



AWARD WINNING ESSAYS 2021

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. 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, learning and growth.

The Learning Partnership is pleased to present the 2021 collection of winning essays from this year's Turning Points program. This year brought new challenges posed by COVID-19 and its impacts and new realities, which so many of us faced. Students and teachers faced these challenges with resilience and dedication.

The pages of this anthology are filled with stories written by students highlighting a turning point that changed the direction of their lives. The Turning Points program guides student authors through a journey of reflection and discovery. They share their moving, funny, tragic, honest, real and celebratory stories. Although each journey is different and personal, every one of them has taught the students 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 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 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

Ross Elliott
Program Manager, Turning Points
The Learning Partnership

Table of Contents

GRADE 7

THE CIRCLE OF LIFE.....	6
HOW SURGERY CHANGED EVERYTHING	7
LIVING IN A GHOST’S SHADOW.....	8
MY BATTLE WITH AN ANXIOUS MIND	9
IN THE WINGS	10
THE COVID CLUB.....	11
LIFT EACH OTHER UP	12
A NEW BEGINNING	13
FINDING FAMILY	14
JOSHUA.....	15
LOVE IS GENDERLESS.....	16
NOBODY SHOULD HAVE TO LIVE IN A CLOSET	17
ADDICTION IS HARD.....	18
BEAUTY IS ONLY SKIN DEEP	19
DIFFICULT DAYS AND LESSONS LEARNED.....	20
ENJOY THE LITTLE THINGS	21
STAR REALIZATION.....	22
ADOPTION.....	24
COMING OUT.....	25
MY FIRST DOG, SHADOW!	27
TEAM JADE!	28

GRADE 11

THE BIG C.....	30
ALEXANDRIA	32
WHEN THE LIGHTS WENT OUT	34

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 7

Elizabeth Acreman

First Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region

THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

It was a cold November night and the rain barrelled onto the sleek surface of our car as we pulled up to the hotel. It had been almost two years since I had last seen my great-grandparents, but this time, instead of us driving all the way to Bay d’Espoir, they had come to St. John’s. My mom, my dad, my little sister and I all sprinted up to the door with the wind and rain lashing at our backs. When we finally got inside, we were greeted by warm air.

Besides my great-grandparents, my grandmother, grandfather, great-aunt, two great-uncles and older cousin were all seated on the snow white beds that lined the wall. After we took off our soaking wet coats and shoes, we caught up on our lives and chatted about the amount of trick-or-treaters we had, since Halloween had just passed. My great-grandmother was excited to say that they had gotten five trick-or-treaters, which was a lot for their small community. While my aunt asked me about school and sports, I could not help but think about how wonderful it was to see them all again.

My sister and I went over to say hello to my great-grandfather and, since he could not hear very well, I greeted him by holding his hand. My aunt explained to him who I was, but all I could focus on was how soft his hand was. It felt like the petals of a flower after a storm, softened and delicate after enduring such force. I suddenly realized how much care my grandfather needs now that he is older.

When I sat back down again, I noted how my great-grandfather’s children and grandchildren were centered around him. They anticipated his every need and made sure he was comfortable. He had cared for each and every one of them his entire life, loved them all and made sure they were all happy and healthy. Now at the age of 96 they were doing the same for him. I could feel the love gravitating towards him and I could tell that they all wanted the best for him in his final years.

After talking for a while longer, we said goodbye and left the hotel room, running back to our car in the pouring rain. On the way home, I could not stop thinking about what I experienced that evening. I had seen the circle of life that night. It starts out as your parents taking care of you and helping you get to adulthood. Then you become independent for a period of time and care for your own children and grandchildren. However, a time arrives when you need similar care as you did when you were a child; the people you were there for would now be there for you, helping you through the last years of your life. As I leaned my head against the rain-spattered window, I thought dreamily about how beautiful life truly is.

Elizabeth is a Grade 7 student at Brookside Intermediate in Portugal Cove-St. Philip’s, NL. She plays violin, volleyball, and baseball. She loves listening to music and playing video games with her friends. Elizabeth lives with her mom, dad, and younger sister. She loves to laugh and eat chocolate! She really enjoys school and loves to read and write.

Layla Whalen

Second Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region

HOW SURGERY CHANGED EVERYTHING

It was a cold day last November when my mother was admitted to the hospital to get surgery to remove a giant tumor before it killed her. I was sitting in class trying to focus on writing a math test at the very time she was going under the knife. All I could think was “ Why does this test even matter when my mom could die?”

This was a big turning point in the way I saw life. Things I thought that mattered just didn't matter as much.

Before the surgery she was extremely weak. Too weak to get out of bed, too weak to cook or clean. Too weak to do much of anything except watch shows on tv. She even stopped eating. She told me once that even rolling over made her tired. It was like an invisible force was sucking the life out of her.

We couldn't do much stuff together. I had to do a lot for myself. I had to make my own supper, which meant a lot of mac and cheese and sandwiches. We ordered a lot of fast food. I had to do my own laundry, which made me realize that folding clothes is hard and super boring. I even had to put myself to sleep and set an alarm to wake up to get ready for school. I went from being a carefree kid to having adult responsibilities and feeling like a mom in a very short period of time.

After the surgery it wasn't long before I saw my mom feeling better and getting stronger. I watched her regain the energy to exercise, write and record music, cook and clean again. When summer came she was going on road trips with us, going on walks, hiking up mountains and going swimming. We must have gone swimming every day for a month! My mom had a passion for life that she didn't have before she got sick.

This was a turning point in my life because it made me think about what's really important. Family and close friendships, nature, being active and healthy, good music and laughter and it made me realize in life that worrying about little things doesn't change anything. Worrying only caused more stress. In the past I may have stressed out over things like what I should wear, my grades, doing chores and stuff like that. By watching my mom live life to the fullest I've learned that I can too.

It's been over a year since her surgery. Our family is back to the old routine of work, school, eating and sleeping but we all do these things with gratitude now. I don't ever take for granted a healthy home cooked meal or a laundry basket of neatly folded clothes. I've even come to enjoy some of her crazy music she makes. I go on walks with my mom whereas before I probably wouldn't have. I appreciate all the little things she does for us and try my best to help out as much as possible. I see how happy she is now and how she just goes with the flow of life and doesn't let anything bother her too much. Going through this experience has let me see the bigger picture and for that reason I'm thankful for it.

Layla enjoys English. She has written from personal experience. Layla enjoys drawing and writing stories.

Hope Hicks

Third Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region

LIVING IN A GHOST'S SHADOW

Most people grow up with siblings in their life, but until you know the pain of losing a brother or sister, you never really appreciate these people. I have personally never had any siblings so I cannot relate when my friends talk about how “annoying” or “rude” their siblings are. You know, it’s actually painful to hear them talk badly about them - they are so lucky to have a brother or sister to love, and should be thankful to have them in their lives, as I never got that chance.

On August 25, 2007 my brother died of childhood cancer. He was only seven when he passed. This was a hard time for my parents; it hurt them tremendously to lose their only son. Things were never the same after his passing. Except that a year after he was gone, I was born. To everyone, I was considered a “miracle child.” Sadly, I wished for most of my life that I wasn’t. It was hard being an only child, and even worse when you add the fact that I was brought into this world after my brother had to leave it.

For eleven years, I felt as if I was living in a ghost’s shadow. Whenever I did something wrong, I was compared to him and how he would never do that. Whenever we went on vacation, I often heard things like “Ryan loved this restaurant, we have to go there!” and “Remember the time when...?”. It was all about him. It was like I could never escape him, like I couldn’t grow up to be my own person. It was as if I had to be my brother and live the life he didn’t get to have.

In elementary school, people started to talk more and more about their siblings. I wouldn’t be able to participate in these conversations. I didn’t actually have a brother or sister, yet I was constantly reminded that I almost did. The more I thought about this, the more it impacted my everyday life. My grades dropped a bit, my mental health declined, and I became anti-social. It was not a good period of time for me, but when I told my parents about how I was feeling, about how the constant comparisons to Ryan were affecting me, things started to get better. They were able to help me figure out who I truly am.

I’m only twelve now but the experiences I have had so far are wild for someone my age. I hope no one else my age goes through the pain and confusion I’ve felt, but to be honest, I’m happy to have faced (and overcome) it. It has helped me learn that you should always be your own person, and you should never feel as if you need to be anyone other than yourself. I no longer live in a ghost’s shadow, but rather honour the memory of the boy who came before me.

Hope is a Grade 7 student at Brookside Intermediate in Portugal Cove-St. Philip’s, NL. She takes part in musical theatre, loves aerial arts, dancing, and writing. Hope lives with her mom, dad, and two cats named Teddy and Max. She enjoys hanging out with her friends and playing video games with them. Hope’s passion is to get a job working at the Janeway Children’s Hospital.

Stacey O'Brien

Honourable Mention – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region

MY BATTLE WITH AN ANXIOUS MIND

Stress is a word used to describe the feeling you get before a big test or during a life threatening situation. Everyone experiences stress in their life and it normally goes away within a short period of time. In my case, it was like a dark bottomless hole that absorbed me for a little longer.

My journey started on a day I had a multiple-choice test. I wasn't very concerned about the test and barely thought of it. At lunchtime, my friend and I decided to walk to her house. The trouble began when we got back late from lunch. As a result of being tardy, I lost any time I would've had to study. Therefore, I did poorly on my test. I was embarrassed and upset with myself. That one test pushed me into a downward spin.

As a result of that one test, I became restless with the thought of school and I had trouble with almost everything in my daily life. The thought of eating made me nauseous, showers became irregular and I stopped spending time with my friends. I even completely stopped going to family gatherings. Simply walking into school was a daunting task. Instead, I spent all my time studying and fully consumed by school. I'd spend every waking second of my time obsessed with grades and terrified of failing. I felt like I had ruined everything I'd ever loved. These feelings continued for months. I started to feel like I was trapped in an empty pit.

Although I didn't realize I needed help at this time, my parents reached out to get some.

My family's first resource was our family doctor. I talked with him over the phone but I wasn't given as much help as I needed. Although it took a while, he finally made an in-person appointment to see me. At the appointment he assessed how healthy I was, both mentally and physically. He finished the appointment by explaining there were two illnesses I could have. Unfortunately he didn't give a definite diagnosis. The doctor gave me a prescription and he informed me it would help no matter which diagnosis I would actually be given. A specialist concluded I had a mental illness known as Generalized Anxiety Disorder. This was the lowest point of my life.

After my diagnosis, I began getting more help to restore myself. I started to go to therapy. My therapist helped by giving me ways to control the stress. For example, he helped me find ways to take breaks without feeling guilty. My pills were also working and online school helped my recovery. Over time, I started to feel more like myself; I was climbing out of the dark hole.

I've learned a lot from this experience. I now know to get help right away rather than push problems aside. I have learned skills to deal with stress as well as skills to maintain good grades. The main lesson I learned was, although things may feel like they will never get better, feelings are only temporary.

Stacey's interests include painting, reading and dancing. Stacey is very passionate about the issue of climate change and hopes to become a planetary astronomer.

Riley Coombes

Honourable Mention – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region

IN THE WINGS

“The stage is not merely the meeting place of all the arts, but the return of art to life”
- Oscar Wilde.

The lights go down. It's opening night. I hear the rustling and whispers of the audience, my heart skips a beat. Palms are sweaty, eyes go wide, it's so dark but I feel so bright. This is it, my first musical. THEN the pit roars to life and just like a bird, the first note takes flight and the stage is alive.

I've loved to entertain for as long as I can remember. Singing, dancing, acting – I have always admired it all. At eight years old I never imagined I would have an opportunity to be in a real live musical. New to voice, and acting, I nervously walked into my first audition. I thought it would be a great learning experience, but as soon as I walked through the door I felt at home and knew this was where I was meant to be.

Nothing could have prepared me for what came next. First an audition, then a call back and finally a cast offer. My head was spinning! Never could I have imagined I'd be selected. I learned quickly that everyone involved had a part to play, regardless of how big or small their role was. Long rehearsals, tired voices, and sore feet felt like a reward. From the encouragement and support of the directors and the rest of the cast you could say I found my second family and the stage quickly became my second home.

Performing became such a big part of my life after that, I found something that really made me feel good. I still remember coming out from the wings and being blinded by the glowing lights, that's still my favorite part of doing a show. Who knows, I may just go blind at the age of thirty because of how bright they are, but it would all be worth it. I truly believe if I had not gone to that audition I may not have found what I loved to do for a long time.

I always dreamed I would be up on stage since I was young. This wonderful journey has really been something I will never forget. I am so lucky to have such great teachers and friends who I can really look up to and who truly make me a better person. And to think this all started from “in the wings”, a magic part of the stage that the audience never sees.

If you were to ask anyone who knows her they would tell you that Riley is no stranger to entertaining and making people smile, they would most likely say that she lives for it. Riley has been dancing with The Dance Centre since the age of three, and also focuses on voice and piano. Riley has received awards from local Kiwanis Festivals and Conservatory Canada, and a Focus on Youth Awards nomination. This year she switched to French Immersion. She dreams of one day pursuing her dreams at Julliard in New York City, or Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

Bridget Powers

Honourable Mention – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region

THE COVID CLUB

Just like that it was closed. The TV was screaming, “Labrador has its first case of Covid-19 - soon be in Newfoundland”. I got anxious just thinking about it. What is COVID-19? Should I be worried? No friends? No family? Quarantine? I just want to be normal. Little did I know it was just the beginning.

It had been some time since the first case of COVID-19 had been reported. At this point there had been over 30 cases in Newfoundland and Labrador. Tensions were high as everyone stared at social media, not knowing what was going to become of school or if we would even return. My mom and I came up with an idea to create a book club to pass time. This idea was about to be the turning point of my life!

Let me bring you up to speed. I am a kind person. I love to play good old-fashioned board games and be outdoors. I always had people in my life that were friendly, classmates I'd hang out with, and those who came to my birthday parties. But I never had a real group of friends. You know - the kind that you laugh with until milk comes out of your nose. Those you sleep in a tent in the backyard and tell ghost stories with. Especially the kind you can just pack a bag and ride off into the sunset on your bikes with.

We quickly figured out how to set up a Google Meet. The first book was titled, “Upside Down in the Middle of Nowhere” by Julie T. Lamana. We immediately made connections to this book. It's about Hurricane Katrina and the devastation it left behind in New Orleans. During this time we felt like we were in the middle of our own hurricane - but together. The more we read, the more we laughed and leaned on each other. It was during the second novel that I realized I had found my crew.

As COVID-19 spread like wildfire throughout the province and our country, and as I watched my parents wipe down their groceries with Lysol wipes, I was reading and belly laughing my way through a worldwide pandemic. Our meetings were not just the four of us sitting around a screen. We had themed days. Have you ever attended a Book Club Meeting with your PJs on? Or how about fancy or crazy hair? We certainly did.

As the online school year was coming to a close so was our COVID Club. Our final meeting was held six feet apart around a campfire. It was an odd feeling to be around my 3D friends. I was excited, ready and in need of feeling like a kid again. They say that books can take you somewhere when you have no place to go. Our club did just that. It came at just the right time and allowed the four of us girls to develop a friendship that will last a lifetime.

Bridget has been smiling since the day she was born. She has always been a petite child with a big presence. She is always one to make others laugh, see the humour in any situation and generally the comedian of the family. She loves finding creative ways to complete school projects and can be found tinkering with new inventions. Up until the COVID-19 lockdown, Bridget had many acquaintances but no true friends. Because of a book and the “Covid Book Club” she now has done just that – gotten into all kinds of ‘good’ trouble. While trying her best to avoid catching Covid she ended up catching three best friends.

Kamryn Oake
First Place – Grade 7
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Central Region

LIFT EACH OTHER UP

As a kid, I learned you can't judge a book by its cover. I was often the new kid; I met lots of people - some nice, some not; and some that made a lasting impact.

At age 9, I again moved. By then I was used to it, so I knew what to expect. I didn't know anyone but I managed. I always felt judged by peers that knew nothing about me. I learned not to judge because it felt awful.

I joined ballet, it was my first time dancing in front of people. I recognized some kids from school, but one girl stood out. She looked different and appeared slightly confused. Before practice, everyone was warming up. I noticed her approach a classmate. "Can you tie my shoes?" she muttered. I could hardly hear her, she was quite soft spoken. "Tie them yourself," the girl spoke aggressively back. "Wow" I thought to myself wide eyed, "that was mean". All the girls ignored her plea. From across the room I saw her repeatedly struggle to tie her own shoes.

It was disheartening watching her with those laces, I approached her. "Hi" I said smiling. "H-hello" she stuttered. "Here, can I help?" I inquired. "Okay" she whispered. As I tied her ballet shoes she softly spoke, "I'm Katie". I looked up at her and grinned, "I love your name," I replied. "Thank you," she said as I finished tying. "You're welcome," I replied.

For two years, for the most part, I tied Katie's ballet shoes at practice. We stuck together. After all, neither of us had many friends but neither of us cared. We had each other. I felt her absence when she wasn't there and I think she missed me too.

As our friendship grew, I learned a lot about Katie. She didn't go to my school or live in my area so we only saw each other at ballet. The reason Katie looked and talked differently was because she had Down Syndrome. It didn't define her or deter her from being her best self. It just meant she needed a little kindness, a little help, and a little compassion to get by. She is one of the good ones.

Katie had a huge impact on my life and hopefully I touched hers. She showed me innocence, compassion, and understanding. Most of all she made me feel special, needed and never judged. I realized not to judge someone by their appearance because you just might be missing out on making a great friend! The other girls in ballet sure did.

After two years, I moved and Katie and I lost touch. I will remember the impact she had on my life. It was her influence that made me see people for their inside and not their outside, and helped me to look past people's differences. Who knows, maybe someday our paths will cross again! Fortunately, Katie and I really did get to "lift each other up."

Kamryn was born in Gander, her mother had her at a very young age. She loves sports such as hockey, and dance. Kamryn has a soft spot for music and hanging out with friends. She loves to write and also dreams of becoming a graphic designer one day. Kamryn concentrates on making sure everyone is treated equally and respectfully.

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

A NEW BEGINNING

Can you believe that one moment could change your whole life? Well, mine did. It was lunchtime in school. A few more days until grade one was over. Thinking of that, my friends and I were overjoyed and we started planning things we would do on our vacation. It was a beautiful sunny day so we were enjoying our delicious meals on the soccer field when suddenly the unexpected happened.

We heard loud noises that were impossible to comprehend. It sounded like fireworks to me. All the teachers were very confused and told us not to pay attention to it. The noises got louder and louder. Out of nowhere a teacher said the noises were bullets. All the teachers rushed us all to the classrooms and told us not to worry. After a while, the noises stopped and all the parents were told to pick up their children. My house was right in front of the school so a teacher dropped me and my cousin there.

The news said there was a conflict between two different political parties in Yemen. Schools and occupations were shut down. Things kept getting worse and worse. The Presidential Palace was behind our street. There was shooting all day and night. People had to sneak out of their houses to get groceries. There was no water supply. I hoped things would go back to normal soon, but life doesn't stay the same.

Then one day, my dad and uncle decided to leave Yemen. It was a hard decision but living there was not safe anymore. That day was the worst day of my life. Leaving my home country was a nightmare. Almost all the people we knew decided to leave Yemen. There was a port in Al Hudaydah, a city in Yemen, where there were cattle ships available. We all decided to leave in the cattle ships as it was easier to escape from there, without getting killed.

On April 23 we left Yemen in a cattle ship at around 2pm. All the people prayed to arrive safely, as the ship could sink. We spent two nights floating under the dark sky. We arrived in Djibouti on the third day at around 8 pm. We stayed in Djibouti for 4 years. It was very hard adjusting to our temporary new home as we left everything back in Yemen. Then came the day we were informed we could immigrate to Canada via UNHCR. That day a new ray of hope shone in my eyes.

On July 22, 2019, we left Djibouti for a new beginning in Canada. When we arrived in Canada, I couldn't believe my eyes. That's when I had my turning point. I never imagined that I would live a normal life again. At that moment I learned to never lose hope. Even though I could never forget Yemen and the war that changed my whole life, I hope that Canada will be a new start to a safe and peaceful life.

Fatima is a 12 year old girl who moved to Clarenville 1 year ago due to the civil war in Yemen. She has a 9 year old sister named Layan and a 1 year old brother named Mohammed. Fatima has a passion for drawing. She was awarded 2nd place in the district for the peace poster in 2020. Fatima loves playing volleyball. She hopes to be a successful dentist in the future.

Mia Butler

Third Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Central Region

FINDING FAMILY

Even though I don't have any memory of this moment, it was the most significant point in my life. Twelve years ago I was a baby without a family. I was located in the massive country of China for the first ten months of my life, getting nourished and cared for by an adoption centre in Beijing. At the time, I was too young so I didn't understand or appreciate this event, but now in the present, I can clearly see this is my turning point.

Miles away from me, my parents were saving money for a plane ticket to Asia. They were determined, constantly labouring all hours of the day until they reached their goal. They always explained this experience as overwhelming and intense, but they knew it would be worth it as soon as they held me in their arms. Our lives would change forever. After six full months of non-stop working, preparing, and worrying, my parents were exhausted but all set to book a long flight for their future!

August 2009 they were off. Flying over the Atlantic Ocean and through the clouds. They were writing a blog to keep track of the trip. My parents always told me this would be the most important plane ride they would ever be on and it was also the most distant. It took them four days to fly from Newfoundland to Beijing, but to them, it felt like a lifetime! The plane was spacious and packed full of people from all over the country. The anxiety was already stressful enough but increased even more once they arrived!

Looking back at photographs, China looked crowded, busy, and enormous. That's probably the reason it took them hours to get to the adoption centre. When they exited the taxi they knew this is where the next chapter would begin. They rushed in the doorway, tears were running down both their faces. I wish I remembered this moment and my parents' expressions as we locked eyes. Imagining this image in my head is like a fairytale, we all lived happily ever after together.

This event affected my life entirely, which is a complicated thing to grasp. Where would I be if I came into another family? Or who would I be with? If this didn't happen I wouldn't have the close relationships with my friends and family that I do now. My culture and home could be anywhere in the world! If things ended up differently I could be speaking a different language, practicing a different religion, or being taught different things. In my perspective, I'm fortunate that my life has turned out this way as I have plenty of inseparable connections and I'm extremely content in my hometown and the Newfoundland lifestyle. This is an essential moment in my life and a big part of who I am today, which is why it's my turning point.

Mia Butler lives in Musgrave Harbour, NL. Mia enjoys listening to music, drawing, and painting. She also likes being active by playing volleyball and swimming. Mia dreams of graduating university and getting a job that helps the world.

Christopher Harris

Honourable Mention – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Central Region

JOSHUA

Christmas is full of magic, or it's supposed to be. The Christmas of 2019 was anything but on December 25, 2019 my life changed forever. I was in the kitchen of my house playing the game of Life with my family and my dad received a phone call so he left the table. He then came back and said that my friend Joshua was in critical condition. He and his dad had gone through the ice on side-by-side. I didn't want to believe it. I couldn't believe it. The news hit me like a truck and I didn't know what to do. My friend that I played hockey with for years had died.

I was in shock. My Christmas holidays were ruined. I was too sad to do anything and sometimes I did not even want to come out of my room. Just thinking of his smile or laugh and that I would never be able to see or hear it again was almost too difficult to bear. That made me depressed for a while. Then I realized that I can't live like this forever so I strengthened up and accepted the news. It wasn't easy but I had to do it.

Seeing all of my friends so upset was very hard. My heart was broken for all of us and I didn't know if I would ever heal it. If there was something that hurt me it was seeing some of my great friends cry. You won't know the sadness you feel until you see your friends cry because they are sad. Hearing how Joshua died made me want to stay off ponds because I did not want my parents to feel the same pain as Joshua Wilcox's parents. It made me want to take more caution when doing anything for a very long time.

Going to the funeral for him was one of the hardest things I have ever done and it devastated me. Seeing his casket and his hockey stick next to it, wrecked me. The last video of him he talked about why he wanted that certain hockey stick and it was because he wanted to have the same stick as me. Watching that video made me happy but sad at the same time. I couldn't comprehend the fact that I won't ever play a sport with him or even see him again. At the funeral seeing coaches, parents, players, and friends cry made me feel lost, like I didn't know what to do and I was just sad all over again.

I know I can't live my life in fear of what may happen. Instead I choose to make the most of every day. Whenever the minor hockey team I play on gets to the finals we all play to win for Joshua. We keep him with us always, this memory lives in all of our hearts and his spirit is in every puck pass, every goal scored.

Christopher Harris is a thirteen year old boy from Lethbridge, Newfoundland and Labrador, who lives with his parents, sister and a dog named Molly. Christopher is an accomplished athlete, who participates in many sports in his free time. His passion is ice hockey and he devotes as much time as possible to this sport, playing in his local minor league, as well as private leagues in the city. His future goals include becoming a pediatrician when he graduates.

Emily Dean
Honourable Mention – Grade 7
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Central Region

LOVE IS GENDERLESS

My friend and I had this joke that in fifth grade we were “married” to each other. I started to spend a lot of time with this girl and I realized that I liked her more than just a friend. I made the mistake of telling someone and they told the girl. Her friend, who always bossed her around, told her that she thought I was weird and gross and that we should not be friends anymore. We stopped talking after that.

Sometime later, I started realizing that this other girl in my class was really pretty. I ended up developing some feelings for her. When I told my friends that I liked a girl, they gave me weird looks. One of my friends, KC, was best friends with the girl I liked and told her. After this, a lot of people in my school started to find out. Someone even told my mom. When people started to ask me about it I simply said that it was a joke and I just wanted to see what people would say.

Now, I’m in grade seven and I still like girls and boys. I was really afraid of what people in my family would think of me but that all changed when my cousin came out as gay a year ago. My family was super accepting and they still love him, no matter what. I found out that my mom already knew for years that my cousin was gay. I decided that I would tell my mom that I was questioning my sexuality. She said that she will love and support me no matter who I love!

A few months ago, someone came over to my house and sat me down on my couch, and told me that they are pansexual. I think they thought I wasn’t going to accept them but I did. I was thrilled to find out that two people I know went through the same thing I did because now I have two people that I can talk to about my sexuality. I did not tell my cousin yet because I am not as close to him as I am with my mom and the person that told me they are pansexual.

I have come to realize that love has no gender. If you love the same gender that is perfectly okay. You are not strange or weird, you are still human. I know that this is hard but you will get through this. It might take a few years but you will get through this. I am enough and you are too.

Emily Dean lives in Grand Bank with her mom and dad. Emily enjoys swimming and even has a silver medal in swimming. She is very into video games and music such as Kpop. She spends a lot of time hanging out with her friends and training her birds. She wants to become an author when she is older.

Felicity Lambert

First Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Labrador Region

NOBODY SHOULD HAVE TO LIVE IN A CLOSET

Her welcoming eyes gazed into mine, I knew.

I was your ideal, middle school girl, decent grades, long silky hair, boy crazed, I was lucky, but not happy. I craved acceptance so badly that I refused to realize that a part of me was missing. Every time I'd walk into school I would be blinded by this stunning girl, but it's just a phase, right?

Every time my peers would ask, "So, who do you like?" I'd be left speechless, my mind wouldn't go to a boy like all of my other friends, it would go to her, but only different people think like that, right?

Every night I'd close my eyes and open them to see her in my dreams, just out of reach, but that's gross, isn't it? It isn't. That's just what society wants you to think. That if you don't fit their definition of "normal" then, you don't deserve to be here, that you're gross, that it's just a phase, that you're different. Well, I am different, but I'm not gross and it's definitely not just a phase. I like girls. Just like she does, it took me a while to accept it but she made it easier. Everytime her welcoming eyes gazed into mine, I knew. She made me feel at home, unlike any boy ever had. I had found my place in the world, now I just had to come out, and it shouldn't be that hard. Besides, I had my amazing sister to help me through the whole thing, and she did. I decided to rip it off like a bandaid so there's not much of a story to tell. All my parents had different reactions, but thankfully, all good ones. My mom and step dad felt it was like any other thing and weren't surprised at all. My dad and step mom were a little more surprised, I think, but still so supportive. My family made me feel safe and loved throughout the whole thing.

After a while I made my sexuality public. Everyone knew, I am bisexual. It was scary at first, but in the end, it was more relieving, like a weight I had been carrying my whole life had been lifted. Like putting in the last piece of the puzzle. I finally got the attention I'd been longing for, but this time, not for the girl hidden in a mask, not for the girl I was pretending to be, but for me. Of course there were people who thought it was a phase, people who thought I was different, people who thought I was gross, that I didn't deserve to be here, but thankfully, most people were accepting. The good outweighed the bad and I finally felt on top of the world. That was three years ago, and now I have new friends who love me for who I am, friends like me.

"If Harry Potter taught us anything, it's that nobody should live in a closet" (Ellen Degeneres)

Felicity is a grade 7 student at J.R.Smallwood Middle School. She loves to write and listen to music. She also enjoys playing piano and basketball in her free time.

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

ADDICTION IS HARD

What comes to your mind when I say addiction? Here's what comes to mine: Addiction is hard, it ruins people's lives, and it makes the people around addicts have a hard time and they don't even realize.

I know what it feels like to see a loved one addicted to drugs and alcohol. I watched my dad get worse and worse every single day for a while. I told him to get help every day. I hated watching my dad go through so much pain.

When I was younger, I was just after coming home and went up to my room. I heard my dad's girlfriend at the time screaming downstairs so I went down and I knew right away something was wrong. My dad was throwing tables and chairs and punching the wall. I got scared and ran over to him to try and get him to stop but he just pushed me away. I didn't know what to do. I went back upstairs and cried myself to sleep. I woke up the next morning with holes in the wall and with him passed out on the floor. It was hard to process because I was so scared but I knew he wasn't okay and that he needed to go somewhere to get help. Every night after that he would get mad out of nowhere and then he would leave the house and come back home later on that night. I knew things needed to change but he also thought that when he stopped drinking or stopped taking drugs it may get even worse.

Me, my nan, and my pop helped him most but it wasn't just us, it was the rehab center he went to. My dad left for two months and wasn't able to leave. He had to stay there and they helped him to heal from his addiction. It wasn't easy though, he had his hard days and his good but they would always say for him to "take it one day at a time". We repeated these words over and over: "believe in yourself". I think us saying that over and over helped him a lot.

When he made the choice to get sober it changed my life completely. One of the best things to come from all of this is the friendship he and I have. The friendship we have is something I would never want to lose. We are best friends and do everything together. We ride dirt bikes and skidoo together and go for drives just to spend as much time as we can with each other. The only reason this has happened is because he went and got help not only for him but me too and he will never ever regret changing.

My dad has been happy and sober for two years. Don't give up on the people you love and don't stop telling them you believe in them. Addiction is hard but don't lose hope.

Brooklyn is 12 years old from Labrador City, NL. Brooklyn enjoys playing hockey, hanging out with friends and riding skidoo and dirt bike. One of her current goals is to become a better writer.

Abigail Lewis

Third Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Labrador Region

BEAUTY IS ONLY SKIN DEEP

“Beauty is only skin deep”. A person’s character is more important than how they appear. I was always okay with how I looked. I was never doubtful about how I looked because my personality is the most important and as long as I was kind to myself and others it didn’t matter. Well, at least that’s what I was told.

It was about March when the news came out that there was a virus outbreak. I never took it seriously because it was on the other side of the world. My friends and I even made fun of it for a while. I wasn’t too concerned until my parents told me to start bringing hand sanitizer with me everytime I left the house and they never really worried about stuff like that unless it was worth worrying about. But even after school shut down I was still unbothered. The teachers said 1-2 weeks. I thought of it as an extra break. It wasn’t until 1-2 weeks turned into 1-2 months that I realized this was serious. You might be wondering what this has to do with beauty...

During this lockdown, like everyone, I spent a lot of time on the internet and watching tv shows. Mostly on social media, like a lot of time on instagram, snapchat, twitter, tictok, etc... It started out as “oh this is really fun and entertaining” and then turned into “these influencers are literally perfect”, then “why can’t I look like them?”

A couple weeks went by and all I wanted was to look like them; they had the perfect bodies and faces, but I didn’t. After a while, I completely gave in and I didn’t eat and worked out three times a day. I was always so tired I could barely get out of bed and I would pass out sometimes. My parents didn’t think much of it because I’m a growing kid and they were never there when I fainted.

It was a month or two until I realized it wasn’t healthy and I needed to talk to someone. But instead of talking to my parents, which was the right thing to do, I talked about it with my friend, let’s call her Hailey. Hailey had told me that she went through the same thing and had just gotten over it. She was there for me the whole time that I was trying to break the habit of not eating and not taking care of my body. It took a little while but I did. She reminded me that I was beautiful and it didn’t matter how I looked because I am loved.

Social media isn’t real, it’s all photoshop. It took a lot to get to this point but I had help and motivation and now I know that it doesn’t matter how I look because my personality really is more important.

Abigail is a Grade 7 French Immersion student in Labrador City, Newfoundland and Labrador. She is a competitive gymnast who also likes to paint.

Johnny Jararuse
Honourable Mention – Grade 7
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Labrador Region

DIFFICULT DAYS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Did you ever wake up one day, expecting it to be like any other day, but it was the complete opposite? Because I have.

It all started when I was visiting my dad. Like any normal day, I woke up to have some breakfast, but then my dad and grandma told me that I had to go and sit in the passenger seat of a police car, and later go on a plane to St. John's. My family met me at the airport to say goodbye. I thought it was kind of weird, because I thought that I was only going to a dentist appointment or something simple like that. But I was wrong.

When I got to St. John's I was tired, because it was 11 o'clock in the night. I was surprised and shocked at the same time. The city was so big and nothing like my hometown. We travelled to a smaller town a few miles away from the city, to the new home where I would be living. I moved into a big house with a bunch of strangers: two teenagers and two adults. These adults switched with other adults every forty eight hours, a constant shift of guardians.

One day, one of the teenagers got really upset and started yelling, screaming, and breaking the walls and the windows. One of the adults brought me and the other teenager into my room and locked the doors. People tried to stop the teenager that was mad, but he was too out of control. This lasted a half an hour, which felt like an infinite amount of time. I fell asleep, and I woke up to see someone fixing the windows and walls. My guardian brought me for a ride, so I felt safe. Earlier, I was so scared that I wanted to go home right away. I didn't even want to have ice cream - and I never say no to ice cream! That night, I cried myself to sleep.

A few months passed by, and I started copying the teenager who threw a tantrum. I am not proud of this, but the good thing was I wasn't living with those teenagers anymore. It was lonely at times, because there was only one guardian and myself. I lived in this house for a little over a year, and then I returned home.

From my experience, I learned some important life lessons, which I can call my turning point. I learned that parents need time to stop addictions. Safe environments are needed. Sometimes children need to leave their parents, so that their parents can learn to fight their unhealthy habits. Leaving taught me not to copy my parents' habits.

Today, I am still in KeyAssets, but in my hometown, and I am content. My move had a big impact on my life. It was hard and difficult, but if it didn't happen I wouldn't be here telling you my story.

Johnny's hometown is Nain, NL. Johnny enjoys playing Minecraft in his free time, where he enjoys creating worlds and finding diamonds. Johnny's favorite subject in school is Math. Johnny can also be found spending time with his younger sister.

Serena Blake

Honourable Mention – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Labrador Region

ENJOY THE LITTLE THINGS

Enjoy the short time that you have with your friends, because you never know how long they'll stay.

It was November 29, 2015, and my family and I were getting ready for Advent/Old Christmas Day. Advent is a holiday where Nalujuit go around filling children's stockings with toys, chips, chocolate, candy, or even clothes. I am Inuit, and Nalujuk's Night and Advent are a part of our culture. Nalujuit are people dressed in sealskin clothes like kamiks (sealskin boots) and pualuks (sealskin mittens).

On this particular Advent Eve my family and I got to "go off" for a couple of hours. We went up the ponds, and had a boil up. We lit a fire and roasted wieners. When we finished, we came back home and went for a ride around town on skidoo.

On Nalujuk's Night, we also go to a Tree Lighting Ceremony at the Nunatsiavut Government Building. A brass band plays Christmas songs, and after the music is done, we shake hands with the Nalujuit. Then we go home and hang our stockings. I usually hang my stockings at my Auntie's house and my own. Hanging more stockings means that you get more presents. My favourite part of Advent is going to bed knowing that a Nalujuk would be visiting me that night, and I would wake up to a stocking full of presents.

Once I got home, I went to my room to relax. It was a long day. I was getting ready to watch some YouTube videos when my mom came into my room. She came in my room and stood in the doorway. She revealed the most devastating news that I had ever received. She told me that my cousin, Grace, died... I could not believe her. I cried. She comforted me. And I cried some more. My mom hugged me. Then my dad came in. My dad hugged me. I still cried.

November 29, 2015, Grace passed away. She was only 7 years old, and she died because of an accidental gunshot. I still don't know many of the details, and they are not important for the story. What is important, is that you know the type of girl that Grace was.

Grace was always very happy. She loved school and she always loved putting a smile on everyone's face. She found ways to make anybody and everybody happy around her. She had a very gorgeous smile, short black hair, and she had beautiful brown eyes. She looked a lot like her mom. Most importantly, Grace was loving, kind, caring to everyone.

See, the thing is, you never know how much time you have left with the people that you love. Take the time to appreciate them, accept them. Every part of them. You never know how long people will stay here or when they will leave. Grace's short life and story taught me to value and appreciate the people in my life. Always.

Serena was born in Goose-Bay, and currently lives in Nain, NL. She enjoys spending time with her friends and family. Serena's hobbies include playing volleyball, and enjoying nature. Serena's goal is to one day open a bakery.

Amber Payne

First Place – Grade 8

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Western Region

STAR REALIZATION

I never really knew how big the universe truly was...or how small I was, along with all my problems. I never really knew how small, a speck of flesh and blood on a dying rock, how small we really are.

My phone dinged with a message from my best friend.

"Look!" She had sent me a photo of smoke rising from the beach area.

"Wanna check it out?" I had asked. "Could be an alien," I joked.

"Sure, it'll soon be dark; bring flashlights," she warned cautiously.

I packed a backpack and hooked a small ring light to my backpack strap. I hoped it would be enough. I told my mom I was going out and closed the door behind me; I would never walk back into that house the same again.

I began trekking through the woods, up a trail that leads to my best friend's backyard. She stepped out of her house with her phone, a swiss army knife and a Kickstart, a true hero!

We walked down the trail to a road that runs just above the beach. We didn't find anything. Maybe it was an ATV or beach fire, or maybe just a dark peculiar looking cloud. As my light got dimmer and dimmer the more extraordinarily stunning the stars looked. We continued to follow the trail, and as we did it took us onto a higher trail, closer to the woods.

At last I sat down, tired from walking, and looked up at the now very-bright stars. My light had almost completely died, and I didn't really care.

"Look at that!" I exclaimed to my best friend, who was sitting next to me in the snow. I lay back and pointed at the stars.

We lay there for almost twenty minutes before she finally spoke up from where she lay, "Hey, we are...spinning." I glanced over at her and then back up at the large streak of clustered stars. I saw it too. The world was slowly spinning, making me feel dizzy. I was shocked at how big the sky was, how far it stretched.

It was almost frightening, how the stars danced across the night sky, slowly moving and rotating.

Looking at the stars made me feel like I was so small and like there is so much more than my problems and me. There are even more and more stars past what our eyes can see, probably more advanced civilizations, even alien ecosystems. Realizing that there are more people, being born and dying, on this earth right now; there are people in underdeveloped countries are fleeing for their lives, losing their families, and then there's the virus we are facing

right now. The more advanced our space exploration gets the more surprises we will find. They might be surprised, but I know what to expect. I wasn't the only person here...I will never be.

Amber Payne lives in Three Mile Rock, Newfoundland with her little sister, mother, and father. Amber attends school in Cow Head. She speaks English. Amber enjoys writing and reading. Amber also enjoys playing soccer and volleyball. She loves helping animals and loves nature as well. Her goals for the near future are to get good grades and have fun while she is still young and doesn't have as many responsibilities. Amber's plan for the far future is to move away and become either an E.M.T or nurse.

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

Adoption. It was the best in my life but also hurt me the most . It was like I wasn't wanted or I wasn't good enough. I was only 5 years old. I lived in Burgeo at the time which is a couple of hours from Corner Brook.

When I was 5 years old I lived in Burgeo with a mom and dad. I had a house and everything like that but not much food and we had no car. We had to use a wagon to pull things like my sister. My mom and dad would make me sit in the corner if my room was not clean. If my dad was drunk, I would have to find my nan or someone to let me stay for the night. Sometimes, my nan would say no to me and I would have to go back home with my drunk dad. My mom and dad used to go to parties and I would have to have a babysitter. When I went to bed I would be by myself because my babysitter would leave me. When night came, the bedroom door was locked by one of those chain ones you would have to slide upwards. If I needed to go to the bathroom, I would have to wait till morning. I was only allowed to eat at breakfast, lunch, supper, that was the only thing I could eat. I had no friends whatsoever. I never went to school. Then someone called the cops on my parents. They were neglecting me. Then the day came that the social worker came to the house and removed my sister and I. I was so scared I didn't have a clue what was going on. So we got out of the car and walked inside the building and there were two people sitting in chairs filling out paperwork and some other stuff. At the end of the day my sister and I were brought to a house with these people I didn't know. The first night came I was scared but I had to deal with it. My first words to these new people were "I think I'm going to like it here". We still saw my old mom and dad from time to time. It was fun. I wanted to go back with them but I wasn't allowed.

My new mom and dad took us to Disney for a trip. They told us while we were there that we were their forever family. Three years later I was finally adopted by my new mom and dad. My biological mom moved to Irishtown but I am not allowed to see her anymore.

This experience helped me know where I came from and where I got my second chance. When I get older I want to do what my mom and dad did for my sister and I. It made me feel wanted. It made me feel like I was the only person in the world for them. The adoption took time. The love arrived instantly.

Taylor Goosney lives in Cox's Cove which is on the west coast of Newfoundland. She loves to play basketball and to hang out with her friends. She won a hockey award for most sportmanlike player. In the future, Taylor hopes to be a firefighter.

Lily Brock

Third Place – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Western Region

COMING OUT

My turning point took place on a hot July afternoon when I was eleven years old, I remember it almost as if it was yesterday.

As my friends and I walked through the grassy pathway I pulled them to a halt and said that I needed to tell them something. As they stopped a million thoughts ran through my head, some of which were positive, others negative.

I mumbled something which probably sounded gibberish, before finally speaking up and and saying.

“Um, I’ve been meaning to tell you this for a while now and...,” I started, stuttering really bad.

“Just spit it out,” one of them teased, making me more nervous.

“I’m pansexual!” I blurted and immediately regretted it.

They stood silently and I watched. I felt like I was going to throw up. After a couple minutes of silence, and at least one hundred thoughts about what they were going to say, I was overwhelmed with hugs and voices saying that it was fine, and I had nothing to worry about.

Once they calmed down, one of them asked what it meant and assured me she wasn’t trying to be rude and that she was sorry if she was.

I explained that it was when you liked all genders, and when it came to who you liked you were gender blind, and could love anyone.

After that I was a lot happier and it felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. There was a visible change in my personality and even my social life. I would make an effort to talk to people and hang out with them. There was still a problem though, I had to tell my parents.

I didn’t know how. Coming out to them would be a lot harder than a few friends. I could get kicked out, or disowned if they didn’t support it. Even if they did support me, I knew them and they would tell people whether I wanted them to or not.

I decided that I would tell my mom but not before testing the waters.

At supper that night I brought up some people in the community just to see her reaction and know how she felt.

When I told my mom, I rushed it a lot, I had just hopped out of the car to go to school when I said, “Um, I’m pansexual. Bye!” And slammed the door. Once to the school entrance

I noticed a text from my mother saying it was all fine, and she supports me.

Although I have yet to tell my dad, I plan on doing it soon.

Coming out to those friends and my mom really helped my mental health, and made me a lot happier in life. It was a turning point from when I went to hating myself, to learning to appreciate and love myself. I started to care less about fitting in with people, and more about being myself.

Lily Brock, who is she? She is shy at first, but once you know her she is loud and energetic. One of her friends often says she is funny and kind, although she rarely listens. Sometimes she struggles with things like math, science, and being social. But sometimes she excels at things, like currently writing a 1304 word novel, and making sure her little brother is taken care of while her parents sleep late for a treat. That is who she is – all of those things and a little more.

Riley Dimmer

Honourable Mention – Grade 7

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Western Region

MY FIRST DOG, SHADOW!

Dogs are in the top three most owned pets in the world and are owned by 53% of American households. I never could have imagined how much my first dog, Shadow, would greatly change my life forever. Shadow was an amazing dog, he improved my mood greatly, encouraged me to be active, and taught me patience.

Each day I came home from school, Shadow would be so excited, it made me happy to see my dog excitedly awaiting me. Every bad day I ever had was turned into a good day when Shadow would come up to me and bring me his favorite toys to cheer me up, or when I would teach him some tricks. I remember a few days I would be so upset and Shadow would walk to my room and snuggle up by me and I felt a lot better knowing my dog really cared about me. He has given me a sense of joy that no other pet could possibly bring me!

Being physically active is important to me; however, with the growing use of technology kids my age are struggling to get out and be active. Since Shadow was a puppy, I had to bring him for walks daily, teach him tricks and keep him entertained. All of these requirements as a pet owner has encouraged me to become more active. Me, my mom, dad and brother would go for family walks of about 30 minutes each day with Shadow.

Patience is very important to me but it wasn't always my thing as a kid. I was impatient and a little stubborn but when I turned three years old we got our puppy, Shadow. I had to learn to become patient with him when he would chew the legs of our table and chairs, bite us, and when he tried to chew our clothes. All of this taught me to learn to be patient with others and not get frustrated

Even though Shadow is no longer with us today I'm glad he made me happy when I was sad, encouraged me to be active, and taught me to be patient. Shadow has helped me become who I am to this day, and I am so incredibly grateful I had a dog like him. Shadow brought so much happiness to my life! I hope everyone has the opportunity to love and care for a pet. Pets can truly change your life for the better and it is an amazing and wonderful experience to learn about caring and loving for animals.

Riley Dimmer is 13 years old and goes to Corner Brook Intermediate in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador. Riley is in the Late French Immersion program and likes to play volleyball with friends.

Kailey Tucker
Honourable Mention – Grade 7
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Western Region

TEAM JADE!

“If you accept defeat, defeat will come.” That is a quote my Godfather, Jade, composed and lives by. He is also a high school teacher. This quote carried him through his fight with cancer. Cancer is tough, even when you’re not the one going through it. My Godfather was diagnosed with a cancer of the blood called Multiple Myeloma. Jade’s illness has had a huge impact on my life. Watching someone experience a tough situation like this one has taught me a lot about life. It has impacted our relationship, how we live through the Covid-19 pandemic, and taught me important life lessons!

My Godfather’s diagnosis affected our relationship. We could not do all of the things we used to do, like snowmobiling, kayaking, camping, hiking and our weekly take-out meals. Every week I’d look forward to having a special dinner with my Godparents to reconnect and talk about our week. My Godfather has always been there for me ever since I was knee-high to a grasshopper! I am very lucky to have him in my life. Not everyone is lucky to have a godfather, and no one has one as great, caring and fun as mine!

Covid-19 makes tough situations like these even harder. Jade had his stem cell transplant just two months prior to the Covid pandemic and it decreased our visits even more. The pandemic allowed us to FaceTime and relocate our visits outside. They were not the same. When someone has cancer, it is important to be careful of illnesses so you don’t pass it on. Covid-19 makes you feel like you are not doing enough when you are doing all you can. Despite the pandemic, creativity allowed us to bring light to a tough situation and make the most of it!

Experiencing a tough situation like this has taught me many important things about life! I now realize that life is short and that you have to enjoy the little things. Sometimes it takes a situation like this to make us realize what is truly important. I learned that when going through tough situations like these people just want to know that you are there for them! This situation taught me how to be a better human being. It taught me that sometimes it is better to say nothing at all, as people just need you to just be there.

Even though times were hard, there was light at the end of the dark tunnel! This situation was like a boat in that it set sail, went through a storm, and then docked. Jade’s diagnosis may have changed our relationship, how we interacted due to coronavirus, and our outlook on life, but situations like these are tough, trust me. I have been there, done that, and got the t-shirt. To get through such a situation all one needs is faith, hope and strength. “If you accept defeat, defeat will come!” Jade taught me never to accept defeat. He fought and he overcame it!

Kailey Tucker is a student at White Hills Academy in St. Anthony. She comes from an immediate family of four people, but enjoys spending lots of time with other family members and close friends. Kailey loves fishing, especially in the salty waters of Ship Cove. She takes part in many outdoor activities such as kayaking, hiking, running, softball, snowmobiling, skiing, and many more fun and adventurous activities! Taught by one of the best, she learned to play guitar with her godfather’s great assistance.

Grade II

Faith Collier
First Place – Grade 11
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region
THE BIG C

Cancer. A word that will send chills down almost anyone's spine. A word that almost everyone can relate to someone they know and love. A word that my family and I can only refer to as "the big C," as it took my father from us in 2015. I only knew my father for 11 years, and the day I found out that he had cancer I knew that my life would never be the same. Losing a parent is some of the worst pain that anyone can experience, and something that forced me to mature and grow up very quickly.

July of 2013, the summer after third grade. I'm running around my cousin's yard for his 7th birthday. I can still remember the smell of hamburgers and hotdogs on the barbeque, and the fresh summer breeze blowing through our hair. A normal summer day for us kids. Our only worries were how much cake we would be allowed to eat and how late we would be allowed to stay awake that night. However, I was told we were leaving early because my dad wasn't up to the party. "Come on, this is so unfair!" I was so upset that they were making me leave all this fun so early. If only I knew how "unfair" life was about to feel.

Later that night, my mom, dad and I sat down. "What is it?" I asked. At this point, cancer was only something that I knew from TV and movies. "Well, what do you think it is?" Mom responded. I will never forget the look herself and Dad gave me that night. "Well, I don't know." I started to list off all of the possible things, avoiding the answer I hoped most it wouldn't be. Finally, I got the courage: "Is it.. Cancer?" Again, they gave each other the look. How do you tell your 9 year old daughter that her dad has cancer, and you're not really sure what's gonna happen? "Yes," she said, "but we have the best doctors to help him and he's going to get the best treatment possible." Of course, that was what we had all hoped and prayed to be true. The diagnosis was pancreatic cancer, something that I had never heard of, but one of the top 3 deadliest cancers in the world

The first time I ever noticed that he was really sick was when his skin began to have a yellow tint to it. "It has something to do with his gallbladder," my mom said, "it won't be there forever." We would use humour to cope with this, calling him "Homer Simpson," trying to hide how scared this really made us. The yellow went away, but he began to get slimmer and slimmer. Hospital visits were a regular thing. Some days I wouldn't even be able to see him because of treatments. It's sad looking back at these times, and how I thought his skin having a yellow tint was the worst thing to happen. I never could have imagined how much worse it was going to get.

Anytime that I would cry, my dad always hated it. He would say something like "Enough of that now." Thinking about how scared I was, I can't even imagine how scared he really was, but never once did he show it. The only thing that he worried about was my mom and I, and how we were doing. He never wanted us to worry about him.

In May of 2015, after countless hours and nights in the hospital, we decided to get a hospital bed for my living room. A nurse would come in to check on him, but he would continue to worsen. Then came the news, he didn't have much time left. When I heard this, I

was numb. I can't remember any significant reaction, or even what happened within these next few weeks.

Then came the evening of May 12th. I was lying down with my dad on his hospital bed. At this point he was too weak to speak or eat. My mom came and whispered "You should go up and get ready for bed," as we were never really sure if he was sleeping or not at this point. Reluctantly, I agreed. "I love you, dad" I whispered, and to this day I can't even remember if he was able to say anything back. I knew if he could have, he would have. Those were the last words I ever spoke to him.

Not even 10 minutes later, my aunt came upstairs to talk. I know now it was to distract me because she knew something was happening. Then, I heard a cry from my nan and pop's room and my heart stopped. My mom walked in, "He's gone."

The rest of that night is a blur. All my family was there. I had to leave. I went back, they took my dad away. I went to school the next day, and everyone offered their condolences. I felt loved and comforted, but I still had to go home early. The following weeks were filled with funerals and meeting new people I had never known. If I had a dollar for everytime I heard the words "I'm so sorry, Faith," I would be a millionaire. I was sorry too, I never had a father anymore.

Looking back, it's so hard to pinpoint how this was a turning point for me. I had to mature so quickly, for my mom. I realised so early on how life isn't fair sometimes, and how sometimes you never really know what someone is going through. It's been five years, but not a day has gone by where I don't think about him. Learning how to live without a father has been difficult, but I couldn't have done it without my amazing family and friends. The big "C" is something that will always send chills down my spine when I hear it, and cancer is something that takes away some of the strongest soldiers.

Faith Collier is a grade 11 student at Gonzaga High School in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Laila Ibrahim

Second Place – Grade 11

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,

Avalon Region

ALEXANDRIA

What immediately comes to mind when you think of a third world country? Many would say the obvious: corruption, poverty, war, and hunger. As for me, I think of my family, unmatched food, breathtaking sunsets, and an unforgettable childhood.

In the summer of 2017, I visited my hometown in Egypt for the first time in seven years. It all started when I arrived at Dubai Airport with my dad and younger brother. Once we boarded the plane I took out a small notebook scribbling every Arabic word I recalled, annoying my dad with endless grammatical questions. It's hard having a family that you can hardly communicate with on your own, especially after already feeling isolated from them for so many years. Finally, after six hours, the pilot announced we were minutes from landing. As I peeked out the window, I saw enormous green fields of every shade that bordered the busy brick city. Flying over the country was surreal knowing the last time I gazed out my window I could see the chaotic 2011 revolution playing out below. The feeling of being home was priceless.

As soon as I stepped outside the airport parking lot, a wave of culture shock hit me. Huge crowds pushing one another trying to find their loved ones, cars honking nonstop, people trying to sell flowers or offer car washes. This was the complete opposite of Canada, but that's what I loved about it. My uncle picked us up, we stacked our luggage into the trunk and headed to our apartment. I was mesmerized by the congested streets of people selling their fresh produce and animals wandering freely. The faint sound of music from the radio and my uncle and dad chatting caused me to drift off. When I woke up, we were parked next to our apartment. My heart was racing knowing my whole family was only a few flights of stairs away. Taking a deep breath, I opened the door to everyone wearing their biggest smiles ready to greet me. The moment I saw my grandmother we both broke down crying, hugging each other tightly. We all sat in the living room drinking tea while catching up and all my cousins made fun of my thick accent. I dreamt of this moment.

Each day for the next week was the same, I woke up early and went to the local street markets to buy food with my grandmother. I watched her use her impressive bartering skills, and she taught me how to pick the ripest fruits and vegetables. Then my aunts and I would cook breakfast for everyone in the family. Every meal was eaten on the floor, no cutlery. Every food was finger food. In the afternoon we would visit family members in other cities. "Do you recognize me?" was a daily question I was never able to answer. At night, it was the perfect weather to go to the beach and play in the sand with my cousins. Our days spent together were simple yet impactful.

One day my dad took my brother and me to meet some family friends for a desert safari. A jeep picked us up and drove us straight through the desert. The drive was anything but smooth, the bumps almost sent my head through the roof even wearing a seatbelt. The driver stopped abruptly beside a towering hill of sand. Little did I know we had to climb it to get to the village on the other side. As we attempted to climb, my brother and I held each other for support. The sand was hot enough to burn the soles of our shoes. When we reached the top, my exhaustion faded. Nothing mattered except the view of the distant mountains contrasting

the tiny tent village below us. I counted down, “3...2...1!” and slid down the hill to get to the bottom safely.

When I got to the bottom I greeted each Bedouin individually. A group of young kids signalled me over to play some hide-and-seek. Around an hour after I arrived, I witnessed how resourceful their lifestyle was: the same clothes, meals centered around bread, rice and meat, and camels used as transportation. What took me by surprise was their knowledge needed for every aspect of survival. Particularly, they showed me their makeshift hospital filled with endless natural remedies and homes for their personal livestock.

Once it started to get dark, around twenty people gathered around a bright red carpet lit by the crescent moon with steaming food displayed in the middle. I will never forget that dinner. I had never met them before, but they made us feel like family. Remembering how hard they work for things we receive at our fingertips is a humbling experience.

For the most part, Alexandria seemed like one of the best places to live. Before we visited, I would constantly hear my dad complain about our family and friends’ issues living there. At the time I didn’t believe them. In my eyes Egypt was like a utopia. How were they complaining? However, there were a few instances where I witnessed their struggle. Pollution is a major problem in the country: there are one hundred million people but no waste management. Whenever we strolled through the streets you could see layers of trash pressed into the ground. Garbage bins were overflowing into the streets and people’s homes. Not to mention, the majority of people have unstable jobs resulting in homelessness. Charity was a daily occurrence in my family’s routine. Extra food and water went to people we knew needed it. When everyone around you is struggling for basics, you start to feel guilty for how easy things are given to you.

Visiting my family while being mature enough to understand people’s circumstances in my community was something I never knew I needed. Years of being surrounded by western culture made me oblivious to other countries’ situations and way of life. First world problems like poor Wi-Fi are laughable now. Those unforgettable three weeks sent me back to Canada with a new perspective on any issues that arise in my life.

Laila Ibrahim is a grade 11 student at Gonzaga High School in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Alana Gale

Third Place – Grade 11

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District,
Avalon Region

WHEN THE LIGHTS WENT OUT

I come from an incredibly tight knit family. The kind of family that plays board games on Sundays, has riveting debates around the dinner table and screams '70s music as it plays in our kitchen. There are four of us. My Mom and Dad who absolutely adore one another and who have always encouraged individuality and instilled in us hard work. There's me, the baby of the family. The type A, high strung kid who never stops moving and has been planning for university since ninth grade. Then, there's my brother. He's a 19 year old, six foot four gentle giant who absolutely oozes charisma. He is a laid back, social butterfly who is adored by almost everyone he's ever met and has no problem making new friends. He could tell you just about anything when it comes to the stock market and would gladly sit down to a good conversation about any movie in existence, because chances are, he's seen it. Liam and I could not be more different.

About four years ago, Liam was in Montreal for a school basketball tournament. He was in his glee up there. A break from school, a trip without the family, and a chance to play the sport he loved. This bliss however, came to an abrupt end in his third game of the tournament. Liam had been guarding a massive rugby player of a guy, but had been doing a good job at defending him. That is until this guy came barreling through the key to go in for a layup. Liam stepped in front of him, ready to take the charge (which would change possession of the ball), but this player had other plans. He aggressively dropped his shoulder, hit Liam in the head and sent him tumbling toward the ground where he smacked his head and was knocked unconscious.

Liam had had concussions before, but this time was different. He played another 10 minutes before being taken off the floor, something that almost surely worsened his condition. When he was finally taken off, one of the team moms - a doctor - checked him out and knew right away he was concussed. The next two days of waiting for him to come home were excruciating because of the distance between us and how unwell we knew he was. My parents were stressed. I was scared. It was tremendously hard. Then Liam came home, and it got even harder.

Liam had his life pulled out from under him. He was at the hospital, physiotherapist and psychologist constantly. He was told he wasn't allowed to play basketball which had always been his passion. He became irritable and snapped at my parents and I for the smallest things like singing in the car or asking him to put the milk back in the fridge. Everything triggered headaches and nausea. Lights, noise, or excessive movement. In fact, it seemed as though everything set him off. We ate family dinner in almost absolute silence for a year.

As hard as it was watching my brother suffer, I was in pain too. With all their attention on him, I felt as though my parents had forgotten about me. This feeling lasted for months until one of Liam's comments absolutely crushed me and I broke down. My parents realized then what was bothering me, and worked hard to reset the balance of our house.

Over the course of this hell we were living I remember thinking to myself “Will I ever get my brother back?”, “What if he’s never the same again?” It was as if he had been taken hostage. Taken prisoner by brain damage. And the worst thing about it was that I couldn’t help him. We could do nothing to pull him out of this cage.

One night after a particularly hard week, I came home to find an empty kitchen, an empty living room - a noiseless, soulless home. I went upstairs to find my big brother, my rock, lying on his bedroom floor, screeching. My parents, tears flooding their eyes, were on either side of his exhausted body, just holding him. I sat down at the base of his feet and through choked speech I whispered “It’s okay Li, it’s going to be okay.”

It was in this heart shattering, soul-crushing moment that I realized the power of family. It wasn’t until this life-altering year that I learned that family is the greatest force in our world. And you only get one.

Now, thanks to an incredible support system of doctors and loved ones, Liam is better than ever, excelling in his second year of university. We are once again that Saturday Night Live watching, world travelling, ‘80s song singing family- but with a slightly different perspective. And me? I cherish every moment with my family and live every day in extreme gratitude. Because we’re not perfect, we’re not exceptional- but we’re lucky.

Alana Gale is a grade 11 student at Gonzaga High School in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Participating Schools

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

NL English School District – Avalon

Admiral's Academy
Beaconsfield Junior High School
Brookside Intermediate
Brother Rice Junior High School
Crescent Collegiate
Dunne Memorial Academy
Frank Roberts Junior High School
Gonzaga High School
Juniper Ridge Intermediate
Leary's Brook Junior High School
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St. Michael's Regional High
St. Paul's Junior High
St. Peter's Elementary (UIC)
Villanova Junior High

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St. James All Grade
St. James' Regional High
St. Michael's Elementary
St. Peter's Academy
Templeton Academy
Viking Trail Academy
White Hills Academy
Xavier Junior High

In Appreciation

The Learning Partnership would like to thank:

- The teachers who encourage their students to share their stories through the Turning Points program
- The students who write their compelling stories
- The judges, volunteers from the educational and professional community
- The administrative and program staff from the regions of the school district
- Ross Elliott, Program Manager, The Learning Partnership, Avalon, Central, Labrador, and Western Regions, NL

Author Index

Acreman, Elizabeth	6	Harris, Christopher	15
Blake, Serena	21	Hicks, Hope	8
Brock, Lily	25	Ibrahim, Laila	32
Butler, Mia	14	Jararuse, Johnny	20
Careen, Brooklyn	18	Lambert, Felicity	17
Collier, Faith	30	Lewis, Abigail	19
Coombes, Riley	10	Oake, Kamryn	12
Dean, Emily	16	O'Brien, Stacey	9
Derwish, Fatima	13	Payne, Amber	22
Dimmer, Riley	27	Powers, Bridget	11
Gale, Alana	34	Tucker, Kailey	28
Goosney, Taylor	24	Whalen, Layla	7



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Our programs build the essential skills and competencies needed in tomorrow's leaders, innovators and problem solvers. They enhance provincial curricula, are aligned with Canada's innovation agenda, and are made available to students, parents and educators through the generous support of our education sector partners and funding from corporate, government, foundation and private donors.

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