in Saint Andrews, New Brunswick with her brother and parents. She attends Sir James Dunn Academy. In her free time she likes to read, listen to music and relax. She aspires to travel when she is older and learn about different cultures.

Ontario, Greater Toronto Area

Soho Ahluwalia

First Place – Grade 10

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board

THE SCARS THAT MAKE US BEAUTIFUL

I guess that up until a few years ago, I would have considered myself to have lived a sheltered and privileged life because I had grown up in a middle-class family. Since I had only experienced a minor fall or two in my childhood, I did not really know what suffering was until I was faced with a major challenge that forced me to learn the hard way.

In the winter of 2015, I experienced a very high fever that lasted for weeks without any sign of improvement. I fainted once at home but my family and I thought that this happened because I was dehydrated. However, it was when I fainted again a few days later, at my music class, we all knew something was seriously wrong. I had been prescribed antibiotics by my family doctor, but after a few weeks, nothing seemed to be working, so I was sent to Trillium Hospital, in Mississauga, to get another doctor's opinion. When I got there, the doctor told us that she also was unable to pinpoint what was wrong and she urged my parents to take me to Sick Kids Hospital, in Toronto.

What was once the name of a famous children's hospital that I had heard about on television advertisements, now became my new home. I was greeted every morning by a team of doctors who were discussing my health, and then by nurses who came in to perform various blood tests. I was in excruciating pain, but I remember getting through those days because of my mother who kept repeating the word "trooper" to me every chance she got. My mother was there with me every night but it was frustrating for us not to know what was causing me to be so sick. I did not want to make my mother even more stressed, so I tried to get her to avoid thinking about possible causes.

After weeks of more tests and failed doses of various medications, I was finally diagnosed with a life-threatening disease called, Hemophagocytic Lymphohistiocytosis (HLH) preceded by Kikuchi Disease, which is a very rare disease for somebody my age. It is either found in babies or adults and here I was, fitting neither category; so rare that the Sick Kids team even published a paper about my case. I had to endure a lymph node removal surgery which left me with a small keloid scar on my neck. I was embarrassed to walk out of the hospital and be seen. After I was discharged from the hospital, I had to take steroid medication and make return visits to the hospital for weekly checkups. While I was in the hospital, I missed being with my friends and I longed to return to my old life.

When I was finally allowed to attend school again, I was beyond excited. The steroids that I was taking were helping me to feel better but the downside to taking the steroids was that the side effects were low energy levels, a swollen and red face and

because of my thinning hair, I had to cut my hair shorter. While I was simply thankful to be alive, people in my classes started to use my appearance against me. I was taunted and called, “a boy” because of my hair, but what hurt the most was when one of my classmates said that he thought that the scar on my neck looked like a hickey. My scar was something that I loved because it represented my strength and perseverance. His cruel comments crushed my feelings of bravery and courage. I felt ashamed of myself and I was filled with a bitter hatred of what I had to go through.

After I told one of my teachers about what happened, she helped me to make a list of everything that was amazing about me. She told me that my scar was something that I needed to love about myself, because it told an amazing story, which is something that I should be proud of. These words of encouragement helped me to feel better about myself. From that day on, I vowed to never be ashamed of my scar again.

HLH has a 54% survival rate, meaning that I am extremely lucky to be alive today, and so I try to live my life to the fullest, each and every day. Being sick taught me to look on the bright side of things, and to smile every day. When I even think about complaining about anything, I remember my time in the hospital and the other children who had to go through much worse things and this helps me to put everything into perspective. I am happy to be alive and my scar is part me and what makes me strong and beautiful.

Soho Ahluwalia is a student at St. Francis Xavier Secondary School in Mississauga. She plays the guitar as well as rugby and basketball. Soho hopes that her story can help other teens who might have gone through similar experiences.

Alexia Miller

Second Place - Grade 9

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board

A LETTER OF REALIZATION

Self-doubt; a lack of confidence in oneself or one's ability. That's something I've struggled with ever since I can remember. I used to tell myself, "your opinion doesn't matter" or "you'll probably do horribly today," and the occasional "I don't think you can do that." I tortured myself every day with those barbaric words. Not a single soul knew about all the worrying I did because of the false smile I wore. I dragged on day by day knowing that what I was thinking about myself was wrong, and knowing that if anyone found out they would probably ridicule me. My thoughts were dull, but dull was normal.

School passed through my head; I never participated. On all of the tests and quizzes that were assigned, all I did was regurgitate information that I had learned. I barely participated in group discussions or class talks. It's not like I couldn't; my brain just wouldn't let me. Whenever I realized I could add to the conversation, it would spew thoughts about me messing up or saying something completely wrong. So instead of letting my thoughts play out, I'd simply just nod my head.

It was the last class discussion of the year. Friends retold memories of past events, reflecting on good times. I sat squished in between two friends, slightly outside of the group. I plugged my nose as a group of boys joined, smelling up the circle with their disgusting body odour. Earlier in the day, the teacher had said she had a small surprise for us. That small surprise was a letter that she composed for each of us. She passed the letters around giving each of us a tiny smile. A tiny off-white envelope floated down to my lap. I glanced up to see that she had moved onto the next person. Laughter and smiles changed the atmosphere of the room. Everyone was comparing letters and giggling at what was written. I squinted down at my letter, hesitant to open it. I thought it was something bad, but then I looked back up to the joyful scene. The background noises fuzzed out as I peeled open the seal. I pulled out the tiny thick blue card. The sharp edges rubbed against the palm of my hand. I rubbed my thumb over the cute colourful anchor on the front, before opening it.

A single tear ran down my cheek, then an entire stream. I grabbed my knees and pulled them to my chest. For the first time, I didn't care about what other people thought. I sat there and cried for what seemed like forever. The sounds of the outside world rushed back when my teacher embraced me. "You read my letter, didn't you?". Her arms slowly lifted from around my body. I nodded my head. "Good," she whispered, then walked away like she never saw me cry.

Slowly nodding my head was all I could do at that moment. All the years of mentally beating myself up took a larger toll on me. And after the letter, I couldn't produce a fake smile anymore, and I just let it all out at once.

"I only wish you would recognize how great you are," was the line that started the waterworks. It turned out that she somehow knew that I doubted my abilities to do anything, and that I was telling myself that I wasn't good enough. She looked behind the fake smile that I placed on my face and knew something was wrong. And instead of pulling me aside and making me feel uncomfortable, she wrote it in a letter. I haven't

experienced any thoughts of self-doubt since that moment. That simple gesture that she made, made me realize that my opinion does matter and that I should stop doubting my actions and abilities to do anything.

Alexia Miller is a gigantic bookworm and enjoys listening to music, creating stories and doing homework. Some of her achievements include graduating grade 8 with honours, having her short story "White Rose Cloud" published, and being able to recite the entire periodic table. She adores the smell of mint, likes knee-high socks, and loves talking about scenes from musicals.

Alana Mainolfi

Third Place – Grade 10

Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

One—wake up and attempt to drag myself out of my bed. Two—descend to the kitchen and eat breakfast. Three—brush my teeth. Four—dawdle to the bus stop and cram onto the bus. Five—arrive at my destination and begin the long, dreaded, ever stressful school. This was the routine I pursued for my many elementary school years. I went about my day like a little, lonesome butterfly cruising gently through the sky in no real direction, with no real purpose. Until one day, I realized that the little butterfly did have a purpose, one that could do wonders.

I arose from my bed at the crack of dawn. The early autumn wind swayed against the fragile leaves, clinging to the safety of their branch. I swiped some mascara onto my lashes, slipped into my boots and clutched my train ticket to my chest, assuring it did not get caught in the hands of the unforgiving morning. I stepped onto the platform, anticipation filling my lungs as I inhaled a steady breath of cool air. The train ride seemed to drag on for hours as I watched the countryside change gradually into a busy metropolis.

My contained delight was finally relieved when I became swept up into the city life of lively Torontonians. Towered above me were breathtaking skyscrapers filled with people hard at work by day, and lights that illuminated the darkness by night. But I did not come all this way to gaze at the alluring architecture. I was selected —along with eight of my other classmates—to represent my school at an annual event called WE Day. This was a gathering of dreamers who believe that together they can take social action to empower others, transform lives and change the world!

What I observed when we first arrived at the Air Canada Centre was an ordinary concert: flashing lights, thousands of screaming fans and music blaring from speakers in every direction. In the beginning, we were all strangers being introduced to the lives of torn families, children living in poverty, and people affected by life-threatening illnesses or diseases. But by the end, we were a family of kids who lit up the arena with our newfound passion, ready to channel our energy back to the world.

I did not know it at the time, but the last performance was one that would stick with me forever. I was giving a standing ovation to the extraordinary Pearl Wenjack. She had the courage to speak in front of thousands of people about her brother who died trying to escape the horrendous realities of Residential Schools. As I listened to her compelling story and witnessed her compassion, I realized a few things that changed my perspective. Going to school should not be a privilege; it is a right. Having a safe place to sleep should not be out of prosperity; it should be a priority. Living as an individual who can afford clothes to wear, nourishing meals and a place to call home, should not only be for the rich. Every human has the right to a dignified life and even if it was solely in my small community, I could make that happen. Visions of equality campaigns and donation drives danced through my head as incentive intoxicated my thoughts.

The amazing thing about WE Day is that you cannot buy a ticket; you have to earn your way in. And as I lay on my bed, reminiscing on my eventful day, I understood why I had been chosen. Bestowed upon me was the gift of possibility. This little butterfly was no longer flying without purpose or direction; it was flying with ambition. The butterfly effect is more than a mere theory that declares that the flutter of a tiny butterfly wing can cause a hurricane on the other side of the world. The butterfly effect was my new-found motivation to do better because no matter how small, one butterfly, one person, can change the world.

Alana Mainolfi enjoys reading, playing basketball and volleyball, cooking and spending time with her family. She is a hard-working student who puts forth her best efforts at school and in her community. She is a lover of nature and wishes to travel the world someday.

Ontario, NPAAMB

Kirstin Lambert

First Place – Grade 9

NPAAMB - Youth Services Fort Erie

THE YEAR OF GROWTH

2016 was the toughest year not only for me but for my family as well. I went through a lot of ups and downs. That year we lost two inspirational people in our lives; Hun (my grandpa), and Coco (my great aunt). After that year, nothing would be the same.

Hun was known as a peacekeeper in my family, always there for everyone, and loved all the children and grandchildren so much. He was always making jokes, and teasing everyone, especially Coco. He would always find a way to make me laugh, Coco was the same. Coco and I would play silly games, and belly-laugh together when we would pretend fight, and she would put me in a headlock. Those are some of my favourite memories.

In 2015, Hun was diagnosed with cancer, again. He was in and out of hospitals for a while. He started getting weaker every day until he was admitted long-term. After a while, it seemed like he was getting better. He had more colour in his skin, and gained weight, but then it just flipped. We would go to the hospital every other day to spend as much time as we could with him. He didn't look like himself. When it finally got really bad, they transferred him to another hospital, and that's when I knew he wasn't getting better.

One day in January, my mom, my cousin, and I went to the hair salon. When we were paying, I noticed my mom was rushing. My cousin and I were confused, so I asked my mom what happened. I remember she looked away and said, "Hun's gone, we have to go". I remember not believing it as we were running through the mall to get to the car; my mom took off fast while she was crying. My cousin and I were sitting in the back seat, hugging and crying. The next couple of days we stayed at my grandma's. I tried my best to be there for her, but she was in no place to organize the funeral. My mom and auntie organized everything.

The day of Hun's funeral was my very first heartbreak. The first time I have ever really cried over something. My grandmother was screaming his name throughout the service and kept saying "Hun don't leave me, don't leave me". It was on the plane ride back from the funeral that we realized that Coco was sick. No one knew what was wrong, she just stopped eating. When we took her to the hospital two weeks after we got back, the doctors said she needed surgery but that it was a simple procedure. The night before the procedure we visited for a long time, and Coco kept saying "I love you with all my heart and soul". Coco did not survive the surgery. Everyone was so mad at the doctors, at the world, at everything. I remember having really bad headaches for the next couple of days from crying so much.

When we got home after Coco's funeral, everything changed, and it was never the same. Both Hun and Coco were always smiling, being goofy, and making jokes. I saw the world differently, and it made me more mature. I was never really told about serious things; I had never gone through anything big before. This experience showed me that life is not easy, but that I am strong enough to get through even the toughest of times.

Kirstin Lambert is a student at Saint Michaels Catholic School in Niagara Falls. She graduated from Grade 8 with Honours, while participating in her school's fundraising efforts, their championship volleyball, basketball, and Rugby teams. Kirstin was also the recipient of the Lions Young Leader in Service Award, and the Principal's award for student leadership. Kirstin has been focussing on her studies and has been excited in this new chapter at high School.

Emma Petherick
 First Place – Grade 10
 Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board

FEATHERS IN THE WIND

“As a result of being deleted from the Indian Register, the following is now in effect.”

I am Maltese/Canadian on my dad’s side, and First Nations/Canadian on my mom’s. My family has strong ties to the Miawpukek reservation in Conne River, Newfoundland. When I was a little girl, I danced like a feather in a breeze with my people and our chief in a powwow (traditional Aboriginal party). I was so proud to be a part of something so beautiful and rich. Miawpukek reserve gave me a sense of belonging and pride, that I had not experienced before. The people are passionate and bring me the warmth you would feel if you were sitting around a fire.

On a sunny September day, after grabbing the mail, I tossed it onto the counter, and something caught my eye - three, brown, official-looking envelopes. One was addressed to me; who was it from? I noticed on the top corner it read ‘Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.’ I figured I should wait to open them with my family.

The house was empty, nobody was home. I left the letter on the counter and waited for my mom to get home. Time passed slowly and I finally heard the doorknob turn. I had no idea the contents of that boring, brown envelope, would change my life and make me question my identity. As my mom began to read it, her face started to resemble a kid who just lost their balloon, anguished. It was so silent in the room you could hear a pin drop. The letter fell out of her hands, and a single tear stained the letter. As she stood up, she looked me in the eye and said, “We are no longer native.”

She slowly walked to her room, as if she was doing the walk of shame. I went straight for the letter to read what it said. My eyes bounced from sentence to sentence, puzzled. “The purpose of this letter is to confirm your removal from the Indian Register which takes place on today’s date, August 31, 2018.” Anger rushed through my veins and sadness consumed my heart. “You are no longer a member of the Qalipu Mi’kmaq First Nation.” What does this mean? As much as I didn’t want to believe it, in my heart I knew. I felt as though the government was trying to eradicate all Native and Aboriginal people from Canada and take aboriginal status away from those who do not live in their native communities, just to save money!

Did you know that the government has the power to take away your identity?

“So, who am I?” I wondered. Half of my background was taken away, so where does that leave me? I felt powerless in this matter, which is a terrifying feeling. This profoundly changed my perspective of those people who make these decisions, making me realize that I cannot trust what they say. With the stroke of a pen, they wiped us off the list: horrifying.

We were not powerless though, the government thought we would scatter like feathers in the wind, and quietly abide by their new rules. Little did they know; feathers are what hold the courage and wisdom of my people together. All they accomplished, was to spark a deadly fire that would never burn out. We joined together to protest against the government for taking away our identity and stripping us of our culture. We launched a lawsuit against the Government of Canada. We are not going to let our culture be wiped out, as it has happened far too many times in the past, to too many races, cultures and religions!

My people should be treated with as much care as an endangered species, for if this continues, we will become extinct. They have no right to alter our entire lifestyle simply because someone changed their mind. I am proud to be who I am, and I will stand with my people to keep our culture alive. I may be just one person, like a single feather, but my voice is powerful.

Emma Petherick attends Holy Trinity Catholic High School. She is the middle child of three kids. Emma enjoys writing and photography. Emma likes to spend time with her family and friends and enjoys attending school. Emma would like to go to a post-secondary program for English.

Ontario, North Bay

Hosea Guy

First Place – Grade 9

Near North District School Board

MY LOST FAMILY

“Life always has a matter of waiting for the right moment to act”- Paulo Coelho

I watched from the window as the black GMC Sierra climbed up my grandparents' slanted dirt driveway. Excitement like no other rose within me, joined as well by a powerful sense of nervousness. It was finally happening; after eleven years of waiting, I was finally going to meet my father.

Through those eleven years I had been lied to by my mother, told over and over again that my dad didn't want anything to do with me and that he had left before I was born. But finally, just a week prior to the day I met him, my Nana and Poppa had explained that my mom had been lying, that they had met my father in court a few days ago and he had always wanted to meet me. That same day we had made plans to meet the next Saturday, which brings us back to me standing at the window, my spirits soaring high.

I watched my dad step out of the truck and slam the door shut. Within less than a minute I was opening the door for him. When he entered we introduced ourselves. We didn't hug at first, though, but rather looked at each other for the first time in our lives. I saw he had black glasses almost identical to mine, and as I looked at him more I realized how much resemblance we shared; we were close to being twins!

I was unsure of how I was supposed to feel then. Should I be crying? Should I have hugged this man? I didn't know. All I knew was how happy I was to have finally met my father, how glad I was to know that he did want to see me and get to know me.

After the initial pleasantries passed, my dad, my grandparents and I went to sit down at the dining table upstairs. There, my grandparents helped keep the conversation going and I offered a few words, though for the most part my shy, eleven-year-old self kept quiet, doing my best to process everything that was happening. I still couldn't believe it. I was meeting my dad! He was sitting right in front of me! A storm of emotions was rushing through me, a warmth spreading through my body; like a tsunami flooding a city, my happiness was an unstoppable force.

The visit went on for over an hour before we decided that my dad and I should go outside and talk alone. I liked this idea and eagerly put on my shoes and coat. Once outside in the cool April air, my dad and I walked as we spoke, heading to the end of our long driveway. We stopped there and just stood in silence, that same powerful happiness still running through my body. And we continued to stand there for almost five minutes before deciding to head back up to the house.

“Maybe you could come to my house next week to meet your brother and

sister," my dad said as we walked; I had also learned of my younger sister, Aria, and my older brother, Jacob, on the same day I had learned of my dad.

"That would be awesome!" I responded.

So, even after my dad hugged me for the first time and left to go back home that day, it could be said our story was not over. As time went on, I met my brother and sister, my other grandparents, my aunts, uncles and cousins and everyone else who was a part of my lost family.

Today I live with my father in Callander, Ontario. It has been almost four years since I first met him and we have grown to have a relationship we should have had long before. The struggles I worked through up until I met my Dad have shown me how good things can happen in life, even if, at times, it seems impossible for anything to be good. You can't give up hope, you have to hold on to the good things, and maybe one day you'll see it was worth the trouble.

Hosea Guy is a grade 9 student in North Bay, Ontario.

Laurel Herman
Second Place – Grade 10
Conseil scolaire catholique Franco-Nord (60B)

TURNING PAGES

Ever since I was little, I'd always loved being read to, however, I was not as much interested in reading on my own. My parents had always read to me. I remember nights being curled up on the couch with my sister, listening to my mom reading us Harry Potter and being invested in the story, shaking my mom every time she'd start to dose off.

At age eight, my mom decided to try to get my sister and I into reading on our own. She would have us read one chapter of a beginner chapter book about fairies, before she would read a chapter of Harry Potter. At first, I remember finding it annoying. I didn't want to read and I only did it in order to be able to listen to my mom read Harry Potter. But, over time, I started getting more comfortable with reading, and actually began to enjoy it. When I finally began reading on my own, (of my own free will), one of the first series I read was The Magic Tree House. We had a library only five minutes from my house. There, I began to take out series after series. I grew to love reading, and reading for me became my biggest pastime. I read on the bus ride to school, before class started, any time I finished my work early, and as soon as I got home. I loved reading.

"The more you read to your kid, the more likely they are to like reading when they grow up," one of my parents, I don't recall which one, once told me. I believe it, I truly do. In grade eight, I was confused, regularly unhappy and even the littlest of things affected me. I felt like the world was against me. At the time, I didn't really have any friends. No one I was really close to, I guess you could say. I had the odd person I would talk to during class or at recess, but mostly I would spend my recesses sitting in the school yard against the brick wall, reading. That's mainly how I dealt with my unhappy state. But, I was happy with it. I remember fellow students coming over to me and asking if I wanted to play basketball or wall ball, and replying that I'd prefer to just read my book.

"Laurel, want to come play a game with us?" they'd ask.

"No, I'd rather just read" I'd reply.

Reading for me became an alternate reality. A way to escape the world. Whenever I was upset and fighting back tears, I'd find myself turn to the thin ink-covered pages of my novels. Almost immediately, I'd forget about my problems, and find myself carried away by the author's descriptive landscapes and the quick-witted actions of the characters.

Reading not only helped me find solace in times of hardship, but it also helped me become a better version of myself. I learned new words, and how to express myself. Reading also helped me with my spelling, and helped me understand people. Without reading, I wouldn't be the person I am today.

Some books have narrators with shifting points of view. First they explained the thought process of one of the characters, then changed points of view to explain

the thoughts and feelings of a totally different character. This helped me understand that different people take things you say in different ways. While maybe you think that something you said was a joke, and meant it playfully, some people might not take it the same way, and might take offence. It's important to be aware of what you say to people, and make sure you're not offending them.

Each thin page of a novel turned is like a new page of my life. I learn more, I get more attached to characters, and I progress day-by-day to the next chapter of my life. As Dr. Seuss once said: "The more that you read, the more things you know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."

Laurel Herman is a student at Algonquin Secondary School in North Bay, Ontario. She has a twin sister and an older brother who studies at the McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. Laurel enjoys reading, playing the violin, and listening to music. She hopes to continue studying music throughout high school, and possibly go obtain a job that involves music in the future.

Riley Perron

Third Place – Grade 10

Conseil scolaire catholique Franco-Nord (60B)

LACING UP

I may not remember the exact moment when I first stepped on the ice, but what I do remember is how my life has improved because of that first pair of hockey skates. Hockey has given me a desire to be healthy and active and it has allowed me to gain more confidence and given me the opportunity to experience the importance of a team. I gained all of these important qualities because my parents helped me lace up my first pair of skates.

Throughout my years of playing, hockey has helped teach me how important it is to make the right choices regarding my health and fitness. This has allowed me to excel in sports, not just hockey, but all aspects of my life. Staying busy with my team commitments hasn't allowed time for parties or making the poor decisions of consuming drugs and alcohol. This has helped me realize that in order to be the best player that I can be, drugs and alcohol will hinder my performance and abilities on and off the ice. Hockey has opened up the doors for me to include myself in many other sports and physical activities, such as volleyball, badminton, baseball, and soccer. Participating in these sports gives me the opportunity to stay active, not only in the summer months when it's easy to be outdoors, but also in the winter time. This gives me a physical advantage over others. "Can we go to the outdoor rink?" I would often ask my parents in the cold winter months.

The second benefit to playing hockey is the amount of confidence I've gained over the past 13 years. It has taught me the value of perseverance and when I think that I have given it all that I can, there is always a tiny bit more left in the tank. This quality will also serve me well in other aspects of life as it will help me with school and work. I have had to learn to prioritize the demands of hockey, school and family to make sure that they all stay balanced. Finally, I can say that although at times it can be hard, I have learned how to lose with grace. This trait will also serve me well in the years to come as I know that in life there will be ups and downs. Having been able to experience these situations through hockey makes me feel more prepared for whatever life throws at me.

Lastly, hockey has given me a team and the importance of what it means to a part of one. This team broadens to include the importance of how our hockey families work together to help each other by getting us to practices and games, to help us when we are hurt or sick and as a support to my family during the hectic hockey season. My team keeps me accountable for my actions, thoughts and mindset. I do my best for them because I know that they are doing their best for me. While at times, we get frustrated with each other and the choices we make, it is guaranteed that I have a group that will always back me up. The world is full of different kinds of teams and I am thankful that the variety of teams that I have been fortunate to be a part of over my hockey career will make me a more employable worker in the years to come.

The decision that my parents made for me all those years ago to buy my first skates, to enroll me in Timbits hockey, to allow me to experience rep try-outs have given me opportunities that some kids don't have. While hockey keeps me fit and active, the

additional benefits have helped shape me into the person that I am today. It will make me a more employable adult who can form successful relationships and have confidence to stand up for myself and others.

Who knew that the course of my life would be changed thanks to my parents who decided to lace up my first pair of skates and let me glide on the ice surface at a small outdoor rink?

Riley Perron is a student at Algonquin High School. He likes playing hockey, designing on Photoshop, camping in the summer and spending time with his friends. He would like to become a graphic designer in the future.

North Bay – French

Brett Richardson

First Place – Grade 9

Near North District School Board

MON FRÈRE

Ce n'est pas normal de grandir avec un frère avec la paralysie cérébrale, mais c'est devenu normal pour moi et ma famille. Quand j'étais plus jeune je ne pensait pas quoi que ce soit, mais en vieillissant, j'ai commencé à réaliser de plus en plus que ceci avait un impact sur ma vie. Il y a des aspects positifs et négatifs qui viennent avec ça. Personne ne comprend vraiment ce que mon frère et notre famille passe à travers, ce que je ne m'attends pas, mais je m'attends d'avoir du respect et de l'intégrité.

Il y a eu un nombre incalculable de fois quand nous marchions comme famille dans un lieu public où tout le monde nous regardait bizarrement. C'était comme au ralenti, ça me donnait l'envie de les frapper au visage, mais je devais seulement continuer à marcher et réaliser qu'ils ne comprenaient pas. Il y a les innombrables nuits passées à Toronto ou dans l'hôpital pour des chirurgies, des bilans de santé ou des rayons x. C'était toujours intimidant de marcher à l'hôpital avec mon frère et le reste de ma famille et voir toutes les autres familles avec des enfants malades et des personnes avec des invalidités. Je m'assoiais à quelque part avec mon DS pour me tenir occupé quand mon frère passait à travers de tout. J'ai toujours détesté aller à la garderie, je ne sais pas pourquoi, mais je détestais seulement ça. Je voulais toujours être avec ma famille et savoir tout ce qui se passait. Il y a aussi les innombrables nuits sans sommeil pour mes parents, car ils étaient toujours debout avec mon frère quand il toussait et ne pouvait pas dormir. Plusieurs fois je ne pouvais pas sortir avec mes amis, car un de mes parents n'était pas à la maison et un de mes parents devait me conduire et un devait rester avec mon frère, car il ne pouvait pas être laissé seul. Mais, je me suis habitué et c'est seulement devenu normal.

Mon frère m'a tellement appris et il est une grande raison pour laquelle je suis la personne que je suis aujourd'hui. Mon frère m'a appris comment être fort, courageux et de ne jamais prendre rien pour acquis. Grandir, connaître et témoigner ce qu'il passe à travers m'a fait comprendre quelle chance et comment privilégié nous sommes. Je réalise aussi comment nous sommes souvent égoïstes. Nous prenons tellement pour acquis sans même penser que certaines personnes dans le monde sont tellement pires que nous. Mon frère est non verbal alors, il nous a jamais parlé mais, ce que les gens ne comprennent pas est qu'il peut nous entendre et nous comprendre. C'est pourquoi ma famille et moi lui parlont toujours comme nous le ferions à quelqu'un d'autre. Il utilise aussi un fauteuil roulant pour sa transportation, car il ne peut pas marcher alors quand ma famille cherchait pour une maison, nous en avons trouvé une avec un ascenseur. Mon frère souffre beaucoup, mais la partie la plus difficile est qu'il ne peut pas nous le dire. Notre famille a appris et a remarqué différentes façons de le comprendre afin que nous puissions mieux l'aider. Même s'il ne peut pas le montrer, mon frère fait beaucoup pour moi.

Pour conclure, mon frère a une grande influence sur ma vie. Je dois dire qu'il me montre que les choses ne sont pas toujours égales et de ne pas seulement vivre la vie,

mais de m'efforcer et affronter les défis. Il m'a appris de ne pas laisser la négativité de personne ruiner quoi que ce soit. Il apporte tellement de joie et de bonheur dans ma vie et met vraiment les choses dans une perspective complètement différente.

Brett Richardson was born on February 5, 2004 in North Bay and has been a student of the Near North District School Board and has been part of the French Immersion program since Junior Kindergarten.

Eve Harrison
 Second Place – Grade 9
 Near North District School Board

LES LEÇONS D'UN MONOCYCLE

Tout le monde m'avait dit, "Tu ne peux pas le faire" et "C'est une perte de temps", mais je ne les écoutais pas. Toutes ces personnes qui riaient et disaient que ce n'était pas possible seulement m'ont poussé plus fort pour atteindre mes rêves. Quand j'avais 12 ans, j'ai fait une décision qui a changé ma vie: J'ai commencé le monocycle. Le monocycle m'a enseignée la persévérance et que c'est bon d'être unique.

C'est tout commencé pendant l'été de la septième année. Ma famille et moi sommes allées sur une piste de bicyclette, 200 kilomètres de longueur, sur un vieux chemin de fer au Québec: le Petit Train du Nord aux Laurentides. C'était très amusant et j'ai eu beaucoup de plaisir à faire la bicyclette sans mains. À la fin de la piste, je pouvais faire la bicyclette sans mains pour plusieurs kilomètres à la fois et je voulais un défi.

Ma fête est en septembre et j'ai décidé de demander pour un monocycle. Au commencement, tout le monde était sceptique, même mes parents ne voulaient pas me donner un monocycle. Quand même, sur ma fête, j'ai ouvert mon cadeau pour voir le monocycle que je voulais! Ce soir-là dans mon salon, j'ai commencé à pratiquer. Avant la fin de la nuit je pouvais faire le monocycle de la chaise au sofa et revenir. Je leur ai déjà prouvé faux.

J'ai pratiqué sans pause pour plusieurs semaines, avant et après l'école. Je passais toute la journée dans mon allée en faisant le monocycle. Après une semaine, je pouvais aller deux mètres et après un mois, je pouvais aller toute la longueur de l'allée. C'était extrêmement frustrant, décourageant et difficile des fois, mais finalement je suis devenue très confiante sur mon monocycle. Tout le monde était surpris que je puisse le faire. Ça c'était le moment que je savais que je pouvais faire tout ce que je voulais.

Ce n'est pas la fin de l'histoire. Chaque jour, je promenais mon chien après l'école et une journée, j'ai décidé de le faire sur mon monocycle! Je suis allée jusqu'au bout de la piste sans tomber et j'étais très fière de moi-même. Je me suis amélioré chaque jour. J'ai appris comment sauter, tourner, aller vite, sur les collines et même sur les pistes dans la forêt!

Un jour, quand je faisais le monocycle avec mon chien sur la route, un de mes voisins m'a donné un "monocycle-girafe" de six pieds de hauteur. Apparemment, son fils faisait le monocycle, mais il est parti à l'université et il ne l'utilisait plus. J'avais hâte mais aussi j'étais nerveuse. Si je tombais, je tombais de six pieds de hauteur! Mais étonnamment, je faisais des cercles dans mon allée à ma première essai! Un jour, quand je faisais la monocycle girafe avec mon chien, une femme a pris ma photo dans la rue, pour être dans le journal local! J'étais très fière de moi-même! La frustration de la pratique était récompensée.

Le monocycle m'a enseignée comment poursuivre mes rêves parce qu'ils sont accessibles même si c'est frustrant. Beaucoup de personnes vont te dire que tes rêves ne sont pas possibles, mais des fois, le bon choix, est de les ignorer et de faire ton meilleur de les atteindre! Le monocycle est très frustrant et décourageant à temps, mais il me démontre, tous les jours que c'est une bonne idée de persévérer et pousser vers tes limites pour être unique et atteindre tes rêves!

Eve Harrison is a student at Chippewa Secondary School. Her favourite subjects are Science and Math and she has won academic awards in English and Science. She enjoys snowboarding, unicycling, biking and swimming. Eve lives in North Bay with her parents and younger sister, Erin.

Jenna Wall
 Third Place – Grade 9
 Near North District School Board

MOINS D'ARGENT, PLUS D'AMOUR

C'était la première semaine d'octobre. L'air chaud et humide précipite dans mes poumons pendant que je descends de l'avion. Tout de suite, je suis en choc. Il n'y a pas de temps pour regarder autour de ce pays étranger avant d'être poussée par des centaines de personnes. Non seulement est-ce un nouveau pays, mais on se croirait sur une nouvelle planète où j'ai besoin d'apprendre à vivre encore. Je ne le savais pas, mais cette semaine changera ma vie.

Mes premières impressions de l'Inde étaient qu'elle était surpeuplée, malodorante de la pollution et trépidante. Les personnes se poussaient l'un l'autre. Il y avait des chiens errants autour de chaque coin occupé, luttant pour survivre. L'air était lourd et pollué. Il était minuit et cette ville ne dormait jamais. Je ne voulais pas passer une semaine entière ici...

Quand nous sommes arrivés finalement à l'hôtel, il y avait une famille de sept qui dormait sur le plancher du lobby. Ça c'était quand j'ai réalisé comment pauvre était ce pays. Je ne le savais pas dans le temps mais où les locaux manquaient d'argent, ils le compensaient avec leur gentillesse. L'homme en charge de l'hôtel qui portait de vieux vêtements déchirés a laissé la famille sans abri dormir dans le sécuritaire de l'hôtel. Il n'a pas fait ça pour son propre bénéfice, mais au lieu, parce qu'il savait qu'ils avaient besoin d'aide dans leur vie.

Au cours des prochains jours, j'ai remarqué des petites choses qui ont commencé à changer ma vie. Il y avait des temples sur chaque bloc. Les gens dépensaient leurs derniers dollars pour nourrir les animaux. Peu importe leur religion, les sikhs nourrissaient les affamés avec les volontaires qui travaillaient sans relâche pour aider. Tous les jours, les personnes se levaient très tôt pour prier. Même si les gens en Inde n'avaient pas beaucoup d'argent, ils prenaient le temps d'apprécier les petites choses et la beauté qui les entourait.

J'ai commencé à réaliser que dans la vie, l'argent ne peut pas acheter le bonheur. Les gens qui vivent dans les situations sans abri, sans nourriture ou aucune source de revenu pouvaient vivre et être plus heureux que tout autre groupe que je n'ai jamais rencontré. Cela m'a fait me demander, que font-ils pour être si heureux et comment puis-je apprendre d'eux?

Après cette expérience dans un pays du tier monde, je fut motivée d'être plus gentille avec les autres, apprécier les petites choses et d'être reconnaissante à tous les jours de vivre dans une situation chanceuse. Chaque jour quand quelque chose de petit arrive, qui est bien souvent, je me rapelle d'être reconnaissante. Si quelque chose ne va pas à mon goût, je me dis qu'il y a des personnes dans le monde dans les situations bien pire que la mienne. Je n'oublierai jamais cette expérience car elle a changé ma vie sans cesse. Je crois que les gens ne comprendront jamais mon histoire avant d'avoir vécu ou visité une journée dans la vie des gens d'un pays du tier monde. Merci à tous ceux que j'ai rencontré

en Inde. Vous avez vraiment changé ma vie pour le meilleur. Vous m'avez appris que moins d'argent, plus d'amour.

Jenna Wall is enrolled in the French Immersion program at Chippewa Secondary School. She was born and raised in North Bay and lives with her brother and divorced parents. Jenna is a competitive swimmer who recently attended Olympic Trials in Toronto as the only swimmer from North Bay. Swimming and school are her primary focuses but she loves spending time with friends in her rare free time. Both of her parents are pilots so she travels very often to foreign countries to learn about other cultures and gain real life experience.

Grade 11/12

Newfoundland and Labrador

Maggie O’Dea

First Place – Grade 11

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region

BIG YELLOW TAXI

“Don’t it always seem to go - That you don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone.” I thought they were just sappy lyrics to a song, written by some sad, remorseful songwriter. Now, I have realized the reality of it all. Sometimes, to understand what something truly means, you need to experience it first hand.

Each Sunday, no matter if sun, showers, or snow, my grandfather would drive my older brother out to Renew’s, his childhood home on the southern shore, so that my brother could learn about the things my grandpa did in his childhood, stopping at the old, rundown fish-and-chips restaurant on the way, getting the same old meal, each time. “Boring,” I thought.

Each Sunday, I would get the same phone call from my grandfather. His frail voice, almost that of a whisper, asking me if I would like to come along for the drive, the same old drive that he goes on every week. Of course, being the ignorant teen-aged idiot I was, I would always say no. “Sorry, but I am busy today,” or “Maybe next time, Gramps!”

Each Sunday, after refusing his offer, my brother and grandfather would pack their day-bags, get aboard the car, and head out to the same old restaurant, on the same old highway, to do the same old things. They would listen to the same old cd’s of my grandfather’s favourite Newfoundland music--talking, singing, laughing, but most importantly, making memories. Together. I would sit home, pretending that I had better things to do, wondering to myself, “Why would my brother waste his weekends, his only days off school, with old people?” I thought he was crazy. Now, I can see why he did it.

My sister and I are very different. She likes being outdoors and gardening, and at this point in my life, all I liked to do was texting my friends and scrolling through my phone, looking at pointless posts online about “the next new thing”. I couldn’t see how ignorant I was. Like my sister, my grandfather also liked gardening. Summer and spring, day in and day out, my sister would be with my grandfather in his garden, helping him plant the flowers, pick the berries, and weed the plants. Some days, they would just sit there. Just sit. They’d drink their tea, and just watch the garden. I never could understand the beauty in that. I was too ignorant to appreciate that -- the beauty of being able to sit with someone in complete silence, and still not feel one ounce of silence.

While they would be gardening together, I would be at home, doing “better” things. Or at least what I thought were better things. They would pick their flowers,

press them between the pages in old books, and put them in frames. That was their thing. Those flowers reminded them of the memories and the love that they shared. I always wondered why she would spend her free time with an old person. "So boring," I thought. Now, I see why she did it.

My grandpa was a cancer survivor. He kicked cancer's ass two times already. So, by the fall of 2016, when he was diagnosed with cancer for the third time, I didn't think much of it. January of 2017 rolled around. At dinner one night, my dad told my brother, sister, and me that my grandfather was very sick. They didn't know if he would be able to come out of this, or how much time he had left. I went to visit him later that week. My grandfather looked like a complete stranger to me; he was so ill that he resembled a corpse. His smile had no life, his voice had no strength. When I got to his house, he was sitting in a wheelchair, staring out the window. Slowly, he turned to me. I was in shock, holding back tears, finally realizing what was eventually bound to happen, but much sooner than I thought. Over his heavy, wheezy breath, his fragile voice sounded, "Listen to the beautiful hum of the birds." Even in the final moments of his life, he was optimistic.

He died a few weeks later. February 16, 2017. I was 15. I'd had fifteen years of knowing him and I didn't even get to know who he was. I never made those memories that my siblings did.

My turning point was the day that my grandfather passed. It helped me to realize that I didn't appreciate what I had when I had it. I never got to share experiences with my grandfather. Today, I try to spend as much time as I can with the people in my life so that I can make the most of every moment. I guess the saying holds true that you truly don't know what you've got 'til it's gone.

Maggie O'Dea a student at Gonzaga High School and was born in St. John's, Newfoundland. Maggie has a part-time job at Posie Row, a retail store in the downtown area of St. John's. She enjoys singing, dancing and running. She is a recipient of the Paris Dance Tour Scholarship. After high school, Maggie would like to go to university, so that she can pursue a career in orthodontics.

Maria Baker
Second Place – Grade 11
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region

SKIN

When I was born on July 1, 2002, I had a birth defect. This news surprised my parents, as there was no prior warning or indication that their baby would be born being defective. I had a large, dark birthmark that covered half of my forehead, and continued all the way up onto my scalp, occupying about a quarter of the surface area. This large mark was referred to as a congenital melanocytic nevus. Congenital meaning present from birth, and melanocytic meaning composed of abnormal cells that produce a dark pigment on the skin. Twenty-three smaller nevi were also counted, all over my arms, legs, torso, and butt. From early on, it was decided that the size of the largest nevus on my head was big enough to put me at high risk of developing an aggressive form of melanoma, which could only be prevented by having the mark removed surgically.

Due to the significant size of the nevus, a procedure known as tissue expansion was required to remove it. The purpose of tissue expansion is to stretch healthy tissue so it can be used to replace a large amount of abnormal skin. This is done by surgically inserting a device known as a tissue expander. This device has a large, silicone sac that is placed beneath the skin, with an attached tube that connects to an injection port. The expander is filled with saline water over an extended period of time, thus gradually causing the expander to grow. This allows the skin covering the expander to be stretched to its maximum elasticity. In my case, this procedure took seven years to complete.

I had two other operations before I underwent tissue expansion, the first being when I was five years old. One of the smaller nevi on my chest changed from dark brown to purple, and a quick surgery was able to remove the mole without any issues. The scar still remains between my collar bones. The same procedure was performed on a part of the nevus that was located on my scalp. It, too, turned a questionable colour, and was promptly removed not long after the first operation.

The more complex procedures didn't start until I was about seven years old, as I had to be a certain age before they could begin safely putting medical instruments into my face. My case was put in the hands of Dr. Bortoluzzi, an extremely skilled craniofacial specialist in Montréal, Québec. To this day, she is my hero. She was always positive, kind, and dedicated to getting the best result.

After my first tissue expander was inserted, I flew home, where I would receive weekly injections from another excellent doctor. The expander was located on the right side of my forehead, adjacent to the nevus. As the expander grew bigger, the entire right side of my forehead protruded about an inch away from my face. Hallowe'en became a holiday I despised, as it was the one day of the year people would verbally express how scary I looked, assuming that the giant lump on my forehead was a costume. In an effort to make the better of my situation, I named the expander, "Bob." Clearly, I was more hopeful than creative.

After Bob and I had spent about a year becoming acquainted, and many months of clenching my teeth in a hospital room as a syringe was inserted into the side of my head had passed, I was ready for surgery. I went under the knife with all the anticipation that when I opened my eyes, I would look normal. However, I was told shortly after the operation that only a small portion of the nevus was able to be removed. It was explained that I would have to repeat the entire process again, with an even bigger expander.

Along came “Bobette”. I went through another year and a half of teasing, judgement, and feeling completely alienated. I hoped and prayed it would all be over soon, but on the outside, I never showed fragility. I realize now how much my refusal to show weakness was really just a way of convincing myself that I was okay.

By the time I said goodbye to Bobette, I was eleven years old. To my delight, the nevus that covered my forehead was gone. However, the skin wasn’t perfectly smooth or lovely, and I had visible scarring and lumps in the tissue. I was advised to wear a medical bandage over my forehead to allow the skin to heal. I wore this for about two years in an effort to make myself look more normal. Since I knew my medical risks were diminished, I decided I finally wanted skin I could feel confident in. I had a final operation to correct and re-shape my new skin in a way that looked more natural. This was the first time I truly had a say in the way I wanted to look, and this liberation allowed my confidence to shine through.

Today, I am sixteen years old, but I know that this will always be the most impactful turning point of my life. By choosing to accept myself for the way I was in some of the hardest times, I developed a mental dexterity that I will never lose. Regardless, having confidence is never easy when you are a teenage girl. I’ve done science projects, presentations, and essays on this experience, but I would be lying if I said that it ever became easier to talk about.

A few years ago, a young girl was born with a nevus almost identical to mine. I was asked recently to speak with her when she’s older, as she will be undergoing the same procedure as I did. I look forward to the day I can finally connect with and help someone going through the same experience I did.

My scars tell a story, and as much as I would like to forget, I wear this story everywhere I go. At sixteen years old, I have finally learned to love my skin.

Maria Baker is a student in St. John’s, Newfoundland. She is a synchronized swimmer and competed at the 2019 Canada Winter Games in February. In the future, she hopes to study kinesiology and travel the world. She also loves animals, especially cows.

Angus Best
Third Place – Grade 11
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region

JUST ANOTHER ESSAY ABOUT SPORTS

Every student athlete has the same story about how their journey into fitness molded them into who they are; their supportive coaches, kind teammates, and physical activity changing them for the better.

I have a somewhat different story.

At the tender age of 8, I was enrolled into competitive swimming. I had never been an athletic type. Several failed forays into sports had left swimming my last option. I couldn't skate without a traffic cone, I spent my time on the soccer pitch picking flowers, my feet cramped too much for baseball. But swimming, a sport at which two of my cousins were excelling, seemed like a great option to Mom. And as a bonus, I wouldn't be able to blab on so much if I was submerged underwater. And so, one fateful night, my mother and aunt came with a demand. I was to join the swim team. I agreed on one condition, that I be allowed to purchase and play Minecraft. An accord had been reached, a detente established.

They got the last laugh. I swam for a lot longer than I played Minecraft.

I easily passed their trivial test of swimming capability and entered into the pre-competitive program with new confidence that was eager to be dashed. That is, of course, hyperbole. I swam twice a week for half an hour each time. Barely 400 meters. It was easy, and I was all right at it. Coaches and teammates came and went for the first year or so. It was good.

Swimming was a slow seduction. When competency was reached, I "moved up a level", another practice was added. We swam faster and for longer. Yay. Soon I was going to meets all across the island, showing off my average abilities to a politely cheering crowd. But I wasn't in this to win medals, I began telling myself. I was in it for fitness and fun. I soon discovered that this sentiment was not always shared.

Practices became two hours long. Four, no, five, no, six times a week. When I didn't practice at five in the morning, I practiced after school stretching into the evening. I struggled to balance my social, school, and swimming lives. My skin was cracked and dry. I oozed chlorine from all my pores. I was constantly tired, lethargic, even physically sick.

For most of my career in the sport, I had been the best man in the worst group. Miles ahead of my fellows in a group with some cheesy name like "Progress" or

“Achievement”. A structural shakeup soon came that changed our whole setup. We were now to be sorted and ordered based on age and potential. Bronze-Silver-Gold, 1-2-3. Three got dropped after a year and we were left with a clear divide between groups 1 and 2, across all ages. The coaches found the best and brightest, and they were given tough training regimens that strengthened their bond of camaraderie. I was left in the dust.

Gold 2. Limbo. Purgatory. No hope to get out and into Gold 1. Some tried. Some are probably still trying. It felt like we were an afterthought, second fiddle. None of us were ever going to win medals, none of us were going to the Olympics, so the head coaches paid us no mind. It was depressing. I knew people who would go to every practice just to sit in the changeroom on their phone the entire time because they felt like it was all worthless. Our own coach tried, bless her heart, but our practices still boiled down to the same uninteresting drills and turns. I missed dates. I missed parties. I missed trips abroad.

So I did the best thing for myself. I quit.

It was an easy decision, yet I still felt conflicted. These people had been close friends for almost a decade. Yet, every conversation with most of them was either about our prowess in swimming or schoolwork, and then eventually back to swimming. It felt like swimming was all these people knew. Weirdly, it felt like I owed something to the team. Like if I quit, then I wouldn't be whole anymore. I realize now that it was they who owed me. Owed me eight years of my life.

That's my change. That's my “turning point”. No longer will my life, my grades, my health suffer for a sport I have no future in. No longer will I have to sacrifice my social opportunities and other interests. I've got other ways to exercise. I've got other friends who aren't constantly judging me for not breaking 30 seconds in 50m Freestyle. I've got another chance.

A few weeks ago, I ran into a girl who used to be in my group with me. She quit, not long after me, following in my footsteps. We both agreed it was a good decision. In fact, she claimed it was the best decision she ever made. I learned more were planning on quitting. So many of my fellows felt the same way. That was proof enough that I had made the right choice

Do I regret the deal I made all those years ago? No, Minecraft was a great game. And I would probably be quite a bit pudgier without all the cardio swimming did for me. All jokes aside, swimming was a massive portion of my life that will be hard to replace. I do miss it sometimes, but not at 5 A.M. It was a tough decision to make, but I believe it was the right one. I don't regret being in swimming, not at all, but I also don't regret my decision to quit. Going forward in my life, I finally have the freedom to do what I want, the freedom I lacked for eight years. And I won't waste a second of it.

Angus Best is a student at Gonzaga High School. He enjoys theatre, talking during class time, and humour in its many forms. His future aspirations are to keep being happy, and to maybe make a few others happy along the way.

Ontario, Greater Toronto Area

Danielle Fox

First Place – Grade 12

York Region District School Board

DON'T TELL

I was in the front seat of my mom's blue Ford Focus, clutching a worn backpack to my knees as we bumped and clanged down Bayview Avenue. My mom looked nervously between me and the road, trying to muster up some advice for an event she had never experienced, trying to recall, perhaps, what she had said to my sister on her first day of high school.

"It's just grade nine." "I know."

"Try to make friends." "I know."

"And don't tell anyone you're Jewish." "I know."

Even in Canada, a self-proclaimed cultural mosaic that prides itself on equity and magnanimity, my family felt that to reveal we were Jewish was an unnecessary risk. To even begin to explain why feels pitiful, an attempt at unpacking millenia of baggage that humanity has dutifully hidden and ignored. Jews are an enduring scapegoat, serving as the outlet for all the violently xenophobic dreams of the elitist, ignorant, and clinically insane. Right up until the present day, the rules of the game are to hide from the fanatics, or blend in with the masses. You can understand, then, why my family wished to choose the path of least resistance, and why they raised me wholly and unabashedly Russian.

Too bad Russian heritage is absolutely insane.

I never understood the Russian part of me, the part of me connected to a motherland built on a millenia of brutal serfdom and tenacious warfare, a legacy equal parts drunkenness and politesse, deceit and genius. The harsh language felt rough and unwieldy in my mouth, everything about my demeanor, from my dark eyes to the upturned corners of my mouth betraying me as a foreigner. While I did my best to play the Russian, I never felt connected to my past, or my ancestors, or my culture.

And then, we travelled to Amsterdam.

Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands, was home to a huge Jewish population before its occupation by the Nazis in WWII, shattering the community and reducing it from 150 000 to 9 000. As such, Amsterdam houses the famous Jewish Quarter, containing holocaust memorials, the Jewish Holocaust Museum, and the Portuguese Synagogue. While I was unsure if I could stomach a day of reflecting on tragedy and death, my mom insisted that we go, at least to see the synagogue.

I remember so vividly stepping into that hushed hall, my sneakers squeaking softly against the old wooden floor. I walked down past the vacant rows of pulpits, illuminated by the soft, surreal midday light, and felt the significance of my heritage come crashing down over me. It was under that roof where my ancestors prayed for health, happiness, and acceptance, looking to the heavens for answers and for comfort, and it was on that floor where generations had stood before me, filled with the same loneliness, the same fear, and the same determination to prove themselves. And as I stood there, suddenly awestruck by the tenaciousness and intelligence that had delivered me safely to the wonderful life I lead today, I could feel my ancestors watching over me. And they were smiling.

That synagogue left a piece of itself in my heart, inciting a dramatic shift in my view of my family and my identity. I felt it bubbling inside me, all of my past fears about revealing my heritage to the world replaced with an uncontrollable burgeoning pride. I wanted to shout from the rooftops about my Jewish heritage, about the exceptional group of men and women who faced daily discrimination and never backed down, who did everything it took to survive without losing their faith. From then on, I have been trying to do my ancestors justice, by being kind, by being strong, and by being proud.

As a result, I reconnected with my past, not only with the Jewishness that had been left behind, but with every aspect of my family history. I researched Jewish history and values, and read an abridged Torah, as well as started actively learning Russian, reading and speaking whenever I had the chance. With my comprehension of the language improved, so did my understanding of my family, as I talked with my grandparents and listened to their stories of life back in Ukraine. I looked at old photographs, and watched some of the films my parents had enjoyed throughout their childhoods. And as I begin to grasp the complexity of my family history, the juxtaposition of poverty and education, love and persecution, Russians and Jews, so I came to embrace my divided heritage. I have been given the privilege to belong to two cultures, and thus to draw inspiration from both belief systems, and to bring honour to both sets of ancestors. So the next time someone asks about my heritage, I'll say with a smile, "I'm Russian-Jewish, and I could not be prouder" ..

Danielle Fox is a student who was born in Toronto into a Russian-Jewish family. She was often ill as a child and found comfort and an escape in fantastical stories. Years later, her childhood love of literature has evolved into a passion for writing and poetry in English, French, and Russian, which she expresses through active participation in her school's newspaper, as a counselor in French immersion camps, and in independent writing projects. She hopes to continue writing while she pursues her ambition to become a doctor and bring joy and security to other children's' journeys through sickness as was done for her.

Emma Gauvin
Second Place – Grade 12
Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board

PANCAKES AND HAM

I really like pancakes and ham.

Three golden-brown buttermilk clouds soaked in melted butter with four half-moon slices of ham. That's my order at breakfast joints, retro diners, and big buffets. I like pancakes and ham, not waffles and bacon, and I can't change that.

On March 11, 2017, I realized there was one more thing I couldn't change about myself, and it wasn't another bizarre breakfast preference. I stomped the snow off of my winter boots and onto the logo of the Sunset Grill carpet. My mother and I huddled in the cramped entrance. As we waited, I could hear the clanging of cutlery and smell the grease of the frying pans. My stomach grumbled. A young waitress ushered us towards a table that was fitted with forks and knives, salt and pepper shakers, and glossy menus. We sat down and my mother opened her menu. She meticulously mulled over her options while my eyes wandered around the restaurant. I watched the waiters work, the fruit flies fidget, and the patrons' pig out. The waitress came by to take our orders, starting with my mother's. Then, like a well-rehearsed actress, I recited my most famous line. "Three pancakes and a side of ham, please?" The waitress jotted down our meals, collected our menus, and fetched our drinks.

While we waited for our food to come out, we talked about my head coach's taste in music (AC/DC), my defence partner's tendency to swing her stick at ankles like a lumberjack does to a tree, and the game I had that night. It was an important game. My mother asked if I was nervous. I was, even though I said I wasn't. I did, however, mention that my stick desperately needed to be re-taped.

At the beginning of the hockey season, I switched from black tape to rainbow tape. No one had ever asked me about it, and I had never offered an explanation for it. My mother asked if my teammates had ever made comments about my bright blade. I shrugged; they hadn't. "But, they know what it represents, right?" she questioned. I didn't know if they did. Her mood immediately shifted. Her expression showed compassion and composure, but I could tell she was concentrating very hard. Her brain was picking out questions as if they were flowers, trying to find the most interesting and vibrant ones but, she was waiting until she had a full bouquet to give me the first daisy. Very delicately, she asked, "Do you think your teammates and coaches might make assumptions about you because of the tape?"

That wasn't the question I was expecting, but it was close enough. A bizarre grin pulled at my cheeks, and laughter stumbled out of my mouth. My body didn't know how to react. "I don't care if that's what people think of me because..." I trailed off. My grin grew wider and my laughter more forced. She was still looking at me, looking for an answer. "Why doesn't it matter what people think of you?" All I could do was shrug my shoulders and avoid eye contact. I realized something utterly terrifying was about to happen.

I was standing on a set of tracks, seconds away from being struck by a speeding train. I looked at my mother with frantic, wild eyes and an unconvincing half-smile. I was about to be struck by a train, and there was absolutely nothing I could do about it. Curiosity coated her words as she asked, "Emma... are you gay?" I had been playing a game of chicken, and I hadn't gotten out of the way in time. Do I tell the truth or lie? I had to decide quickly, the waitress was about to bring out the food. "Yeah, I am."

The world didn't explode into a million little pieces. Disease-like disapproval didn't spread across the restaurant floor like a plague. I wasn't immediately put up for adoption. I had simply survived being struck by a train. A scary, unstoppable, imaginary train, but the impact was just as intense as a real one. I glanced around the restaurant. People were continuing their meals, their conversations, and their lives; it was just a normal day. The world had not shattered, but the tiny closet I had been living in did. For the first time in my young life, I was completely and unapologetically my true self.

Our waitress brought out our food. It was a welcome interruption, one that allowed the tension in our conversation to evaporate like the steam from my pancakes and ham. Between mouthfuls of food, my mother told me of the thousands of ways she loved me. It was the first time I had cried while eating my favourite meal. People might have stared, but I didn't have to hide anymore. I was with my mother, eating pancakes and ham, and she loved me. There were no more trains to dodge.

The way I talked changed after that conversation. A muzzle no longer censored my speech. Pretty girls became a common source of conversation for me. My sexuality can't be changed because it's like my love for pancakes and ham: unwavering. For years though, I had shut down an entire part of myself for other people's sake. If my mind was a mall, my attraction to girls was a deserted storefront covered in police 'do not cross' tape and infected with mould and asbestos. It was to be avoided, ignored, and repressed. But, on March 11, 2017, after some major renovations, I was finally comfortable enough to let the public in.

Liking girls is just as normal as liking pancakes and ham. My sexuality is not something to be ashamed of; it's not something I should shove deep down into my laundry basket or ignore like store flyers you get in the mail. I like pancakes and ham, not waffles and bacon. I like girls, not boys. And there's nothing wrong with that.

Emma Gauvin is a student who was born in New Brunswick and moved to Bradford in 2014. She enjoys knitting, reading, and playing the bassoon. She has also played competitive hockey for the past 12 years. She would like to thank her English teacher and her family for always being supportive. If they had not been, this would have been a very different essay.

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

OUR DISTANCE

“If you ever miss me, just remember that we’re looking at the same stars.”

Do you miss it? It. Whatever you thought about when I asked you this? I’m sure you do, because we never really know what we have until it’s gone. As cliché as it sounds, it’s much easier to count what we lack rather than what we’ve been given. In all honesty, I overlooked many of my blessings, rather than utilising them. Until one day, everything changed in the blink of an eye and I was forced to open my eyes to all the greatness surrounding me. Here, is my list of love.

Up until recently, I didn’t recognize the love present in my life. I chose to wallow in self-pity rather than appreciate my blessings. Typical teen-angst. Mainly, I constantly overlooked and degraded my father and his efforts. When I thought of him, I pictured a broken man of addiction, and felt revolted with the fact that he was incapable of staying sober long enough to raise his children. I like to think that his heart was once in the right place, but the world broke him day after day and he didn’t have a choice but to change. He’s constantly at war against an army of his demons. Sympathetic.

For a very large portion of my life I resented my father. I refused to call him “dad” for a very long time. Unfortunately, the man I was supposed to love the most became a stranger to me. Even though he wasn’t physically there for the most part, he was emotionally there for me. Specifically, I may not have seen him on a day-to-day basis, but he was there for many milestones of my life. To this day, it warms my heart to know that he commuted all the way from Cambridge to Toronto to attend every single one of my dance competitions and recitals. When he lost his licence due to multiple DUI charges, he still commuted to Brampton every weekend to take me for lunch. Most children of divorced parents would appreciate these great efforts, but I didn’t. Selective view.

When I look back to my very first memory, I don’t remember a good relationship with my father. Well, I don’t really remember a relationship at all, this predisposed me to a negative opinion towards my father. Our relationship wasn’t always broken, but it was definitely cracked.

As much as I hate to admit it, I used my father for his assets. He lived in a house with a very nice pool, and he gave me cash each time he saw me. He also paid for a large portion of my hockey equipment, which is very expensive. As I got older and matured, I began to notice that each time I agreed to see him, just for my own personal gain, I broke his heart again. I truly did not see the great amount of love he has for me. Self-realization.

One day, everything changed. I received news that he was moving back to his hometown, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Ironic, isn’t it? I didn’t know somebody could leave you twice. Automatically, all the bad memories went away, and the good came in. Memories of him beginning his journey towards sobriety to gain visitation rights. Memories of him

teaching me how to ride my first bike. Memories of him taking me snowmobiling for my thirteenth birthday. Memories of him giving me all he had. It was then that I realized that he loved me throughout my entire childhood, and continues to. I didn't only realize the love he has for me, but the love I have for him. As you can imagine, I was very upset with myself at first. I analysed my entire relationship with him and realized how poorly I had treated him. The day I said goodbye to him, was the day I promised myself I would forgive him for his mistakes and put genuine effort into our relationship. Forgiveness.

1820.5 km; the new distance between us. My entire life, there was a metaphorical distance that I created. Now, a literal distance that we cannot ignore. Everyday, I walk down the path towards forgiveness; our metaphorical distance is minimizing each and every day. Although, it is disappointing that it took a major event for me to recognize the positive aspects of my father, I'm very glad I did. Not only am I walking down the path towards forgiveness, I am walking down the path of love. I'm learning how to love myself, and those around me. I have grown as an individual, and I have recognized my mistakes and I have learned from them. Growth.

Dad, if you're reading this, I want to apologize. Not only for the way I treated you in the past, but for the way the world has treated you. I am not excusing your poor choices, but I want you to know that I understand. I know you think I didn't pay attention to you, but I always noticed the smile that formed on your face when I wrapped my arms around you as a little girl. I want to end this the way you ended each one of our phone calls; "I love you more than the whole world." Love.

Emily Gittens is a student who grew up in Brampton in a family of two older brothers and a mother and father. At the age of 9, she started dancing and has competed in a large range of genres, including ballet, acrobatics, jazz, and hip-hop. When she was 15, she began writing and when she writes she aims to create a silence that has never been so loud. Emily has also spoken at numerous education conferences, as she aspires to be a high school teacher one day.

Greater Toronto Area – French

Camille Tsang

First Place – Grade 11
Toronto District School Board

APRÈS LA MORT...

Pendant nos vies, on rencontre de nombreuses personnes. Parfois, on est chanceux et on rencontre quelqu'un qui laisse un empreinte sur l'âme. Pour moi, cette personne était mon amie de famille. Elle a changé ma vie, mais pas pendant qu'elle était vivante.

Mon amie de famille était une idole pour tous. Elle était seulement six ans mon aînée mais, selon moi, elle semblait presque parfaite. Quand on se rencontrait, on voyait quelqu'une de contente, de gentille et de douée. Elle était une athlète talentueuse, elle a fait la gymnastique à un niveau provincial et elle était aussi entraîneuse. Elle était une nageuse accomplie et elle est allée à OFSAA où elle a gagné de nombreuses médailles. Elle était très intelligente et elle avait obtenu un baccalauréat en sciences de l'Université de McMaster où elle a étudié la kinésiologie. Juste avant sa mort, elle étudiait pour devenir dentiste à l'Université de Toronto. Elle était prête à assumer la clinique dentaire de sa mère quand elle finirait ses études. Il semblait qu'elle avait tout. Je suppose que ça, c'était le problème. Tout le monde voyait quelqu'une de forte et de contente et personne n'a vu ce qui se passerait.

Souvent, je trouve que je pense au jour où j'ai entendu la nouvelle de sa mort. Comme d'habitude, chaque jeudi matin, je faisais la grasse matinée parce que mon école avait un début tardif. Mais, pas comme d'habitude, ce jour-là, mon père m'a réveillée pour m'annoncer la nouvelle. Il venait d'apprendre qu'elle était morte depuis deux jours. Les parents de mon amie décédée ont envoyé un courriel au groupe d'amies de famille. Personne ne comprenait ce qui s'était passé. On était tous choqués.

Quand j'ai su de sa mort, j'étais bouleversée. Mes sentiments étaient indescriptibles. Je ne pouvais pas croire la nouvelle. Je n'ai jamais imaginé que quelqu'un de si jeune pouvait mourir, alors j'étais en choc pour toute la journée. Ça semblait comme une blague. Je me rappelle que, quand je suis allée à l'école, je ne voulais pas parler à mes amis ni à mes professeurs parce que je me sentais comme si personne ne pouvait comprendre comment je me sentais. Ça semblait comme si rien n'avait d'importance et je trouvais que c'était vraiment difficile à me concentrer. C'était comme si j'étais dans un cauchemar.

Une semaine après sa mort, le groupe d'amies de famille a appris comment elle était morte. Ses parents ont seulement dit qu'elle était tombée d'un balcon. Cette révélation soulevait plus de questions qu'elle n'en résolvait. Aujourd'hui encore, on ne sait pas exactement ce qui est passé.

Quelques jours après ça, j'ai pris mon examen de mathématiques mais j'étais distraite, alors je n'ai pas reçu la note assez haute que je voulais. En premier, je me sentais

triste mais je me suis rendue compte du fait qu'une mauvaise note ne voulait pas dire que ma vie serait mauvaise. La plupart du temps, les petites choses ne valent rien et il ne faut pas qu'on y pense sans cesse.

Le service funèbre s'est passé presque deux semaines après sa mort. Je me souviens du fait qu'il y avait tellement de public qu'une centaine de gens ont dû rester debout. Je me souviens encore de ce que ses parents ont dit, de ce que ses amies ont dit et de ce que son frère a dit. Ce que je ne vais jamais oublier est comment son frère a décrit sa relation avec elle. Il avait tellement de regrets... Après ce jour-là et après beaucoup de réflexion, j'ai décidé que je ne voulais pas avoir des regrets comme lui; donc j'ai fait plus d'effort de passer du temps avec ma famille et mes amis.

Plus d'un an après sa mort, je me sens encore triste, mais, je ne pense pas que ce soit quelque chose dont on se remet. Quand quelqu'un de si jeune meurt, c'est difficile de passer à autre chose. La seule chose qu'on peut faire est d'essayer d'apprendre et de nous améliorer. Une grande chose que j'ai apprise de cela est l'importance d'avoir de l'équilibre pour le bonheur. La vie est courte, alors c'est mieux si on peut toujours garder une perspective de l'avenir. De plus, on ne sait pas ce que chaque jour va nous apporter, donc il faut croquer la vie à pleine dent.

J'ai beaucoup appris de sa mort, mais la leçon la plus importante que j'ai apprise est comment je ferais face à la mort. C'est une leçon importante parce que, alors que je grandis, mes êtres chers vieillissent et il faut que je sache comment faire face à la mort. J'ai aussi appris que je me sens mieux si je parle avec quelqu'un, donc quand mes êtres chers mourront j'essayerai toujours de parler avec ma famille. Finalement, j'ai appris que mes amis et ma famille m'aident beaucoup et qu'il faut compter sur eux.

La mort n'est pas quelque chose qu'on veut connaître, mais c'est une grande partie de la vie alors il faut l'accepter. On doit apprendre comment faire face à la mort et comment compter sur nos êtres chers. Après la mort de quelqu'un, on peut seulement continuer et essayer d'honorer les souvenirs de nos êtres chers.

Camille Tsang was born in Toronto and speaks both French and English. She spends most of her spare time playing badminton and hanging out with friends. She loves to travel and has travelled to many different countries. She hopes to continue to study French in the future.

Ontario, NPAAMB

Xxavier Mckay-Loescher Woon-A-Tai

First Place – Grade 12
Toronto District School Board

WHY I DID NOT STAND

“Disrespectful”, “Ungrateful”, “Shame”, “Canada is the best country, we **all** must stand for the playing of Oh Canada! – for what this country has done for us, for the people who have fought!”. Is it that I am being disrespectful, or I am ungrateful? That I have no feeling towards the people who have lost their lives during war? Or, could it be that I do have respect, respect for myself, my family, my people. What is the Oh Canada! based on? The facts are it is based on greed, power, cruelty, and terrorism.

Greed – Take this land and make it into your pot of gold. Forgetting about who already lives on the land – from the Indigenous Nations to the Indigenous animals.

Power – Royalty, to help fund their expensive lives to which we the “savages” must endure.

Cruelty - Rape, Murder, an attempt of Cultural Genocide – guess what, we are still here.

Terrorism – To define terrorism; it is an act of violence and intimidation towards civilians in an aim to conquer. This is shown when the first Europeans came to our lands and brought with them their diseases. When they killed our people one by one. When they thought of a way to control us, by creating an Industrial School like they did to our people South – calling it a Residential School. To be run by the grace of God and his priest and nuns. **Terrorism**, this act of violence took away the most basic rights of children – love and nurturing from their parents and families.

Acts of Terrorism still live on today. Status cards keep track of who is an “Indian”. Standing in line to use your “Indian Card” always proves to be an inconvenience and nuisance to the cashier, and others waiting in line. Their eyes say it all, Frustration! Having to wait another minute for you to sign your slip. Their eyes saying, “we are all citizens, you should be paying taxes just like the rest of us!”.

Why I did not stand - Which brings me to my title. Why I did not stand for the National Anthem. My interest in learning more about my Indigenous culture, brought me to horrendous facts that Indigenous people have and still face on this land today. From smallpox, Residential Schools, to the 60s Scoop – all these acts woke me up and made me realise that I was part of allowing this terrorism to continue to my people and our ancestors.

I refused to stand for the playing of the national anthem. In my eyes this is the

conquerers music. I will not stand for something that is made of Greed, Power, Cruelty, and Terrorism. I respect myself, my family, and my people. But not everyone agrees with me. What happened that day, that I refused to stand you may ask? I was met with disgust from my teacher. Her stern face and hateful eyes watching me. Her words telling me **I must stand**, that she would not stand back as I sat during **her** national anthem. I was sent to the principal's office as the teacher wanted me suspended from school. They tried to call my mother to complain. The thing they don't understand is, my mother taught me to speak up if something is unjust, to study the meanings behind the words. I did that. and my understanding of the anthem is the reason I did not stand.

I was then known as that disrespectful kid.

"I laugh, I laugh that they won for I can not speak my native tongue" Xxavier Mi'de

Xxavier Mckay-Loescher Woon-A-Tai was born in Toronto two minutes ahead of his twin brother D'Pharaoh. Xxavier's mother is of South American/Guyanese descent. His father is Oji-Cree from Big Trout Lake, Ontario. English is spoken at home, and Xxavier and his siblings are also learning the Ojibwe language. Xxavier is close to his Indigenous roots and works at Tea and Bannock, where he enjoys creating traditional dishes. Xxavier is an inspiring actor. He most recently was chosen by Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) to appear on their new show called That's AWSM. There he was interviewed by the host, explaining why and how he was so involved in learning about both of his cultures. Xxavier has been a part of the TDSB Drama/Theatre program since 2018. He played the lead role in "Our home on native land" a play which was based on his situation on not standing for the national anthem. He also wrote a poem which was used in the play. He received emotional - moving comments by the audience, who now felt they had a different perspective to Indigenous people not standing for the National anthem. Xxavier's academic future is to pursue drama/theatre, directing and writing – along with Indigenous studies in college.

Chloe DeRoy
Second Place – Grade 12
NPAAMB - Youth Services Fort Erie

SUNDANCE

To begin, I would like to say that everyone has different experiences in their life, ones that change them. I remember mine. Throughout my life, I have experienced many moments when I realized what I needed to change, and that I have a lot to learn about myself. I was raised in a single parent household; my parents divorced before I was even born. While having divorced parents is not unusual in today's society, it was a piece of the puzzle that was hard to put together. The divorce in many ways had caused me to miss out on things I wanted to know about: my culture.

My father, who I never see anymore, was a full-blooded First Nations man. He is part of the Ojibway tribe. Growing up, that is all I knew about my culture. Nothing more. I was told that was who my father was, not necessarily me. It was not something I explored or had the opportunity to really understand. It was tough growing up unsure of who I really was. I felt like I was unable to completely get to know myself; like a part of me was missing.

Once I became old enough, I came to realize that I was not like everyone else. I did not look like my mother in the slightest, with her blonde hair and sparkling blue-green eyes. I was different, and I didn't totally understand what that meant. For a while I had been raised as someone who went to church and was told follow all the rules, and I did...but it never sat right in my chest. I felt so out of place. Once high school hit, I was more insistent on learning who I was, and made sure I took the time to ask questions and discover things about myself. I learned more and more about little pieces of my culture, the beliefs, and the way of life. I did not realize it at the time, but I was fascinated and mesmerized by the beauty of it all; what it meant, and how I was a part of it.

The one event that truly opened my eyes happened in the summer of 2018. It was in August, and my mother, brother and I took a road trip to Manitoba to participate in our first Sundance Ceremony. We had been invited by our uncle, who has two glorious little girls and an amazing wife. He joined us and a couple more family members who were familiar with the ceremony. It was perfect, going into a space where healing was taking place. It felt amazing to become completely immersed in my culture like I had never been before. Ever since those couple of days, I noticed I have become more serious about my background, understanding who I am, and where I have come from. This chance to explore myself and my history meant the world to me.

There are days when everything feels too much, and I do not know what to look forward to and what to hope for. I then remind myself that I have a future. I see that I have been accepted to the University of British Columbia. This new chapter makes me excited in more ways than one. I will now be able to see and grow in a place where our culture is recognized and appreciated and where they are willing to go to great lengths to support people like me out there who want to learn more. I see that I have been able to be a part of so many new experiences, like making

my first drum, my first moccasins. All of this happened after my first Sundance.

People expect to know who they are when they are so young, I was no different. I wanted results, then and there. I thought the journey of understanding and knowing yourself was something I could do overnight. I wanted to know everything in that moment, to make up for all the lost time. I now know that the process of coming to truly know yourself is a long one. I hoped, and still do, to one day know as much as I can, to feel comforted and safe within my identity, safe with who I am.

People ask why I am going so far for school and if it's hard for me, but I always think, "Is it hard for me to want to be where my culture is a norm?" "Is it hard for me to be at a school that could teach me so much about myself and my ancestors?" and finally, "Is it hard to be where my family who are First Nations as well is?" The answer is always no. I have found who I want to be, where I want to be, and what I want out of life.

Chloe DeRoy is a student at Port Colbourne Secondary School. While achieving honours throughout her high school career, Chloe also enjoys giving back and has been a volunteer with Port Cares, Early ON working with children in her community. Chloe has been accepted to the University of British Columbia and hopes to pursue a career in the social service sector.

Zachary Jamieson
Third Place – Grade 12
NPAAMB - Youth Services Brantford

MY JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

In this essay, I will be talking about how my education and volunteering has led me to what I want to do in the future. This will tell you about how my journey has impacted my personal growth and development.

Toward the end of the first semester of my victory lap at Tollgate Technological Skills Centre, the co-operative education teacher approached me and asked if I would be interested in doing a placement at John Noble Home. After looking at my resume and all my volunteer experience, she said that she had noticed that I really enjoyed working with elders. She said that she also noticed that my science marks were very good. She told me that she saw commitment in me and that she was very confident in my abilities.

These words encouraged me to take advantage of this wonderful learning opportunity and I told her that I would like to work with the elders at John Noble Home. A meeting was set up with me, Mrs. Campbell (co-operative education teacher at Tollgate Technological Skills Centre) and Janet Beachey (the Volunteer Coordinator at John Noble Home). This meeting was successful, and I started at John Noble Home in February, 2015 in the Day and Stay Center and the Recreational Therapy Department. I gained a lot of experience in this placement. This co-op placement led to a summer job in the Recreational Therapy Department. Having had such a great learning experience with my first placement, I returned to John Noble Home in September 2015 to do another placement in the Physiotherapy Department.

All the experience I received through my co-operative education placements led me to become a weekly volunteer at John Noble Home because I learned the importance of sitting with and talking to those who are alone and lonely. I learned the simple feat of kindness and offering help where and when needed. I learned the importance of being that friend for an elder whose friends have all passed away or are unable to visit them or whose family live far away or are simply too busy for them. I found myself as that person who could offer them encouragement when they were struggling to complete a task or exercise.

My experience at John Noble Home taught me to think about other people and to realize how we often don't think about what others are going through. I learned that the simplest acts can make the biggest changes in people. This has helped me realize that I want to have a career working with the elderly.

Having realized this, I took advantage of the opportunity to take the Journey To Success Health Program at Niagara College from September to December 2018. I am presently getting very excited to start another placement at John Noble Home. Upon completion of my placement, I plan to upgrade my English and Math skills and then apply to Mohawk College to take the Personal Support Worker program at Six Nations Polytechnic. If successful in the Personal Support Worker program, I would like to further my education and take the Recreation Therapy program. I would ideally like

my education and work experience opportunities to lead me into a career of working with our elders to help them lead more fulfilling lives physically, mentally and spiritually.

I am so thankful to so many individuals who helped me on my journey. Firstly, my high school co-operative education teacher who gave me the initial push into the world of learning and work outside a classroom setting. She allowed me to see myself as someone other than a student with developmental delays whose choices were limited. She allowed me to see that I was able to do whatever I set my mind to do as long as I put the effort forward. Secondly; to the staff at John Noble Home who showed me the importance of living by their motto of always showing love and caring and allowing the residents to maintain their dignity. The staff here taught me the importance of working together to enhance the quality of life for those we serve. I learned that while John Noble Home was my workplace, it was home to the residents, and I was simply a daily visitor to them, and I needed to show respect at all times while in their home. Lastly to all the staff connected with the Journey to Success Health program from the NPAAMB staff to the staff at Niagara College who so generously hosted us to the guest speakers who taught me so much. Without all these people, I would not be where I am today in my journey. They truly helped me towards realizing my calling of working in the healthcare field with the elderly.

Zachary Jamieson is a motivated youth who is currently taking great steps in his journey towards becoming a Personal Support Worker. Zach is a graduate of NPAAMB's OLES Healthcare program and is now in placement at John Noble Home in Brantford.

Ontario, North Bay

Angelyka Sopchyshyn

First Place – Grade 12

Near North District School Board

TRUST MUST BE EARNED

I had a feeling that summer was going to be the gateway to a new era. The dominoes had fallen in just the right way. I thought I was finally turning into the person I had been working so hard to become. I had earned my parents' trust, so much so that it supported their decision to send me away. I was going to be working the entire summer at my childhood camp, a place I had romanticized into this sunny, lakeside hideaway.

I was honoured that I was going to be able to repaint the picture of my happy summer experiences for another group of young, impressionable girls. A small group of 8-year-old girls were assigned to my care. I remember meeting each one of them. The immediate trust that these young girls placed on me, a random 16-year-old girl at the time, was alarming. One had to be observant and patient to see how they showed their trust in you, but they inevitably did. Some girls came bounding up to me straight off the bus demanding a piggyback ride to the cabin; while others could only muster up the courage to hold the last three fingers on my hand. I respected this equally because it took courage to show it to me either way.

We quickly grew to know one another, and fairly well. I learned their favourites: colours, pajama bottoms, and music -- they learned mine too. I also kept their list of fears tucked away for safekeeping. I wanted to make sure they knew the trust was mutual.

It was late August when things shifted. I was on the night watch, which essentially meant that I was in charge of making sure the kids stayed in their cabins and all the raccoons stayed out of the trash. I had been doing it for months and knew that the most strenuous thing you'd have to do was possibly fight off a small mammal with a push broom. I never expected a disruption, especially one like him.

His stumbling gait is what caught my attention. I thought that something was off and my suspicions were confirmed when I heard his voice slur my name, "Angel." I was shocked at the sound of my girl's nickname coming from the lips of a grown man I hardly knew. "Can you help me find my way to my cabin?"

I look back on that decision to help. It was his pleading for help that drew me in. At that moment, he reminded me of a child; so I let him wrap his arm around my shoulder to support his body weight and he, in turn, wrapped his hand around my ponytail and lifted mine.

I couldn't fight back as he pulled me across the threshold of that empty cabin. I couldn't push back when his hand was pressing my ribcage into the bed. I couldn't go anywhere but back to his lips next to my ear telling me I still looked like a child, using words like "nubile" and "innocent". The realization that he wanted a child made my

blood boil, and it is because of him that I was no longer a child.

The next morning, I spent too long trying to find a way to cover my bruises so I was late for breakfast. I was greeted by the comforting grins of my girls, simply happy that it was pancake day. This respite was interrupted by a tug on my sleeve. We had a visitor at the table.

They greeted him with genuine enthusiasm and it made my stomach turn. He didn't deserve that. He bent down and whispered in my ear again, his threatening tone hidden by a crooked smile. "No one will hear of what happened last night." It was his boldness alone that kept me quiet. I maintained silence for six days before finally breaking at the sight of my shyest girls asking him for a piggyback ride. That symbol of trust I learned to look for was being placed on a man who viewed youthfulness the same way he would a centerfold. The letter I left on my boss's desk that night sent him home, far away from me, and most importantly far away from my girls.

The girls knew something was wrong before I could even admit it to myself. The piggybacking girls saw it in my eyes and the handholding kids felt it in my bones. They knew I was rotting from the inside so they softened their grips to keep my fragile frame intact.

Two weeks after I came home, I ended up decaying to the point of an emotional collapse. It landed me in a suicide-proof room in the pediatric ward of the hospital. It was there that my "new era" was confirmed. After three long days of questioning and surveillance, I was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The more time I spend with my new brain the more patterns I find. My illness likes to think of my existence as a liability. I have learned that the root of my fear comes from not trusting my vessel to my own safekeeping. Just like those first days at camp with one of the little girls. I envy how they are free to trust so confidently in others, and someday I hope to find that part of me again. For now, I safeguard those pieces because I am terrified at the thought of having any childlike similarities. It hurts my chest knowing that I will probably be at an adult age when I am able to feel safe again; my childhood gone. I'm not ashamed to admit that day hasn't come yet because I still have to earn my own trust back.

Angelyka Sopchyshyn wishes to pursue a multidisciplinary career in the arts, with a main focus on vocal music and acting. She has shown an interest in writing, having written and directed a one act play for the National Theatre School Drama Festival in 2018. Although the turning point described in Trust Must Be Earned seems grim, she believes that writing about this topic has been a therapeutic opportunity. The road to recovery has become more and more clear since her diagnosis, thanks to the ability to filter her thoughts and emotions through art.

North Bay - French

Brooklynn Hartin

First Place – Grade 12

Near North District School Board

FIERTÉ, RESPONSABILITÉ ET PATIENCE

Il y a beaucoup de choses qui ont changé ma vie. Plusieurs d'entre elles ont changé mes valeurs morales et mes pensées sur la vie. L'évènement le plus récent de ma vie a été l'annonce de mon double crédit dans le programme d'apprentissage du niveau un de cuisinier au collège Canadore. Ce programme me permet de compléter un crédit au niveau secondaire et un crédit envers le collège. Ce programme m'a non seulement rassuré que je voulais devenir chef quand je serai grand, mais il m'a également aidé à mieux comprendre certaines de mes valeurs morales. Les valeurs morales que ce programme a influencées incluent la patience, la fierté, la responsabilité, l'engagement, la créativité, la détermination et l'efficacité. Mais les trois qui m'ont le plus touché sont la fierté, la responsabilité et la patience.

La première valeur morale que j'ai eu plus de respect pour quand j'étais à Canadore est ma fierté. Avant de faire le double crédit, je ne mettais que peu de fierté dans mon travail. Je ne pensais pas que c'était quelque chose dont une personne avait besoin, mais j'ai appris autrement. J'avais tellement tort à ce sujet, mais une fois que j'ai commencé le double crédit, j'ai appris que l'on devrait être fier de tout ce qu'on fait dans la vie et que cela fait partie intégrante du métier de chef. Un de mes professeurs de cuisine m'a dit que l'on devait être fier de ce que l'on cuisine et même dans la présentation de l'assiette, pour que vos aliments aient un bon goût. Si l'on n'est pas fier de ce qu'on crée, notre client ou notre invité n'aimerait pas l'aspect ou le goût de notre produit. Une autre façon dont ce programme a changé ma vision de la fierté est lorsque je portais l'uniforme de chef. En m'habillant dans mon uniforme de chef, j'ai appris que je devais toujours être à mon meilleur. Notre apparence devrait être bien présentable lorsque l'on rencontre un invité qui mange dans notre établissement. Être fier de notre apparence signifie que sommes plus à l'aise dans la cuisine et que l'on sait ce qu'on fait. J'ai finalement réalisé que je devais faire preuve de plus de fierté lorsque j'ai commencé le cours, car c'était moi qui avais choisi cette opportunité et je voulais que ma famille soit fière de moi et dans ce que je pourrais devenir. Cette occasion a changé ma vision de la fierté et dans l'amélioration de ma vie à l'avenir.

Une autre valeur morale qui a changé lorsque j'ai commencé à aller à Canadore était ma responsabilité. Cette valeur morale est tout aussi importante que la fierté dans le monde de la cuisine. Lorsque l'école a repris ses activités en septembre, j'ai commencé mon double crédit, j'ai abandonné la vie que je connaissais et je suis allée aux campus collégial où tout était différent. Les professeurs étaient plus calmes et détendus, ils ne nous demandaient pas de remettre les choses à temps. Les étudiants étaient plus matures, responsables et aussi amicaux. Je devais apprendre à être responsable, à arriver à l'heure et à faire tout mon travail. Être traité comme un étudiant de collège m'a fait comprendre qu'il

faut être responsable et gentil pour bien s'entendre avec les autres étudiants. On devrait également être responsable dans la cuisine lorsque l'on cuisine. Lorsque 32 autres élèves de notre classe manipulent des objets pointus et chauds, on devrait être responsable et conscient de tout ce qui nous entoure pour assurer la sécurité de tous. Prendre le cours de cuisinier de niveau 1 signifiait que je devais à tous les jours me changer en uniforme de chef et apporter ma trousse d'outils à tous mes cours lorsque je devais cuisiner. Ceci signifiait que je devais garder mes uniformes et ma trousse d'outils propres. C'était une autre façon pour moi d'apprendre la responsabilité. Sans garder mes affaires propres, je ne serais pas en mesure de participer à mes cours. La responsabilité est la deuxième valeur morale que ce programme a contribué à changer.

Une autre valeur morale qui a changé quand j'ai commencé mon double crédit était ma patience. Ma famille a dit que je n'avais pas beaucoup de patience quand il s'agissait des personnes, mais une fois que j'ai commencé à travailler à Canadore, ma patience a commencé à améliorer. Bien que la cuisson soit un travail rapide, il faut également être patient. Dans mes cours, je devais travailler avec de nombreuses personnes sur différents projets. J'ai vite appris que je devais faire preuve de patience lorsque je travaillais avec d'autres personnes. Je devais m'arrêter pour les écouter et comprendre ce qu'elles avaient à dire. Être patient a également aidé dans la cuisine à minimiser le nombre de coupures et de brûlures. La dernière étape dans l'apprentissage de la patience pour moi a été lorsque j'ai dû attendre que les taxis viennent me conduire au campus. Ils n'étaient pas toujours à l'heure et je devais être patient. Outre le fait que je devais attendre que mes cours commencent, il y avait beaucoup de temps entre certains de mes cours et j'ai donc dû apprendre à être patiente. Gagner en patience m'aidera à l'avenir à trouver un emploi et à réussir à l'école.

J'ai appris beaucoup de choses à propos de mon avenir et des valeurs morales qui sont importantes pour moi. Cette occasion a été un moment tournant décisif dans ma vie qui a changé, non seulement, ma façon de voir la vie, mais aussi mon avenir. J'ai hâte d'utiliser entre autres, ma fierté, ma responsabilité et ma patience à l'école et dans le monde. J'ai surmonté de nombreux obstacles dans ma vie et je suis fière de dire que je les ai surmontés. Il y a beaucoup plus d'obstacles à venir et j'ai hâte de les faire face car je reconnais maintenant l'importance de mes valeurs.

Brooklynn Hartin was born on April 18 2001, in North Bay, Ontario. She lives with her mother and brother along with a cat, 4 guinea pigs, a hamster and a fish. In her past time she likes to listen to music, play in the band, draw and cook. Once she leaves high school she wants to become a chef, traveling around the world to learn different styles. She can speak French as well as English.

Madison Norman
Second Place – Grade 11
Near North District School Board

MA VIE SANS INTIMIDATION

Un moment tournant est un moment décisif. Un moment tournant dans ma vie fut en 5e année quand j'ai décidé de changer d'une école anglaise à une école d'immersion française. Cet événement a changé ma vie pour le meilleur. Il y a plusieurs raisons pour lesquelles j'ai décidé de changer d'école. Par exemple, quelques personnes à mon ancienne école me rendaient la vie difficile et en plus le français est une excellente langue à étudier et je voulais essayer une nouvelle école. Les façons dont les changements ont contribué au point tournant de ma vie sont que j'ai acquis plus de confiance personnelle, j'ai élargi mes compétences en apprenant le français, j'ai commencé à aimer l'école et je me suis faite de nouveaux amis.

Quand j'étais en 4e année, je n'avais que quelques amis. J'avais beaucoup de problèmes avec certaines filles qui voulaient me tyranniser. J'étais victime de ces filles intimidantes. Je me sentais complètement seule la plupart du temps. Les filles volaient mes affaires ou les cachaient autour de l'école, de sorte que je ne puisse pas les trouver. J'étais constamment tyrannisée et les enseignants n'étaient pas très utiles. Elles m'excluaient de beaucoup d'activités sociales et des événements sociaux et elles se moquaient souvent de moi; cela m'a rendu beaucoup moins confiante.

J'ai décidé qu'il me fallait un changement. Ma mère m'avait parlé d'une journée expo de français à l'école d'immersion tardive. Je suis allée ce jour-là et j'ai vraiment aimé l'idée d'apprendre le français et d'essayer une nouvelle école. J'ai donc commencé le programme en cinquième année. Lorsque j'ai commencé ma première année de français, c'était vraiment cool essayer d'apprendre quelque chose de nouveau. Je me sentais comme je devenais une personne complètement nouvelle. J'ai rencontré tellement de nouvelles personnes et j'ai appris beaucoup de choses intéressantes. C'était la meilleure école pour moi.

Les enseignants étaient très gentils et prenaient toujours le temps de m'aider quand j'en avais besoin. Ils rendaient les classes plus intéressantes et plus amusantes. Après un certain temps, j'ai vraiment commencé à prendre plaisir à aller en classe et à apprendre. Cela a changé qui je suis aujourd'hui parce que maintenant, j'aime beaucoup l'école, j'aime apprendre et j'essaie toujours très fort avec mon travail et mes cours. En plus, il y avait différents enseignants pour chaque cours ce qui m'accordait une grande variété que je n'avait pas à mon ancienne école. Ce changement m'a aussi bien préparée pour l'école secondaire. Je me sentais beaucoup mieux à cette nouvelle école.

Je voulais essayer une autre école parce que je pensais que ce serait peut-être plus facile socialement. Peut-être que tout ce dont j'avais besoin était un changement de lieu. J'ai fait de nouvelles amies, j'ai été acceptée pour qui j'étais. De plus, j'étais beaucoup plus heureuse et j'avais l'impression de pouvoir exprimer mes capacités. Anciennement, j'étais souvent triste mais quand je suis arrivée à ma nouvelle école, j'ai rencontré plusieurs filles fortes et gentilles qui m'ont aidée à me trouver. Aujourd'hui, j'ai encore ces mêmes amies

que j'ai rencontrées. Par exemple, Mia est une de mes meilleures amies. Je la connais depuis la maternelle. Elle est une de mes amies depuis tout ce temps, mais au cours des dernières années, nous sommes devenues très proches et le changement d'école m'a permis de réaliser qu'elle était l'une des amies qui se souciait réellement de moi et en qui j'avais confiance.

Finalement, j'ai choisi de changer d'école parce que l'apprentissage du français est un bon défi. J'ai décidé que je voulais apprendre le français et je l'ai fait. Au début, c'était une lutte et c'était aussi intimidant. Cependant, après beaucoup de pratique et l'aide de mes enseignants et mes amis, je pense que je me suis vraiment améliorée. Maintenant, j'ai beaucoup plus de confiance en mes capacités à parler, à lire et à écrire en français. Apprendre le français était très important pour qui je suis aujourd'hui. Je suis devenue bilingue, ce qui ouvre également de nombreuses portes pour moi et pour l'avenir. De plus, j'ai acquis un vaste ensemble de compétences que je continuerai à appliquer et que je pourrai toujours améliorer.

En conclusion, le changement d'école a eu un impact considérable dans ma vie, car je pouvais me faire de nouveaux amis, apprendre une nouvelle langue et avoir l'expérience d'un changement d'école. Beaucoup de mes caractéristiques ont changé quand j'ai pris la décision de changer d'école. Je suis devenue plus confiante, indépendante, respectueuse, acceptante, déterminée, responsable, et plus heureuse. Toutes les compétences que j'ai acquises de cet événement m'ont aidées dans mon parcours scolaire, dans mon programme de français et avec mes amis. Elles me porteront fruit tout au long de ma vie. Je veux continuer à les améliorer, en obtenant beaucoup plus et en devenant meilleure en français.

Madison Norman is a hard-working student, who always aspires to succeed. She is enrolled at Chippewa Secondary School. She has a part-time job as a lifeguard/instructor. Her first language is English but learned French starting in grade 5. She enjoys a variety of activities including ringette, hockey, and swimming. In the future, she would like to be educated in Law with a possible undergraduate degree in psychology.

Jakob Russell
 Third Place – Grade 12
 Near North District School Board

AMIS

Il y a beaucoup de points de réglage dans ma vie, mais il y a un qui me frappe en ce moment. Après une rupture avec ma copine je suis devenu vraiment de bons amis avec un ancien ami River et j'ai commencé à m'entraîner avec mon ami Nate. Il y a quelques raisons pour lesquelles ceci a marqué un vrai moment tournant dans ma vie. À partir de là, je me sentais plus heureux et confiant. J'ai retrouvé des amis importants avec qui je pouvais tout partager; des gens dans lesquels je pouvais vraiment faire confiance et être moi-même. Je sais que cela semble ringard, mais je pense que j'ai découvert la véritable amitié.

River et moi nous nous connaissions depuis 13 ans. Pendant ce temps, nous étions «amis», mais pas vraiment de bons amis. Nous avons entraîné ensemble de temps en temps mais nous ne sommes jamais devenus si proches. Après avoir commencé à fréquenter cette fille, j'ai lâché de passer du temps avec lui et nos interactions étaient rares. J'ai fréquenté cette fille pendant environ un an et demi et si je suis honnête, près de la fin de la relation, j'ai commencé à me sentir vraiment brulé. Je ne pouvais pas rester dans cette relation. J'ai fini par rompre ma relation avec elle. Je n'ai rien à dire contre elle, rien de mal ne s'est passé dans la relation. J'en avais juste assez et je ne pouvais plus être authentique. Il m'a fallu beaucoup de temps pour arriver à cette décision. C'était probablement près d'un mois de contemplation dans ma tête pour décider si cela valait la peine ou non. À la fin, j'avais définitivement fait le bon choix.

Après la rupture avec cette fille, je me sentais vraiment moins pesant et beaucoup plus libre. Je ne sais pas au juste, mais j'avais une sensation écrasante de bonheur. Coïncidence ou pas, beaucoup dans ma vie a amélioré après ce moment tournant. En raison de ce sentiment de bonheur, j'ai commencé à faire des choses comme faire des promenades simplement pour faire une promenade. C'était quelque chose que je n'avais jamais fait auparavant. Je voulais juste aller sur ces promenades juste pour apprécier la vie. Une autre chose qui a commencé à se produire, c'est que j'ai commencé à m'appliquer plus à l'école. J'ai commencé à me soucier de mes efforts et mes notes reflétaient ce changement. J'ai commencé à pratiquer et à jouer ma musique beaucoup plus; une passion qui avait diminué est revenue. Je pratiquais et jouais à tout bout de champs, tout le temps. J'écrivais et j'écrivais jusqu'à ce que je ne puisse plus écrire. Ma vie avait changé, un peu comme l'arrivée du printemps.

Environ un mois après la fin de ma relation j'ai commencé à parler à River de nouveau. Juste à l'école, mais je lui parlais des faits des sorcières que je n'avais pas fait depuis longtemps. Je ne suis même pas certain comment nous avons cliqué à nouveau. C'était comme dans le bon vieux temps, mais mieux. Après peu de temps nous étions de retour à être de bons amis. Nous avons commencé à passer des heures ensemble, j'ai réalisé que je n'avais jamais vraiment eu une amitié comme celle-ci. Chaque ami que j'avais avant, après, et entre River était un peu superficiel, pas aussi profond. Je pense que si ce n'était pas pour River je ne serais pas le même Jakob que je suis aujourd'hui. Si je suis honnête, je ne pense pas que je serais une aussi bonne personne sans River. Je crois que nous pourrions passer des années à part et après nous revoir de nouveau et cela

serait exactement le même que lorsque nous nous sommes séparés.

Mon amitié avec Nate m'embête parfois. On s'est rencontrés en 6e année. Il venait de déménager d'école et n'avait pas vraiment quelqu'un à squatter avec. Alors j'ai commencé à passer du temps avec lui et pour une raison quelconque, on est devenu de très bons amis. C'est drôle parce que nous sommes deux personnes vraiment différentes, mais c'est quand même devenu une amitié vraiment spéciale. C'est un gars vraiment intelligent et excentrique. Il aime vraiment faire et étudier des cartes. Il connaît la carte du monde comme personne d'autre que je connais. Vous pouvez nommer n'importe quel pays et il peut nommer tout ceux qui l'entourent. Nous avons toujours vraiment fait les choses ensemble. Nous avons bâti plusieurs forts d'arbres. Un dans son jardin et un autre à son chalet. Aussi dans son arrière-cour, nous avons construit une tyrolienne qui était d'environ 60 pieds de long. Tout ce que je finis par faire avec Nate est vraiment intéressant. Je peux aller chez lui et escalader des arbres, planter des pommiers, faire des choses ou construire des forts de neige. Nate est un très bon ami et je pense que me tenir autour de lui me rend plus intelligent et plus intéressant.

Parfois nous oublions à quel point nous sommes chanceux d'avoir nos amis. J'ai maintenant découvert comment mes amis sont vraiment importants. Si vous êtes assez chanceux de trouver de très bons amis que vous pouvez continuer à passer de grands moments pour avec le reste de ta vie. Les amis peuvent nous élever quand nous nous sentons à terre; nous faire rire et sourire. Je suis vraiment chanceux d'avoir des amis comme River et Nate dans ma vie. Je suis certain que les deux seront avec moi pendant longtemps et je suis sûr qu'il y aura beaucoup plus de bons moments rians. Devenir vraiment de bons amis avec River et Nate a été un point tournant très important dans ma vie. Je ne l'ai pas réalisé pour un bout de temps, mais les deux m'ont changé pour le mieux.

Il m'a fallu beaucoup de temps pour apprendre ce que je voulais en un ami. Dans ce cas, il m'a fallu réfléchir et que j'écrive cet essai pour vraiment comprendre ce que j'apprécie le plus chez les gens. J'ai appris que je voulais vraiment trouver des personnes avec lesquelles je puisse avoir des conversations constructives. La qualité des interattractions entre mes amis me fait rire et réfléchir, deux choses qui me manquaient.

Jakob Russell was born in Townsville, Australia. In school Jakob participates in volleyball and track and field. He loves playing and making music. Jakob plays multiple instruments and records his own music. He is actively pursuing a career in music. Next step, attend Humber College for Jazz guitar.

Ontario, Sudbury

Kaitlyn Chevrier

First Place – Grade 12

Sudbury Catholic District School Board

BEYOND BLOOD

“Family isn’t always blood, it’s the people in your life who want you in theirs: the ones who accept you for who you are, the ones who would do anything to see you smile and who love you no matter what.” ~Maya Angelou

I’ve never felt fear like the day my parents decided to disclose their divorce. It wasn’t the pulse-racing kind of fear. You know, the jittery, sweaty-palms, cottonmouth kind? No, it was more the type that makes everything slow down. It was like my veins had filled with lead, making my steps heavy and forcing my head to hang as I shuffled from my bedroom to the kitchen.

The dreaded conversation between parents and child is supposed to be “the birds and the bees”, and I guess mine started out the same, “Dear, when two people love each other very much—of course, mine had a different ending—they sometimes fall out of love.”

When asked, I’ll often compare the stages of accepting my parents’ divorce to the five stages of grief:

Denial: “But you guys are still married, right?”

Anger: “Okay, so I’m running away.”

Bargaining: “Please God, don’t take away my family.”

Depression: “This is my fault.”

Acceptance: “My family is changing.”

Humbly, I zipped through the first stage with little resistance. Where I faced my biggest hurdle was the second. I wasn’t just angry, I was livid. Nostril-flaring, blood-boiling, ears-steaming livid. I was a tapestry of emotions, where every feeling was intricately interwoven until I couldn’t distinguish just who exactly I was frustrated with, but I knew that I was a thread’s width away from falling apart and I needed somewhere—or rather, someone, to be an outlet. Unfortunately for him, the new guy with his tail between his legs is any angry, hormonal, and downright confused pre-teen’s outlet-of-choice, and that’s how my stepfather ended up suffering the worst of my young and clichéd wrath.

It wasn’t that he didn’t try; my stepdad was pretty persistent. It wasn’t that he didn’t care; he was warm and welcoming. In hindsight, it had nothing to do with him. It was just one of those “it’s not you, it’s me” moments. My loyalties were becoming cloudy, my ideals were falling like flies and my family was suddenly up for interpretation. I felt like I was living in some awful, angsty teen fiction novel. Instead of opting for a reasonable approach, like communicating with my parents, in my fit of rage I decided to spice up the plot and shut down completely. Now, if I had some fancy PhD and could psychoanalyze my past behaviour, I’d maybe say that I was building walls to protect

myself, or that I was trying to regain some of the control I was losing. Alas, I'm no more than a high school student who's only taken one psychology class and I therefore prefer plain English. In layman's terms, I decided to shun my stepfather for the first year of our time together.

Admittedly, there was pride in my small rebellion. Not to brag, but it was the shunning of the century. Still, me living with the man and all, my mutiny came at a price. Chewing mouths were the dinner soundtrack, my room became my sanctuary, and I began to feel lonely. Really, really lonely. My family's lively conversations could be heard upstairs, while I sulked in the basement because I wouldn't admit that I wanted to be a part of the new gang. And what only furthered my rage and isolation was that my stepdad was completely respectful of my rejection.

The audacity.

I can't pinpoint the exact moment when things began to change. Maybe it was my thirteenth birthday, when he dug out his guitar T-shirt—yes, it actually plays music—and serenaded me. Maybe it was our first Valentine's Day together, when he bought me my first bouquet of flowers. Maybe it was at one of my ringette games, when I looked up into the stands and saw him alone, in a clique of parents that couldn't appreciate his humour, and saw him cheering me on without an inkling of shame. Maybe it was when he introduced me to his family and friends as his daughter. Regardless, he miraculously wedged his way into my stony heart and completely redefined what I understood to be "family".

My stepfather has taught me heaps—how to play chess, how to cook, how to drive—but his inadvertent lesson on love-by-choice is by far the most invaluable. The societal norm is to love-by-obligation, to identify our family by blood, rather than by merit. What my stepdad has proven, is that unconditional love doesn't come from shared genes, and it can't be forced through impromptu reunions. He has accepted me unconditionally and wholeheartedly, even without the biological obligations, and I couldn't be more blessed. Even after giving him every reason to run, he chose to stay.

That, I've come to learn, is love.

Over these past four years, I've managed to stumble my way through the five stages of accepting divorce with about as much grace as a drunkard, and yet I never had to do it alone. My own flesh and blood have judged me, but never once have I felt pressured by my stepfather. I've grown into a woman I can be proud of, and as morbid as it may sound to some, I credit a lot of that personal gain to the separation. My experience with being a child of divorce has been more of a renovation than a demolition. My stepdad is now my confidant, someone I turn to when I need a shoulder. He's someone I know I will always have in my corner. He's someone who supports my passions and he's someone I have chosen to love and look up to.

He's my family, and I pity anyone who can't see beyond their blood.

Kaitlyn Chevrier is a student at Marymount Academy where she is President of the Student Administrative Council. In her free time, Kaitlyn enjoys coaching youth sports and partaking in a few games of her own. As a self-proclaimed debate champ, she aspires to be a lawyer and has accepted her offer at Laurentian University for an undergraduate program in Law and Justice.

Kelsey Jean Sabourin
Second Place – Grade 12
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

TO BE A WOMAN, TO LOVE A GIRL

I am no stranger to the world of bleak doctors' offices and stiff patient chairs. In the span of four years, I have bounced between five therapists, one who only met with me twice and was able to see repressed trauma in my mannerisms. He was right, because no amount of antidepressants can solve an issue if you don't even realize it is a problem. Lying to not only those closest to me, but to myself, was killing me from the inside out. I had no idea who I was, and instead of finding out, I simply tried to fade away.

There's an important detail to this story that can't be ignored. I'm a lesbian. I know this like a sparrow knows to fly south when the water freezes, like a sunflower knows to grow towards the light, like the river knows to flow to the ocean. But this part of me was a secret, a disappointment to my nuclear family. Every time I came home, I left my lesbianism at the door. I lived a lie at the dinner table, never talking about my depression, avoiding the topic of love even though I am a hopeless romantic at heart. It tore me to shreds, leaving my chest empty and aching. I was hungry to feel alive, and desperate to numb the pain. So I did, in the only way I knew how.

For the longest time, I found beauty in smallness, in fine detail, in small smiles. There was beauty in quiet voices and tiny waists and a ribcage that pokes through skin every time I breathe. I am a lesbian—a girl, woman, young lady— who likes girls. Caught in a lie of pretending to be straight, I clung onto the one thing I knew I could control— femininity. And what better way to become feminine than to become small? It was the constant quest of my mother, with her numerous diets and workout plans. The pressure gradually began to press into my skin.

I skipped breakfast and lunch everyday for two years. I choked down the food I was forced to eat at dinner and obsessively counted every calorie I consumed. In turn, my body hollowed. I covered sharp rib bones with baggy sweaters two times my size, and curled in on myself whenever my stomach cramped and my chest ached. My hands trembled, my arms became weak.

The tie between my soul and body became an uneasy tether that threatened to snap. In the dim shadows of the early dawn, I stood in front of my mirror and stared at my naked reflection. At the pink scars and white stretch marks that littered my thighs. At my soft stomach, flat in the early morning hours before becoming bloated later in the day. At my face, with cheeks thinning and makeup to cover every acne spot. I met my own hollowed eyes, and thought, not feminine, not pretty, not small. I couldn't recognize myself, and I didn't know how to go back— I couldn't remember who I was before.

The doctors call it dissociation, or depersonalization. Some counsellors soften the blows, describing it as flat or numb. It's all the same. I slipped in and out of my body, watching through eyes not my own as if I were playing a game, as if this wasn't my life, as if none of it was real. People close to me began to notice. In turn, I pushed them away, lacing my words with venom as I insisted nothing was wrong. My parents never understood, and a part of me loathed them for it. I remember one silent car ride

with my mother behind the wheel where she turned to me in a fit of frustration and snapped, “What’s wrong with you?” But to me, there was nothing wrong. I knew I was depressed, and knew that needed to change, but could never answer the question of what my life would look like if I wasn’t. I had deluded myself into thinking not eating was fine, that I was fine. I was never fine.

I hadn’t told my therapist for that reason. She was a nice woman, with a tattoo of a sparrow on her forearm. Her office was littered with small tokens of Indigenous imagery alongside toys meant for her younger clients. It was a standard session, me playing absentmindedly with bottle full of glitter, when she asked me if I had anything else on my mind. I had been there for almost an hour, the usual length of my appointments. I hesitated only a moment before breaking. Tears flowed freely and I let myself feel them burn on their way down my cheeks. I told her how I revelled in the ridges of my ribcage and wished only to look petite and perfect. I remember what she told me, what this path of my life meant— hospitals I so feared, infection, a lifetime of lingering issues. She spoke with a quiet, kind voice. You don’t need to be this feminine, you just aren’t a lipstick lesbian. You need to listen to your spirit. You need to be your authentic self, and I can’t tell you how to do that.

The realization didn’t happen overnight. It took weeks after that meeting to begin eating regularly, and it still felt wrong. But when I took to staring at my reflection again, with my hair cut fresh and my shoulders tall, I could see the figure of someone not bound by the conventional standard of beauty. It took me years to reconcile that my identity is not shackled by the idea of performing femininity for the sake of others. My authentic self is a person in the making, defined by the actions I take everyday. My perception of my body is just a small part of that, and I have to believe that comfort in my body will grow alongside comfort in my identity.

Kelsey Jean Sabourin is a poet, writer, and all around storyteller from Sudbury, Ontario. She has taken part in NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writer Month), and has written a piece about the role of democracy and art as a part of the Student Science and Technology Research Co-op. Besides writing, she plays in the school’s Senior Band, Jazz Band, Strings Ensemble and at home. She would like to become a novelist, and make enough money to retire in the middle of the woods with several farm animals and a small garden.

Eliana Brereton
Third Place – Grade 12
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

TEARS AND THE SEA ARE BOTH MADE OF SALTWATER

“To weep is to make less the depth of grief.” - William Shakespeare

I had chest pain when I was twelve years old. That's a broad statement, however, because it only occurred once. Two months into my seventh grade year, I was sitting in math class when I experienced an intense pain in my chest, seemingly out of the blue. It felt like a pressure so intense my heart would explode. The chest pain accompanied itself with a friend, however; a gut feeling. A bad one. Something terrible had just happened, and I knew it, although I didn't yet know what. What followed this pain was a lead up to what I today consider the worst moment in my life.

The classroom phone rang. The teacher told me to pack up my books and go down to the office. My mom was there to pick me up. Instead of experiencing the extreme elation a twelve year old would normally experience from getting to leave math class, panic swelled in my chest. My palms grew sweaty and I felt like the room was closing in on me. Suddenly it was hard to breathe. Was it hot in here to anyone else? Something was wrong, and now I really knew it.

The next thing I heard was the vigorous slam of the passenger side car door attached to my mom's worn-down 2011 Ford escape. I was in the car now - I didn't even notice I'd made it here. I pushed down the vomit trying desperately to claw its way up my throat and turned to face my mom, who was awaiting me in the driver's seat. The solemn expression painted onto my mom's face told me everything I needed to know. Someone had died. There was not one word spoken between us the entire way home.

I lost my dad on October 23, 2013. He died of sudden cardiac failure - none of us saw it coming. That is the absolute worst way to lose someone, I think. You really can't prepare yourself at all. He was the most wonderful person I ever had the pleasure to speak with. He was my best friend entirely.

When you lose the person who taught you how to tie your shoes, and use a fork and knife properly, and stand up to your older brothers when they pick on you, you feel completely and utterly lost. You feel like you are alone on a dinky, flimsy fishing boat that's stuck in the middle of the Pacific Ocean during the worst storm mother nature has ever come up with. When you lose the person who made you into the person you are, there is nothing to do except hurt.

The hurt shows its ugly, mangled face when you're reminded of them. When you step into their room, when you do something they taught you, when a random passerby is wearing the cologne they always wore. That's expected. It's obviously going to hurt when you think of them. But, nobody expects the hurt to show up while you are just brushing your teeth. And eating breakfast. And walking the dog and - you get the

point. Nobody warns you that when someone you genuinely love dies, it seems like there isn't anything you can feel, or experience, except pain. There is no escaping the hurt when you lose someone you love.

When it first happens, and in the days afterwards, the hurt comes down in crashing, thunderous waves that are 100 feet high each. They crash down on you without mercy. They don't stop coming. It's wave after wave after wave of pain, crying, and mourning. The biggest ships humankind could ever build are ripped to shreds by the intensity of these waves. All you can do is hang on, try not to fall off, and float. It feels as though it will never end.

But then - as time goes on, maybe a month, sometimes three, you get a breath. The waves are still 100 feet tall and they're violent, and angry, and thrashing down on you with the force of a nuclear blast. But they come further apart this time. You can get up on your boat, stand up and stretch. You won't know what triggers the next wave. Maybe it's a restaurant, a conversation, driving through a specific intersection. It's different for everyone. When that wave comes, it will absolutely still knock you off your feet and you will be left sputtering in it's wake. But in that time between - there was no hurt. This realization, that you can overpower the monster that is pain, ignites something new within you.

Sometime down the road with this realization in hand, the waves become 80 feet tall. And then 50. And then 30. Every once in a while you'll get one that will flood your boat and discombobulate you to the extreme. However, they're usually manageable now. Along with this - you can see them coming. A birthday. Christmas. Thanksgiving. You know the waves will be there on those days and you have time to build the necessary reinforcements on your boat.

I would never wish the experience of losing someone you love on anyone. However though, I can say now that my boat is much stronger than it ever used to be. My boat is almost invincible now, and it takes the utmost outrageous of waves to knock it over. I consider myself a professional wave rider, and I can navigate myself through other waves of hurt like losing a job or failing a test with a certain sense of ease I would not otherwise have if my wave survival skills were not so advanced.

A person you love dying will change you. No matter what - it will. Living without them seems impossible, unfathomable at first. Losing a loved one, however, will teach that time will heal all wounds; whether you believe it or not.

Eliana Brereton is from Sudbury, Ontario. She enjoys spending time with loved ones, and creating art. She also enjoys acrylic painting and tattoo design. Ellie is planning to attend Guelph University next year to specialize in Psychology and Neuroscience. Ellie thinks that always having a creative outlet is the key to a happy life.

Participating Schools

We would like to recognize the involvement of the following schools in the Turning Points/Moments tournants program:

Anglophone East School District

Lewisville Middle School
Moncton High School
Riverview East School

West Ferris Secondary School
Widdifield Secondary School

Anglophone South School District

Barnhill Memorial School
Bayside Middle School
Harry Miller Middle School
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St. Stephen High School
St. Stephen Middle School
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Nipissing First Nation

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Newfoundland and Labrador English School District - Avalon Regional Office

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Beaconsfield Junior High School
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In Appreciation

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Partenariat en Éducation The Learning Partnership

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