

The Twenty-Eighth “Celebration of Youth” Essay Contest

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PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE STUDENTS RECEIVING HONORABLE MENTION

Contest Theme: Life brings change. What change has happened in your life that has made a big impact on you? Tell us what happened and how you have changed as a result of this experience. How can what you are learning serve you in the years ahead?

EAN BOWIE is a 5th grade student at DC Prep Middle School at Edgewood. He shared: “Life has been hard for me and my family... because our mother died. ... I’m changing a lot as a result of this experience. Like in school, I’m not getting in trouble as much as I used to. At home I’m bonding with my brothers and sisters. ...This experience can help me in the years coming because I will never take things for granted.”

JAYDEN GUIDRY BRANSON, a 5th grade student at Barnard Elementary, was a First Place Winner last year. He wrote in his essay *My Grandmother Rocks*: “My biological mother couldn’t take care of me and my brothers, so from the age of four, I was shuffled around. ... The change that made the biggest impact on me was becoming part of a forever family! My adoption was finalized in February....I had no idea of how great it is to have a grandmother until I met mine.”

NYEEMA CARTER, a 4th grade student at Barnard Elementary, revealed: “I was on a low reading level when the year started. Then Mrs. Majer decided to help me improve. ... Now I am able to read on the 4th grade level. Next I have to work on reading fluency. ..Mrs. Majer is not only happy that my reading levels are moving, but also that I am reading challenging books. ...she taught me how to enjoy reading.”

DANIELA MENDEZ CASTRO is a 4th grade student at Thomson Elementary. She wrote: “Back when I was an only child, I was treated like a princess and I got everything, until one day, a munchkin showed up. ...Sofia changed everything because now she got everything she wanted. Then, another munchkin showed up. ... I felt outraged... and more than a little jealous. But, both of them brought a good change. So, I thank Sofia and Issac for making me a better person.”

DANIELA A. FLORES is in the 5th grade at Bruce Monroe Elementary. Daniela wrote: “Have you ever felt scared when you had to move to a new place where you knew no one and did not speak the language? I felt this way..., when I had to move in the middle of the school year to a new home, school, and country. ... Since first grade, I have learned that I can adapt to changes. This makes me feel more confident about moving on to middle school next year.”

BRENDAN GRANT is a 4th grade student at Barnard Elementary. He expressed: “My life changing event happened on August 10, 2013. It was my brother’s, Justin’s, first day of college at Clarion University. Justin is the first person in my family to go to college. ...my dream of going to college came true too. ... He told me how he got his scholarship...Justin gave me important

advice...work hard and strive to do your best. ...ignore distractions including drug use, gang members, and alcohol. ...This lesson will lead me ...to a successful life.”

XAVIER GREEN is a 6th grade student at Brookland Middle School, and he shared: “...ever since my brother and sister were born, I have learned that I matter as much as they do. I now understand that they have changed my life by showing me I need to be a role model.I have grown up and I believe that we all matter. ...I love them more than anything in the world and I would do anything for them to never get hurt.”

BRIAN GUZMAN, a 4th grade student at Barnard, wrote in his essay, *My Life After the Divorce*:“ I did feel crushed but then I realized this actually had a positive impact in my life. ...when I used to live with my mom and my dad, it was not a house full of love. They used to fight a lot...As a result,...I would have a hard time focusing on my school work, and I would argue with my classmates. After the divorce my mom met my stepfather, Nelson Reyes. ...I now have two fathers that love me to death.”

AUJINAE ROBERTS -FOUNTAIN is in the 8th grade at Eliot Hine Middle School. She loves to write: Remembering her grandmother, she shared: I'll never forget the time when she brought me home a cake for my birthday. ...Grandma Missy did not use public transportation. She didn't have wings and she wasn't so sure about carpooling. So she would walk. ..imagine her with a big cake in her hands for me, her pocketbook, and a black plastic bag with a pepsi in it walking all the way from Landover, MD to southeast Washington DC. I loved her even more for this. ...I knew I was going to have to work harder in life.”

WILLA HANCE is in the 7th grade at Capital City Public Charter School. She wrote: “Then, one day I looked in the mirror and something was different. I didn't see a mistake. I saw beauty. ...In that moment I decided that I was going to make myself healthy, happy, and safe just as everyone else wanted me to be. I ate again. ...I still am working on myself. I still base my life on how people think of me. Whether someone will judge me or not. However, I'm better. I love myself.”

KENIA HERNANDEZ is a 7th grade student at Center City Public Charter School at the Brightwood Campus. She expressed: “Bullying is such a very important part of my life...I know the impact that bullying can have on people. It can lead to depression or even suicidal thoughts. I also know the importance of telling a trusted adult because they can help solve the problem... I can teach other students that bullying is such an important issue that should immediately stop.”

AUSTIN KUANG, in the 4th grade at Thomson, shared: “One day at school...the person in front of me turned and asked, ‘Excuse me, can I borrow a pencil please?’ I snapped, ‘No way!’ Immediately after I said that, I felt that what I said was wrong. So, I said, ‘I'm sorry.’ ...When I got the chance to talk to him, I said, ‘I know why I said that..., it's because I had no friends. I had friends, but they betrayed me.’ This experience will stick with me forever. I think when I'm a grown man, ...I know to think before I speak.”

LAMROT JINFESSA is a 7th grade student at Raymond Education Campus. She shared: “...I had to move from Ethiopia to America...When we landed my parents knew they were on their own. The main setback ..was...we couldn't speak English. For me the only words I knew was HI and Bye. ...I worked hard and now I'm one of the top students at Raymond. .. Moving to America made an impact on me and my family. It gave us a better opportunity.”

AZARIA JORDAN attends Barnard Elementary. She is in the 4th grade and she wrote: “My mom got very sick; there, she had to stay in the hospital. My older sister Zimariyah and I did not want to leave my mom. A few minutes after visiting hours were over, Zimariyah and I fell asleep and my step dad left. After a while the CPS workers came and took us. I did not want to go but I had to....Now, I have realized that you can't always get what you want.”

CATHERINE LOPEZ, is in the 4th grade at Barnard Elem. She wrote: “...my grandmother...said, ‘Catherine, your father left our family when you were little. Now you have a stepfather’....My grandmother told me that my real father who left me didn't care about me. ...I like my stepfather better than my real father. ... He is a person who is always thinking about our family and our happiness. My stepdad changed my mom's life, and mine, ...”

EDWIN LOPEZ MARROQUIN is a 4th grade student at Thomson Elementary. He stated: “Making a mistake can change the way we see people....The change that happened in my life that made a big impact on me is when I left my dad's car key in the trunk. ..I didn't know what to expect. Anger maybe? But, my Dad said, ‘It's okay.’ ... I was so surprised. ... So in the future, I will try not to predict everyone's reactions to situations.

ASA MARSHALL is in the 7th grade at Brookland Middle School. Asa told us” “My life is full of crazy and sad events...It has been a bumpy road for me. Many people see me as crazy, funny, different, smart, motherly, angelic, and much more. Honestly by now, I don't care what people think of me if it's negative. Sometimes I think it's true but I pray and I always get peace of mind that I am someone.”

EVELYN MARTELL-ROBLES is a 4th grade student at Bruce Monroe Elementary at Park View. She shared: “Something that affected me in my childhood was that my parents got arrested by the ICE for the simple fact that they were undocumented workers. ... This situation was hard for me. ...I wanted to have a boyfriend to not feel so alone. ...So remember always appreciate your parents ...because you don't know how long you will have them.”

WALTER PALACIO attends Brookland Middle School and is a 6th grade student: Walter wrote: “Working for the first time with my father was a new experience that had a huge impact. I never truly understood how hard it is to work and make money in this world. ...I can honestly say that I now feel even more blessed and grateful for the things I have and possess.’

ASHLEY ZAMBRANO VASQUEZ is a 4th grade student at Raymond Education Campus. She wrote: “There are three things in my life that have made a strong impact on who I am today. ...I learned to swim. It made me a much more independent person. The second thing that affected me was when my grandparents passed away. I realized how important my family was to me. Lastly, when my mom and dad divorced...my mom played the role of mom and dad. All these changes in life have made a big difference.”