

American Dream

Essay Contest



2023



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF CENTRAL WYOMING

American Dream Essay Contest



2023

THE “TEN PRINCIPLES TO LIVE BY” AS DESCRIBED IN
JAMES P. OWEN’S BOOK, *COWBOY ETHICS*.

1. LIVE EACH DAY WITH COURAGE
2. TAKE PRIDE IN YOUR WORK
3. ALWAYS FINISH WHAT YOU START
4. DO WHAT HAS TO BE DONE
5. BE TOUGH, BUT FAIR
6. WHEN YOU MAKE A PROMISE, KEEP IT
7. RIDE FOR THE BRAND
8. TALK LESS AND SAY MORE
9. REMEMBER THAT SOME THINGS AREN’T FOR SALE
10. KNOW WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE
11. **PERSONAL ETHICAL BELIEF**

INTRODUCTION

Sir John Templeton, a pioneer of financial investments and philanthropy, believed there were a defined set of principles that guide one when living a purposeful and joyous existence. In 1987, he established the Laws of Life Essay Contest in Franklin County, Tennessee, based upon these values. He saw the contest as a new approach to self-assessment that would encourage young people to reflect upon their lives – thereby paving a foundation for a brighter future.

Sir John Templeton's vision spread across the United States and abroad with contests that now take place all over the world. In the mid-90's the Templeton Foundation, Zimmerman Family Foundation and Larry and Margo Bean established the American Dream Essay Contest in our great state of Wyoming. Ten years later, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Wyoming joined the team – helping to facilitate the contest every year.

This year we continue to partner with James P. Owen, author of *Cowboy Ethics*, *Cowboy Values* and *The Try*, as we use these books as a launching point to prompt youth to discover who they are and how they plan to accomplish their dreams. This approach has challenged the youth of Wyoming to reflect and describe how one of the “Ten Principles to Live By,” or their own personal ethical belief, has been a driving or guiding force in their life. Whether a part of their internal guidance from within, the decisions they make every day, or how they inspire the decisions they make for the benefit of their future.

This booklet contains the 2023 first place winning essays from each participating high school. The Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Wyoming is honored to be part of such an amazing and inspiring opportunity as this competition has become a great tradition for our state.

IN APPRECIATION

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Wyoming, who has implemented and hosted this event would like to extend our appreciation and gratitude to the major underwriters who have helped make this year's American Dream Essay Contest a success.

Thank you, and congratulations to the high school students who have dedicated their time and hearts into writing such powerful essays, and to the teachers and sponsors who organized the local contests for their pupils.

Thank you to the state and local judges who donated the time to diligently read each essay and for the difficult task of selecting our finalists. We appreciate the significant job you did this year.

Finally, thank you to James P. Owen and his team for allowing our Wyoming youth the opportunity to evaluate their own values and apply Cowboy Ethics into their personal lives and stories.

Thank you to everyone who devoted their time and effort toward providing this amazing opportunity!

CONGRATULATIONS



1ST PLACE

\$5,000

Tiana Barton
Natrona County High School
Sponsor: Rebecca Sontag

2ND PLACE

\$3,000

Dellana Michelena
Arvada-Clearmont High School
Sponsor: Betsy Mack

3RD PLACE

\$2,000

Dana Porter
Kelly Walsh High School
Sponsor: Bryce Flammang

HONORABLE MENTIONS

\$1,000

Melisa Martinez
Riverside High School
Sponsor: Travis Rapp

Rivers Robinson
Tongue River High School
Sponsor: Andee Marcure

CONGRATULATIONS

LOCAL WINNERS

Tiana Barton

Natrona County High School
Sponsor: Rebecca Sondag

Grace Gibson

Lingle Ft. Laramie High School
Sponsor: John Watson

Dana Porter

Kelly Walsh High School
Sponsor: Bryce Flammang

Justice Battle

Rock Springs High School
Sponsor: Anna Crawford

Jesse Harmon

Sundance Secondary
Sponsor: Casey Harmon

Mackenzie Priest

HEM High School
Sponsor: Tania Ward

Kira Beach

Encampment High School
Sponsor: Leslie McLinskey

Kinsey Jones

Burlington High School
Sponsor: Wendy Kuper

Rivers Robinson

Tongue River High School
Sponsor: Andee Marcure

Avery Benedick

Thunder Basin High School
Sponsor: Deneen Redd

Melisa Martinez

Riverside High School
Sponsor: Travis Rapp

Isabelle Scales

Glenrock Jr./Sr. High School
Sponsor: Julia Turner

Layla C'Bearing

Wyoming Indian High School
Sponsor: Margaret Abrams

Katherine Maxwell

Kaycee High School
Sponsor: Natalie Maxwell

Shawn Turner

Cheyenne East High School
Sponsor: Lt. Col. Christopher Johnson

Gretchyn Farris

Buffalo High School
Sponsor: Karen Blaney

Dellana Michelena

Arvada-Clearmont High School
Sponsor: Betsy Mack

Matisse Weaver

Lander Valley High School
Sponsor: Stacey Stanbury

Aidan Freeman

Hot Springs County High School
Sponsor: Elizabeth Mertz

Sarah Palmer

Wyoming Girls School
Sponsor: Jenny Mutch



1st place

FUELED BY LOVE

By Tiana Barton

Natrona County High School

My alarm clock on my phone screams as I try to drown out its noise forcing myself to get a few more minutes of sleep before I start my day. My eyes feebly attempt to open as I reach over to silence the horrible noise. 5 am. I want to move, but I'm so tired. Then I hear him. My sweet baby begins to stir in his crib on the other side of his room. He starts to fuss. I know he is hungry before he even begins to scream. My legs swing off the bed fueled by love as I turn on my small lamp. "Henry, Momma's coming. I know you're hungry," I whisper loud enough for him to hear. Hearing my voice, his big blue eyes look at me through the bars of his crib. He wants milk. He needs me. It is both strange and wonderful.

I gently pick him up, taken aback by how big he is now. Is it possible he has grown overnight? His soft, little arms wrap around and cling to my neck, and we stand there for a moment in a warm embrace. Squeezing him a little tighter, I walk over to the rocking chair and plop myself down while positioning his body across my

midsection, and he begins to nurse. Though it's been months, it is still amazing to me that I have the ability to nurture and nourish another human being. I watch the window in my room move from dark to light. As I sit in this loving moment with my son, I look back and reflect on how I got here. For a long time, I could only see the darkness; but now, like the dawn outside my window, I see the light. How I've changed.

I had just started my first year of public school in Casper, Wyoming. We moved from a small town in Missouri the previous year where I was homeschooled in a town of only 500 people. In Casper, going to a public high school was daunting, there were over fifteen hundred students. However, this was not the only new thing happening to me. In the pit of my stomach, I knew a change was taking place in my body. A life was growing inside of me, and I was terrified.

I couldn't go to my mom and tell her what happened. The story that hurt so bad. I couldn't reveal my vulnerability, my pain, and my suffering. How could I tell her someone had taken something from me that I did not want to give? That someone had crossed the line and brought darkness into my life? And now, how was a teenager supposed to get a pregnancy test?

I had lived a very sheltered life in Missouri, and things like teens getting pregnant didn't happen all too often, so I didn't know what to do. After school one bleak day, I walked the two blocks to my friend's house to ask her mom for help. I trusted her. It was the only thing I could think of to do.

As I knocked on her front door, I felt the butterflies start to go crazy in my stomach. Walking up the old wooden stairs to her front porch, my mind was ablaze with terrifying thoughts that tried to deter me from my mission. What if she won't help me? What if she thinks I am a horrible person? These thoughts circled in my head, but as her mom opened the door, all my worries evaporated. There was a smile and kindness in her eyes, and it was clear to me that she would help.

"Tia! Come in. Is everything okay?" she questioned. How could she know the battle that was going on within me? The fear I tried to hide from everyone. As soon as I heard those words, the tears broke through the dam I'd carefully built, flooding down my freckled cheeks.

"I think I might be pregnant. I don't know what to do," I managed to sputter between sobs.

"Okay, let's go get a test," she said. I was surprised there was no judgment or condemnation in her

voice. She grabbed her purse, and we started our short journey to Walgreens. I stayed in the car and waited, too distraught to go inside. It felt like forever, but she finally came out and handed the bag to me. I stared at it, trembling the whole drive back to the house.

As I descended the stairs to the bathroom, she gave a brief explanation on what to do.

“I’ll wait outside the door and once you’re done, tell me so I can start the time.” With a huge sigh, I nodded and went in shutting the door behind me. The paper quivered in my hands as I read the directions several times to make sure I didn’t do anything wrong. I couldn’t contain the tears.

“I’m done,” I called out, my throat choked with emotion. I gingerly placed the test on the bathroom sink and then hovered above it. I began to beg. Please be negative, Please be negative. But it did not hear my plea. It didn’t even take the five minutes to show the results. Within seconds, I could see the two dark pink, distinct lines. I was pregnant. Pregnant. I thought my life was over.

Though it was over a year ago, it feels like just yesterday. It’s funny how life can change in a single moment. How one tiny thing, like two pink lines, can change the course of your life. In a second, I crossed the line from being a carefree fifteen-year-old girl to having the responsibility of another human being on my shoulders.

I think back to the fear I had that day. A fear that consumed every fiber of my being. Much like my irrational fear of the darkness I had as a small child: it is the fear

of not knowing what is in the path to come. The fear I felt that day in the bathroom, as my whole world came crashing down around me, dissipated after a while and led way to a different fear. I was left with a big decision to make. Would I keep this baby that didn’t feel like mine or would I give him to someone else?

After eight months of being pregnant, my mom needed an answer to that question. “Tia, I don’t want to pressure you into anything. But you’re going to have this baby in less than a month and your dad and I need to know what you’re going to do. We have to start getting things ready or get an adoption agency put into place to find a family.” My mother’s eyes and voice were full of urgency. The tears started flowing down my face again. I’d been crying for weeks as the pressure to make a decision mounted. I knew the day was coming when I would have to make a choice, but I wanted to put it off as long as possible. This was a decision that crowded out everything else in my mind. Even at night, I had no peace as I tried to decide what to do. I forced myself to imagine giving away my baby to another person. The fact that he could possibly call someone else “momma” broke my heart. Though we’d not officially met, in the final months I grew to know him in how he moved, in his hiccups, and in the way he made me feel.

“Tia, are you listening to me?” my mom asked with a slight sharpness in her voice. I nodded not wanting her to see the tears.

“What do you think I should do?” I finally asked as I took my sleeve and wiped away the tears.

“Tia, you know I can’t make the decision for you. It’s up to you and God.” After saying those words, she grabbed the groceries from behind her seat and walked into the house leaving me alone with my thoughts in the cold, dimly lit garage. I stayed seated in the van and rubbed my round belly. My baby kicked my hand as if he knew what I was going through and wanted to console me.

At that moment I knew what choice I was going to make. I knew the choice God wanted me to make. It was the biggest decision I had ever made in my life. At that moment, I chose to keep my son and be his momma.

I watch the sun rise, and little Henry coos to show me that he is done eating and smiles to get my attention. A year later, I’m amazed that I don’t feel that kind of fear and anxiety anymore. As I look into his big blue eyes my thoughts become hazy as I start to daydream of my future with him. I can see us growing up together. I can see him cheering me on as I graduate med school, and I envision cheering him on through all the milestones he will encounter in life. Henry is the love that fuels me. He gives me strength.

The window is full of light now and the golden rays shine across my room. His belly is full. It’s time for school. I start getting Henry and myself ready for my day savoring my last minutes with him before I have to leave. As I kiss his soft head and say goodbye, already looking forward to seeing him once school is over, I remind myself to live each day with courage. Courage isn’t what I once thought it was. Now that

the darkness and fear are gone, I fully understand. Living each day with courage is coming to school pregnant and ignoring the whispers that others make behind your back about you. Courage is waking up early to nurse your child. Living each day with courage is choosing to do full IB even though it's hard, because my future is my child's as well. Courage is being able to say no to spending time with your friends, at age sixteen, because you need to spend time with your child more. Courage is being able to chase your dreams despite the obstacles and detours that you face on your journey. Living each day with courage looks like a lot of different things, and it is different for everyone. For me, living each day with courage is being proud of being a teen mom. It is finding light in the darkness. I chose to keep my baby, and I know without a shadow of a doubt in my mind that I made the right choice.



2nd place

TO BE PROUD

By Dellana Michelena
Arvada-Clearmont High School

Many people have passions. It is a commonly occurring thing and nothing unusual. A passion is something that one has a love for or is naturally talented at; whether it is chosen that way or just happened to be. When one finds a passion, it can become an obsession, habit, and part of life. One will do almost anything to perfect it down to every last tiny detail because they care so incredibly much about it. They could either boast to others of their great skill or let it speak for itself. Great people with a true love for what they do will likely choose the latter.

The smallest things that someone worthy of looking up to do might seem little to them, but to a bystander are viewed as quite the opposite. All throughout my childhood, this was shown to me by my Great Aunt Bonnie. Hair done. Makeup on. Jewelry to coordinate with a carefully chosen outfit. Almost everything was always planned and ready for the coming day. This was the case nearly every day. These were her usual patterns in all aspects of life, not just in appearance or scheduling.

Each year for Christmas, she would call my mom to get our clothing sizes and would buy each of me and my siblings a pair of pajamas. Every year we would count on getting a pair, and look forward to the comfort they would bring. We could count on the tops coordinating with the bottoms, and on the anticipation of whether we would envy our sibling's pair. We never did.

As a passionate leader in 4H, she helped many kids to discover what they loved, and learn to love it wholeheartedly. While preparing for a variety of things, she would see that everyone had been invited, she would get set up, and she would make sure that everybody felt comfortable, leaving no person out. It could be assumed that it would

be done right if she had done it. She had high expectations to go along with her high standards, which she was known and loved for. It was simple to tell one thing: she loved what she did, and would meticulously perfect it down to each detail.

Through her passions, she involved other people and, as a result, I eventually got roped in. When I was just starting out in 4H, I had to figure out a project. I ended up coming to the conclusion that I wanted to sew a simple peach-

colored sundress to enter in the county fair. At the very start of the project, I was focused and excited to get it made. We had all of the materials laid out and were ready to begin. There were all of the fabrics, scissors, pins, and a large assortment of other items sitting out and ready for use. Though it wasn't her project, she was so excited to teach me how to learn a new skill, as well as the importance of seeing that I made it to best showcase all of the skills I had so carefully learned. A while in though, as a typical nine year old, I started rushing through to get done and forgot all about the eagerness I had just a few hours earlier. Despite it looking alright to me, that might have been because I was inexperienced and in a hurry to finish. I recall after sewing a few seams at one point I went to show her.

"I finished" I proclaimed

"Let me take a look" she requested

I reluctantly handed her the dress, avoiding eye contact knowing exactly what she was going to say but having her tell me anyway.

As I gave her the dress I waited anxiously for her to comment on it and correct me. Instead, she had me come closer and pointed to a crooked seam.

"Miss Dellana, it looks like you rushed a little."

“Well yeah, but it should work shouldn’t it?” I asked, slightly embarrassed. She set the dress slightly aside and looked at me. I knew that I was about to get lectured and I braced myself for it, completely unaware that I was about to get told something I would carry with me from that day on.

“I know that you got the job done, but is this something you are proud of? Could you show the judges this and be fully confident that this is your best work?” I thought about it for a moment, biting my lip and finally telling her my pusillanimous answer.

“Um, probably not.”

After I gave her my answer, she had me grab a seam ripper and take out the stitches that I had so carelessly sewn. Instead of being upset, I surprised myself by being glad that this had happened, and by being happy to redo it. Though this wasn’t a huge event, I finally saw the significance of just doing my best the first time. To me today it means more than it did at the moment. Then, it was for the judges. Now, I am realizing that it should have been for myself.

Time went on, years passed, and things changed. Even her.

To me, she had seemed indestructible as if she had everything under control. And for the most part, she did to the best of her ability.

I had known that she had been sick for a while. Like far too many other people, she had cancer. As a kid, I understood what it meant but looking back I now realize that I didn’t fully grasp the grim and awful effects of it. Partly because

she held her head high not wanting to complain, and partly because I was, like many other kids, living in my own little world, letting very few things snap me out of it.

All in all, life kept going on normally. Every once and a while my parents would give an update on how she was doing and on some of the snippets of her life they had gotten passed on to them. Gradually I received more and more updates, some good and not.

Then something changed. I don’t remember exactly how or when it happened but it was pivotal. I found out that her cancer was terminal, and that she had under a year left. That. That caught my attention.

It was fall and Thanksgiving was approaching quickly, like a due date that seemed far in the distance but wasn’t. Each year, we could look forward to Aunt Bonnie’s delicious and well-known almond rolls. That summer, though she didn’t have much energy all of the time, she taught me how to make them so I could enter them at the fair. This meant so much to me, being that not many people had the opportunity to do this with her and create this memory. Though she was not feeling the best, she made sure to teach me how to do each step correctly and precisely so that we got the best outcome. We made two batches and took the best of them to send off, though almost all of them were uniform anyway. When it finally came to be Thanksgiving, she asked me to bake the rolls for the first time, partially because she was tired and mostly because she knew how much it would mean to me, and that I would see to having it

done right after having her teach me. It was sad knowing that she would not be making them anymore, but special that I had gotten to experience it all with her. Through this, it was displayed that sometimes to do something to the best of your ability, you might need a little help, and that it is ok. There is no need to have shame.

After a few months passed, and holidays with similar situations, it was finally summer once again. I busied myself with the usual summer agenda, everything seemed the same as it typically was. Except for one thing. My Aunt had wanted to spend her last month or so in the big house at the ranch along Piney Creek that she and her siblings had grown up on, to be taken care of by nearby family. I had heard that she moved out to live at the ranch and knew that there was no ignoring it anymore, there was only a short time left we had with her. One afternoon, we went to visit my Aunt Bonnie after basketball practice. She lay there in pajamas, with messy hair, and presented a big smile when we walked in. She always did that part. Being the woman she was, she made sure we were comfortable and asked all about every aspect of our lives.

The next thing she said was something that reflected herself so well. With a raspy voice, she spoke with a laugh: “Sorry girls, I haven’t done my hair and I’m still in my pajamas.”

Considering how weak she was, this would have been astonishing and in a way was, but instead, it came as no surprise. We planned to visit her again soon. A few days later though, Bonnie passed away.

Sitting on the brown leather couch in the living room, my mom received a call. I could see her face drop and instantly I had known what happened, without her saying it. The feeling crushed me.

The grief took hold of each and every one of us. It was like something bitter in your mouth that you can't get out, no matter how hard you try or what you do. I saw it coming. I had to. But it snatched me up anyway and made me feel like I couldn't do

anything more. For the next few days and weeks, I found myself simply going through the motions of life, and not really caring about much of anything.

Many people would then talk about how great of a woman she was. I kept hearing this, but could not shake the fact that she was gone. Why did this have to happen? Then, as if a switch had been flipped in my brain something clicked. She would not want me to waste these perfectly good days of my life sloppily doing everything and caring about little when I could be pushing forwards instead. I had to not mourn what I had lost, but cherish what I had received. Though times were tough, I could still take pride in anything that I did. It didn't have to be perfect, just to the best of my ability. After all, as she would always say and show, why do it if you aren't proud of it? She took pride in everything while she knew that she wasn't going to get better. She took pride in everything she did when she knew that everyone would understand if she let her guard down and gave up. She did this because she took pride in herself and what she did. And what she did was perfecting

everything that she could.

She was not perfect, no one could be. But by striving to show how great she could really be, she seemed like it to me.

Every time now I feel like quitting, like doing the bare minimum, like going into something with a "just get it over with" mindset, I think of her and what she taught me. That no matter how rough the circumstances are, we always must move forward with dignity and pride to make the most out of the life that we have been given.



3rd place

CHILDREN ARE FEARLESS

By Dana Porter
Kelly Walsh High School

Children test fate with every hand swinging to the next monkey bar. They see who can jump the furthest from the swings, completely ignoring the pain in their ankles after the landing. I wasn't so fearless. I was scared less of pain and more of people. It was Him who did that. He will remain anonymous to all who were not involved. He does not deserve the recognition. His name does not need to be spoken. His name haunted me from the age of six to right before my twelfth birthday. I was terrified. At first, I heard the angry screaming during fights, then the cries of pain from Mom. The closet became my safe space away from the violence. Everything progressed at a linear rate. It was small fights to large arguments to screaming matches to hitting. I quickly learned the danger of misbehaving. There was a constant threat looming in the air of the apartment. Be a good girl. Don't step out of line. He will know. He will punish any misbehavior. Lucky for me, I have long been out of that environment. He is in the past, no more punishments. While

living with Him may have been difficult, I can admit that time with Him taught me a lot. I had to rid myself of fear and learn to live with courage, even when the four walls of my room couldn't ensure my safety. It was scary for me to learn, but I did it. I learned how to stand up to him and be courageous. Then I needed to stop lying, and learn that promises to myself are just as important as promises to anyone else, because I matter.

Fear was not an emotion I felt from time-to-time. It was a state of living. It wasn't always like that though. It started small. Little arguments popped up between Him and Mom. It took two months. Two months for Him to become violent towards her. Another five months and it was my turn to experience His wrath. One single step out of the box he drew for me, and that box changed daily, and I got in trouble. Punishments varied from day to day. I would get told to stand in the corner and think about what I did, or I would get my head slammed into the wall whilst being called a "stupid useless kid." I got used to being told I was worth nothing, and that eventually made me think I was. Mom got the worst of it. She regularly had bruises, they couldn't even heal before new ones were placed, but it wasn't as often for me. I listened to her pain daily. All of my anger was growing and being stored in a

box in the back of my brain. One day the box overflowed. When it did, it came hard and fast. I ripped open my door and screamed at Him to get off of her. I told him to stop hurting her. He didn't like me standing up to Him. I was supposed to be scared. I was terrified. I was shaking with fear as I screamed at Him to get off. He stormed over, the floor trembling with each step, and shoved me backward. I tripped and fell onto my back. Lucky for me, my bed caught me. I laid there, knees at my chest, ankles crossed, as he towered over me. He leaned closer. Bad breath was assaulting my face, and I was pinned between His arms. He screamed, spitting on my face, that I had no right to speak to Him that way. I screamed back telling him to get off of me. I kicked and pushed on Him. All the while Mom was behind him, tugging at his hair and clothes and screaming, trying her best to pull Him away from me. My attempts all failed me. I was a ninety-pound eleven-year-old girl. He was a two-hundred-and-eighty-pound man. An idea crossed my mind. It wasn't a good one, and I knew that, but I did it anyway. I gave him a taste of his own medicine. I hit him. Open-palmed right across the face. He stood in shock for a moment. He told me to do it again. I said I would if he didn't get off. That day I realized I had power. I had the right to stand up to Him. That

moment gave me courage, and it still does. Mom did get him off of me, but the shock he went through stopped his thought process. He didn't know how to react. The courage I had built up at that moment has lasted me through the years. I now understand that I need to live each and every day with the courage to stand up for myself.

Child Protective Services became very familiar to me, almost like a close friend. The visits started during my time with Him, but they didn't stop after he was gone. He and mom always told me to lie to them. I was told CPS was bad. I was told they would take me away from my family, and I would get lost in the system. I hated lying, it made me feel sick. I was always nervous about the visits, and I thought CSP would know and would be angry with me for lying. After we left, Mom had a hard time moving on from Him. She turned to drugs to help her cope. After living in the eye of a hurricane the storm hit again, and now I had a baby brother, His son, to look after. Mom would be gone for days at a time. We had no way of knowing if she was even alive. I had just turned twelve, and my grandma's health was fragile at best. Taking care of a newborn seemed impossible, yet we managed. There would be nights where Mom was convinced everyone was out to get her, and nobody was safe from the chaos. I didn't recognize my own mom anymore. I saw the damage being done to both Mom and Gabriel. I knew we had to escape. I made a simple promise to myself. I was going to get myself, and my baby brother, out of that house and away from toxic substances and people. It took a few phone calls

and a truthful meeting with CPS at school, since Mom wouldn't let them come in the apartment. They helped me and Gabriel get out. I was so relieved and scared at the same time. We were going to be safe, but I had no clue what the system was like. Despite my fear, I kept my promise to myself and got us away from Mom. Promises are important and should not ever be broken. To this day I do not regret what I did, and I am so proud that I was able to keep my promise. Ever since that promise, I have made a point of not breaking any promises I make. Promises hold a special place in my heart, and therefore get treated with the upmost respect. When I make a promise, I keep it.

There are two main things that make up my values and who I am. The first being my courage to stand up for myself. Sometimes life is scary, and unexpected things will be thrown our way. We need to face the world with courage. It helps, I promise. Courage gets me through the day, but the truth is what will get me through life. I stay true to myself by keeping my promises. Promises are built on trust, and trust can make or break relationships. This all depends on if you keep, or if you break your promise. Promises and courage are everything to me because they are me.



Honorable Mention

LOS SACRIFICIOS DE LA VIDA (THE SACRIFICES OF LIFE)

By Melisa Martinez
Riverside High School

Seventeen years have passed since I illegally crossed the “wall” to the United States. The crossing has always stayed vivid in my mind. Luck. The conditions were grim, an endless hot desert, landscapes of beautiful mountains overlooked by the tedious work of crossing them, the various coyotes, stepping foot in the United States for the first time. It took me four times, six months pregnant, with another child already waiting for me across the border. My first attempts were for my eldest to be born in a country of opportunity. A gut-wrenching feeling creeps up again; I could have done more for my child. I wanted a better life for you. No, it’s alright. I successfully had 1 out of 2 here in the United States. I’ll make sure to bear all the suffrage so my kids don’t have to go without anything. These words have always felt foreign, but now as a parent, I’ve promised myself to do everything I can to give my children a life, future, and opportunities.

On October 7, 2005, I was born as the first American citizen in my family. A privilege. My presence

would mark the beginning of all the years to come. My childhood was filled with innocent wonders and beautiful adventures as a kid. While I was bathing in the sun on our small yet vast playground in our backyard, my parents were under the boiling sun, with calloused hands, picking weeds across acres of fields. One day my mom took me out to play, and many people were there. I smiled as I ran through aisles of dirt, picking weeds. I’ve always loved the feeling of the sun kissing my skin. My mother smiled back at me; I hadn’t noticed it didn’t reach her eyes. My mom had taken me out to play, and it pained her. At the ripe age of nine, I was old enough to help provide an income for our family. Although she ensured I never worked long hours and sent me home when I was tired, she stayed behind to finish the work. I had spent seven years working in manual labor and learned that money shouldn’t be taken for granted. A dollar is a dollar.

My parents had never received a proper education. My mother finished elementary school before her parents broke the news that she had to help provide an income and help take care of her younger siblings. My father grew up in a miserable environment with an abusive alcoholic parent and a mother who tried her hardest to shield her children. All their

money would go towards bottles and bottles of alcohol. He could only afford to go to school up until middle school. My father had trauma from his childhood along with the crossing and hadn’t known how to handle those problems. He had turned into the thing he hated, an alcoholic. I would come home to find him with a twelve-pack, slurring his words, and with music. My mother always told us that he’s gotten better than when they were in the beginning of their relationship. He was more aggressive back then but never got physical or touched her because although he was an alcoholic like his father, he would never raise a hand on the people he loved.

Education was highly pushed forward to me by my parents. They watched how my brother couldn’t receive various scholarships from the state because he didn’t have a social security number. The frustration my brother felt every time he opened a scholarship only available to American citizens even though they had the same academic qualifications. He would always make sure I knew the privileges given to me. *“It’s so easy for you. You’ll never understand the struggle of being denied or the relief of finally being accepted to at least a couple of scholarships.”* Since then, I grasped every scholarship or academic opportunity given to me, so my

parents wouldn't have to worry about paying for two kids. School is more than a high school diploma or a college degree. It's about being able to tell my parents, who didn't have college access, "we did it."

When my parents and brother migrated to America, they spoke and understood no English. The first year my brother started school, he had to repeat a year. That was the first time he had learned English and couldn't grasp the concept quickly enough. We rarely ate out since my parents had yet to learn to order in a language foreign to them. Then when we did, they would usually point at the food on the menu, hoping the person on the other side of the desk would understand. Once my brother and I spoke enough English, we would become their interpreters and advocates. I would make appointments, and if an American talked to them, I would translate. Anxiety was not an option, even though it always liked to creep up, cloud my brain, and make me stutter. "You just don't want to help us," "You're ignorant; you're just asking a simple question," "You go to school to learn. How could you not know what this is?" Speaking to others has always been an issue for me. "Can you translate this," are words I'm used to now. But my tongue still stutters as I read the words I still don't know.

My mother took English classes given and offered by Greybull's community with other ladies like herself. They provided books, face-to-face lessons, and CDs she would play at the house to engrave in her head. She would use Duolingo and tried to build enough confidence to use her English outside of the house. My mom would even try to

get us to speak to her in English, although we never did. It felt odd to talk to her in English when up until then, we had always spoken to her in Spanish. Old habits die hard, and I only talk to her in Spanish to this day.

My first experience with deportation was in 2016. My uncle was found drunk driving on the highway and was arrested. They discovered he had no papers and deported him to Mexico in just a couple of months. Even before then, my parents had a constant paranoia about ICE finding them. *Never open the door to anyone you don't know, check the windows, hide, let's live in a less populated area, and never let anyone know where we came from.* I was the only one with papers in my family, so I followed every rule out of fright. *If they got taken away, where would I go? I can't live without my parents.* We always hear the news about ICE detaining people in different states. Fear has been instilled in me, thinking they'll be here one day.

My mother has told me she misses being understood. She misses the food, her parents, and the place overall. She loved expressing her emotions through her language and the feeling of having people she knew surround her. My mom loves to tell me stories of her adolescence in Mexico. She lived in a small rancho hidden in the trees and mountains, far away from the city. Music played in the background while she did her chores or walked through the forest with her sheep. She says she was a troublesome child, always getting into fights, but she was always her mother's favorite. It was a little secret between them before she

passed away. Her mother's death had hit her the hardest. It occurred just months after she left for the United States. She tells me she was sobbing through the phone while her siblings told her the news. She wanted nothing but to go back to Mexico. It broke my heart when my mother looked me in the eyes and spoke. Many of the things that left her mouth will never leave my mind. At the end of the day, she did the impossible for me, and I am trying my absolute best for her.

It's been seventeen years since my parents arrived in the United States. Day by day, I am motivated by the chapped hands of my father and mother, who have worked tirelessly in manual labor. I am driven by the countdown until my 21st birthday to give my parents and brother the opportunity of becoming an American citizen. Whenever I feel like giving it all up, I think of my parents, who secured our family, found jobs, and raised my brother and me with their "broken" English. I've figured that neither my background nor my barriers make my potential and value any less, but they reflect my migrant heritage, a vital piece that made up who I am today. Since they had crossed the border, they made a promise and kept it through until the end. I am making a promise to myself to embrace all opportunities my parents have given me and one day return it to them with gratitude.



Honorable Mention

UNTITLED

By Rivers Robinson
Tongue River High School

Pounding. Perpetual pounding. My head seems like it's on fire, and I have no idea where I am. I look around and see a face staring back at me, but she's going in and out of focus. I don't know who it is. I stare at her and think to myself, *why does she look so tired? She looks like she should be dead.* And the truth is, she should have been dead the second she stepped into that house. The girl looks at me and starts to cry. I look around again and she does the same, tears streaming down her face. Music is blasting and lights are flashing everywhere around us. There is no one else in the room; just me and her. Our eyes meet again, and I realize I'm crying too. I take a deep breath and let out a cough. She does the same. I drop my gaze to my hands. She does the same. I move forward. She does the same. I put my hand up to touch her, and my fingertip is met with the cold and empty feeling of glass. I know who she is, and I hate her. I raise my hands up in a fit of rage and swing them forward. My hands meet the glass again, but this time with the feeling of bitterness and

resentment surging through my veins. It's almost as if that feeling takes over my mind and all else drifts away from my control. The glass shatters and both the girl inside and I fall to the ground. In front of me lay the shattered remains of a mirror, and as I look down, I'm swept under an ocean of guilt and realization of who I am; who I've become.

All of my life I have been told to "shoot for the stars" and "follow your dreams", but what the people telling me this don't realize is that is so beyond terrifying. If last year, I was asked to write an essay about my core values, there is no way I would have said yes and thrown myself out there. I would have been too scared. I would have looked at the people around me and asked for their opinion on what I should do. The assumption is they would have looked at me with a disgusted look on their face and said "you do you." Only behind that facade, they would have been thinking of ways to tear me back down and rip me farther away from my dream, father off the edge, deeper into the fast-approaching demise of my kind nature.

Last year, I was the most insecure and broken version of myself. I remember days where I wouldn't even want to get out of bed because I knew that if I was faced with the tiniest hindrance, I would dig

myself deeper into a hole and add the pity I felt for myself into a little box in the back of my mind. At night I would open the box and look inside and find all my thoughts sitting there in a selfish puddle of sorrow. I would justify the things I was doing and thinking about myself and others because I thought I was the victim. When in reality I was the villain, not just to others, but to myself and my mental health. The selfish thoughts I had would turn into fuel for my selfish actions and the little angel that everyone has on their shoulder completely disappeared from mine. I think back, and I can remember certain nights. Nights where the angel wasn't only gone, but was replaced with something evil. In its place was the feeling of obligation to make everyone happy and create an impression of adulthood to my peers. It first started with sneaking out, then it escalated to drinking, then finally: drugs. It took a lot for me to get that way, though. I know why, but I can't put the reasons in order, nor can I justify them. All I can say is I was aware of the consequences I would have to face, and that wasn't even in the realm of my concerns.

I often think about how I could have prevented my downfall, though. *Maybe if I had just stayed home that one night, maybe if I wasn't such a pushover, maybe if I had better friends.* I think about

those possibilities, and I realize that I wouldn't be where I was today if I hadn't fallen off the deep end. The truth is that there was no way of avoiding it. I had horrible friends, and I surrounded myself with the people who I thought would accept me. I can say with confidence that those people had nothing but a negative effect on me and never accepted what I stood for or who I was. Yet, they showed me how fun it was when I could just let go for a while, just take some deep breaths and fall to their level and live as a vacant soul; I thanked them for it.

As a child, I knew my boundaries. I knew where the line had to be drawn, but as I got older, I looked at the line, and stepped right over it. I knew what I did, but I thought that since I already crossed the line, I might as well keep going. In the beginning, I walked, but I looked back every few seconds and wondered what would happen if I just went back. *What if I just turned around and went back into my bed and called someone for help.* I would contemplate it, but eventually discarded the idea. It was too much for me to turn back now, so I kept walking. Days passed and the walk started to have a little more skip in it, and I was having fun on the other side of the line. I didn't have someone on my shoulder convincing me not to give into my destructive, hateful thoughts, and I loved it. I started dancing farther and farther away from the line until it wasn't even in view anymore. The line was consigned to oblivion, and I couldn't have cared less.

People would come to me and ask if I was okay, and I would always reply with "I'm fine". But after a while, the blatant lies started to

become harder to sell. I would repeat the cycle of realizing what I was doing was bad, denying the fact that I was digging myself a deeper hole, and would continue on a path destined for failure. Over time though, the period of realizing my failure became longer, and the thought of changing my ways was more appealing. I would make more stable friends, stay focused more in school and probably have a better attitude. But again, the cycle would take me back to the path. Maybe it was the way my mother looked at me after she found out about my habits. Maybe it was how my old friends saw me for the broken girl I was. Or maybe -just maybe- I finally realized my full potential and had the strength to come out of the tunnel I created. I like to think it was my own choice, but it wasn't really. The reason I started my journey back to a healthy lifestyle was solely because I got caught.

On May 26th of 2022, I came into my house and was met with my demons. In the living room was my mother holding a drug test. She handed it and a cup to me and said, "pee in the cup." I froze. The most blank expression lay on my mothers face as she walked to the bathroom with me. She made me keep the door open in case I decided to put warm water or anything else in the cup. I did as she asked and when the results showed up, I tested positive for everything. It was a three panel test; marijuana, nicotine, and alcohol. I spent hours trying to convince her it was a faulty test, but even through my tears and lies, she saw right through me. She knew what I was doing, and even though I begged her not to, she

talked to our county sheriff about the issue at hand. Since it was my first offense, I didn't have any legal repercussions, but I did however have a complete loss of trust with my parents, old friends, and the rest of the town that knew about my secrets. I spent every night for weeks crying and in pain from my withdrawals. Even worse was the pain of guilt. I failed my family, my friends, and most of all: myself. I eventually stopped getting headaches and nausea, and in that time, I apologized to every person that I hurt during my deceitful past. I was finally stable physically and growing more stable mentally everyday.

I now know that the path I took, even in its fun parts, was the most destructive path I could have taken. I broke bonds with people I cared about and who cared about me. I demolished all trust my parents had for me and ruined my reputation. All of that to come to the conclusion that I was wrong. After 18 months of breaking the law and floating farther away from a shore of love and success into an ocean of disgrace and regret, I am here. I am the person I looked up to as a little girl. I am the person my parents wanted their baby to become. I am the person I thought about in my room those many months ago and wished I was. I am proud of who I am and the bridges I had to cross to get here. I am proud to say that I found my angel again. But most of all, I am proud to say that I walked back toward the line and no longer wanted to be on the other side of it. I not only stepped back over the line, but I dove head first into the prosperous side of life, again. Thankful. Thankful for everything

I had to learn and the obstacles I had to face. Thankful for the people I met on my journey. And thankful for my ability to forgive myself, because now, I can picture that girl in the shards of the mirror, and she is nothing like the girl I would see today. I can make a promise to that broken soul I was in the past, that I will work hard every day to piece the mirror back together and see myself as whole again, so I can be proud of who I've become.



LOVE YOURSELF ENOUGH TO HAVE COURAGE

By Justice Battle
Rock Springs High School

On August 29, 2022 my life changed forever when I witnessed my fellow peers get into a fatal life

changing accident. It would end in the death of one of the students and a forever immense amount of guilt for the other student. Courage helped me move on and survive witnessing something so brutal. The principle of "live each day with courage" has taught me that courage is one of the best things that you can have.

One of my first memories was my mom telling me how important courage is. At the time I didn't know courage was the word for it, but she told me how we have to be brave when facing new things. She said that sometimes things are going to be uncomfortable for us and all we can do is have courage and face it. What she told me got me through the first day of kindergarten, and I didn't know it yet but it was going to help me for the rest of my life.

It was just a normal day for me. I got up, got ready for school and went for the first two classes. On my way to lunch, going the way I always went, my life changed forever when I witnessed my fellow peer get hit and knocked into the air off of his bike and knocked down onto the street. Instantly, I got out of my car, ran up to him and called 911. Unfortunately he didn't make it. I spent a lot of time wondering why it happened and all of the things that could have happened instead. It took me a long time to realize it but courage is what caused me to get out of the car and do what no one else would and call 911. Courage also helped me get up and go to school after the accident.

The accident was eye opening for me. It made me understand that I had to use courage everyday, for

everything. Courage has helped me become a varsity athlete, it helped me be able to compete and rise to the occasion. It helped me in public when no one else would speak up. Courage has played a big role in my life and it continues to every single day. Courage means a lot to me because it was something my mom wanted me to have, it helped me get through one of the darkest times in my life. I use it in my everyday and everyone could benefit from having even just a little bit of courage.

Do you have courage? You might've said no, but courage comes within. Having courage is something that people admire. Love yourself enough to try new things and meet new people. Love yourself enough to have courage.



HIS NAME WAS DOUG

By Kira Beach
Encampment High
School

Courage is a fickle thing; it comes and goes at will and rarely stays for long. I can not claim to have some kind of disease or disability that causes me to find this fleeting feeling and hold onto it, like so many who face catastrophic circumstances. I can not make myself believe I can come out the other side of a dark and dangerous tunnel unscathed, nothing but the flickering flame of false determination to light my way. The only thing I can claim to know about courage comes from the one man who has been the essence of it since the moment I opened my eyes. This man, just as evanescent as the emotion he still embodies to me, was only in my life for a brief seven months. Those seven months, based on photographic and

video evidence, were the happiest in my life.

This man's name was Dougless Brian Beach, and he was my father. I do not remember him but instead stitch together false memories through stories, videos, and pictures. Constantly lamenting over what could have been, had he not made the decision to go rock climbing without a harness that fateful day, has become part of my routine. However I believe that, if given the chance to know his fate, he still would have headed to the mountains with his head held high and his harness discarded at home. He never backed down or succumbed to fear, living each day with the dauntless bravery to persevere through whatever awaited him. The flame of courage, flickering weakly in my hands, roared with an unseen passion in his. It never faltered and only blazed ever brighter with a barely restrained hunger for more. Not even water, a tool he used to extinguish flames of a different kind, was able to smother a single ember of his courageous will. In everything he did, he showed off the roaring fire he possessed.

He was a veteran, serving our country right out of highschool even at the expense of his relationships, never complaining. As told by my mother, his highschool sweetheart of four years, she was so distraught – over not being able to see him because of bootcamp and his eventual service – that she broke it off with him and only rekindled their relationship twelve years later. Throughout all of this, even after loving my mother for such a long time before they split, he held his head high and kept going. He

finished his service to our country and found my sisters' mom, eventually having the two of them, and then after that relationship ended he moved on once more. He found my mother again, and cared for my brothers as if they were his own. All the while he never complained, and he took every change his service in the military brought upon him in stride.

He was a fireman, putting his life on the line every day just to keep the people around him safe, one of his only recognitions a green bench in front of the Cheyenne Fire Department. Something one of his fire buddies told me that sticks to me like glue, is that he didn't have any stories about courage or heroism to tell me. He told me my father viewed the life threatening work he did, that saved countless lives and took endless amounts of courage, as just work. My dad's buddy told me my dad saw it as a privilege to serve and be there for citizens, even signing up for advanced paramedic services the year he passed away.

Most of all he was a father, with soft eyes that looked at me and my sisters as if we held the secrets to the universe, and strong arms that lifted us up and made us feel safe no matter the challenges we faced. One of my sisters told me there was never a moment she could pinpoint where he made her feel safe, because he always did. She said she remembers sitting next to him on the couch, laying her head on his shoulder, and that was the safest place in the world to be. I can only imagine how it must have felt, wrapped in his arms and enveloped by his calming presence everyday, protected from the people and things that wished to do us harm.

Every day I attempt to live up to even a fraction of his blazing inferno, nursing the flickering flame I hold in my hands to a bonfire. Though not as powerful – never as powerful as courage itself – it is brighter and stronger than it's ever been. In everything I do, I try to find and keep some of this ever fleeting feeling and make it stay, to feed it more kindling to grow. I show it through everything I do just as he did; I sing loudly and confidently in my small school choir, I perform in front of a large crowd of people, playing a main part in a musical, I walk into school every day and study on weekends with teachers despite wanting to do anything else, and most of all, I am there for everyone who needs me. I may not be doing anything as important as he did yet, but every day I try to do him justice and be a daughter worthy of his praise. I miss him more than words can express and I love him more than I should be able to. Courage to me is a man, and his name was Doug.



MORALS AND MATERIALISM

By Avery Benedick
Thunder Basin High School

Although I'm young, one of my biggest regrets is how many of my teenage years have been torn away and tossed into the trash like an old piece of notebook paper with eraser stains on it. Love, childhood, morality, friendship, joy, and even memories are all things people don't spend enough time prioritizing in their lives. Society has become way too materialistic when people should worry more about spending their time on meaningful things rather than scrolling social media posts and being insecure about what they find. I wish I had learned how much sentimental value things can have and how important it is to balance that with materialism sooner because now all I'm left with is reflections on what I missed out on.

Throughout my life, I've learned to care deeply about all of those things a lot of people don't think twice about. Friendship, being productive, using my time wisely, and making memories have become my number one priority. I always had friends even though I was bad at making them growing up and I make sure to remember that money isn't as valuable as time. Once upon a time, however, I was totally in the dark about how valuable time is.

I remember sitting in my dad's townhouse. It was spring of 2020 when I was in my awkward teen experimental stage and the whole world decided to flip upside down because of a new virus going around. It was a day like any other and I was sitting on my couch with my golden retriever when I received a message from my mom. She told me that we wouldn't be going back to school due to the recent COVID-19 outbreak and would be confined to quarantine. I was so wrongfully excited that I would get so much time off away from torturous school, but little did I know that my year would become a blur of societal abandonment and social media obsessions.

The first week of being stuck in the house was my pre-teen dream! Facetime karaoke, video games, movies, and social media all started wrapping their strings around me until I was a mere puppet under the control of the internet. There was nothing I cared about more than keeping my Snapchat streaks and never missing an update post from my favorite celebrities. After months of wasting in the corner of my room with my 18-hour screen time "achievement" at the top of my screen like it was a trophy,

it was finally time to go back to school. The only thing I remember was being so excited to see people again; it would never be the same though.

During those months of quarantine, I was doing nothing- including maintaining a social life and my friendships. I had turned into a cyborg that was so codependent on my phone I felt like I couldn't live without it. My life became a cycle of eating, sleeping, scrolling through status updates, watching Netflix, calling some friends, and repeating.

So much of my time was wasted on social media and not worrying about anything else. I could've been making friends, finding love, and even working on myself, but I instead spent over a year of my precious life being useless and now I can hardly remember that entire year due to my lack of memories made. I wish I had cared more at the moment because now I won't ever get a second try. No matter how much money, effort, or how much manifesting I put in, I won't ever get my time back. That chapter of life was ripped out and burned with only ashes and glimpses of regret left to show.

Not very long after I got back into the social world after quarantine, my social world decided to nuke itself and become so destroyed my only answer was to restart completely. My social skills after COVID were disappointing at best. I didn't know how to talk to people anymore and those years in middle school where I should've been "finding my crowd" were skipped. This resulted in freshman me still being friends with the people I met in kindergarten. I thought it

was nice not to have to meet new people, but it turned out to be a big mistake and more wasted time.

People always told me that I wouldn't keep the same friends growing up and I wanted nothing more than to be the exception to that classic high school warning. I wanted to stay friends with the same people so badly that I did everything I could to get them to like me. I changed my personality, kept my feelings to myself, and even did their homework and chores on some days. I had many fond memories with those people, many of whom I was friends with for 10+ years; however, I became so worried about maintaining my friendships, I couldn't see that in reality there was no friendship at all.

One day while I was at lunch, my group of "friends" started saying extremely racist and homophobic remarks at other people's expense, and eventually, it got turned on my family. As they said terrible things, I had an epiphany: these people are not true friends. They treated me poorly and never cared about my thoughts and feelings. This realization terrified me because I had nowhere to go even if I did leave. Charisma and confidence were my weak points and I was just a freshman with no connections. I still decided that I would rather be an outcast than be with people who used me for my smarts and pushover attitude. After considering my options, I left.

The months following were punishing and strenuous. I sat with people I hardly knew at lunch and did my best to connect with them but it just couldn't happen on its own. Then I started getting to

know this girl. She was the yin to my yang and the roar to my lion. She helped me become friends with people so naturally and we became pretty good friends too. If it weren't for her I wouldn't be in my current position with a loving partner, amazing friends, and an overall good outlook on my life. She taught me what true friendship is and that you can't force true friends.

My dad always said true friends are the people you can call when you need to bury a body and know they would help with no questions asked. True friends are the people who like me for me and allow me to be my genuine self around them no matter what happens. The situation just proved to me that I can't make true friends by helping them cheat in school, doing them constant favors, or even letting them make jokes at my expense. Nobody can just "make" true friends, you have to find them. I spent so much time, money, and energy on those dead relationships, and all I got in return, is the feeling of regret knowing I won't get another chance to redo everything no matter how much I spend and wish I could. Friends aren't bought, they're found.

As I edge my way through the thick daisy fields and steep rocky mountains of life I have learned some very important lessons. Always have an open mind, and never judge something you haven't tried or experienced. Use your time wisely because it's all you get. Love more, hate less. Try new things and put yourself out into the world or later you may regret it.

Most importantly, I've learned that no matter how much I dream it's

conceivable, Some things in life just can't be bought. I can never buy back my childhood or preteen years. Time is only something you can spend or waste, you can't gain or save it. I can't ever buy myself, real friends, with money or favors. Never take those things for granted.

I may have many regrets about not focusing on things that matter that I can't ever simply buy, but I learned so much from those experiences. I now live a happy life with an amazing significant other, a friend group, wisdom, and time that I choose to spend in the right ways. After moments of consideration, I decided to go to the trash can in the corner of my room, smooth out the wrinkled pieces of paper covered in eraser and pencil marks, and start writing a new story where I focus on all the things I can get for free as long as I put in the effort.



LIFE LESSONS OF REZ BALL

By Layla C'Bearing
Wyoming Indian High School

110 miles. 2 and a half hours. Every Sunday. Laramie, Wyoming to Boulder, Colorado every Sunday. Practice from Monday through Friday everyday after school. I was only in the 4th grade and trained like a D1 college athlete. School, practice, homework. Everyday. 110 miles every Sunday to make it for a day of hot and loud gyms and warm gatorade with a banana nut muffin.

I was first introduced to basketball at the age I could walk. Just like my brother, I had a little plastic mini hoop and a rubber ball in my hand at all times. I have a vivid memory of my first basketball game. It was at the Civic Center in Laramie, Wyoming. An old creepy place with a terrible gym, shiny floors, and the smell of cleaning

supplies. Little did I know that was soon going to be a place I called home.

Growing up playing organized basketball, as most on the reservation call it, I learned a lot about diversity and racism. At such a young age, I was dealing with prejudiced parents and their offspring who thought that kind of behavior was okay or funny. At the time of course, I didn't know any better and thought it was normal to have things said to me like, "red skin girl", "savage" or even called Pocahontas. It wasn't until I moved back to my homelands, the "rez". Before then I'd been living in Laramie, Wyoming, a college town, for 11 years of my life. Raised with kids from the mansions on top of the hill, and the kids from the trailer parks just down the road. My family wasn't rich, neither were we poor. But having friends from both ends of the stick really taught me how to be a good person. Or at least I thought I was a good person, till I moved back to the reservation.

My first day at Wyoming Indian Middle School was in 2017. I was entering the 7th grade. My family and I moved that summer and spent the whole summer with family and friends. Well, my brother did at least. We walked in through the doors into the tiny cafeteria we'd wait in before heading to class, a glance, a stare, and neck turns, from every angle of the cafeteria. Eyes glued on us. It was like we were fresh meat to a pack of wolves. My brother headed to a table where boys his age were shouting his name to go sit down with them. I was left standing there clueless and lonely. As time went on I developed a small group of friends, and an even bigger group

of what most people would call, “haters”, or “bullies”. I was always the target of a conversation, it was never any good conversation either. I got called white washed, an apple, or just a straight up white girl. I was made fun of for how I dressed, how I talked, how I came off to people. I always thought to myself, “Why’re they making fun of me? We come from the same tribe, school, community, and sometimes even family.”

I had a very hard time expressing myself and getting close to people. Sometimes I wouldn’t even want to talk when a teacher asked me a question because I was afraid of the laughter or things that might be said about my voice or “accent”. I soon came to realize, most people saw me as a threat because of the place I lived at before moving back, and the opportunities I was given. All of that would make sense to me once the biggest sport on the rez would start. Basketball.

Before I knew it, basketball season came rolling around. I was nervous. Before moving back to the reservation, my brother and I were obsessed with watching “The Chiefs Documentary”. A documentary based off of my school and the boys basketball team. It was famous all throughout Indian Country. The documentary was one of the reasons my brother and I wanted to go to Wyoming Indian. Because of that movie, we were passionate about showcasing our talent in basketball once we got the chance. I was nervous for the first practice, but I quickly learned that half of the girls, even some older than me. Didn’t have basic fundamentals or their skill level was not as near as the level I was on, I saw it as an opportunity to

be the first 7th grader to make the A team. I out worked everyone, showcased my knowledge of organized basketball, proved that I wasn’t just some white washed native who thought she could hoop. I knew I could hoop.

Throughout the season, as being the only 7th grader on the A team with the big scary 8th graders, the conversation about me did a full 360. I was soon talked about in a good way, I was praised for my skills in basketball. More and more people wanted to be my friend, and even more wanted to fight anyone that would call me names or diss my basketball talent. I wasn’t quite sure how to feel about this, but as time went on I learned to just stay humble. I didn’t want to let anything get in my head. I was always taught by my parents to remain humble but also be confident in what I do. There is a big difference between cockiness and confidence.

My game developed drastically as the years went on. I am now a Senior at Wyoming Indian High School, playing for one of the best teams in the state, I still get called names and have rumors made up about me. But I’ve learned from the moment I stepped foot back on this reservation, that people will cheer you on but once you succeed, they will be your biggest let downs. I’ve been through many friends, friend groups, whatever you want to call it. But the same thing has happened to me every single time. As soon as I’m doing good, the names and the conversation about me from the 7th grade suddenly pop back up. I’ve grown to let this kind of energy motivate me, to motivate me to be better than I was the day before, to work so hard that people

won’t have anything to say about me anymore.

Going through all of this at such a young age and experiencing bullying taught me to be a good person. On and off the court, people are always watching you. Waiting for you to make a mistake. Success to me is being a good person, but not wasting any time to prove it. Everything has taught me to be a good person, especially basketball. In basketball you won’t let an opponent with a bad attitude affect your game. So why would you let a bad person ruin your success, when there’s so many other people cheering you on. You have to go through good and bad times to get where you want to go.



NEVER GIVE UP

By Gretchyn Farris
Buffalo High School

He was down the hill, chopping wood in the bitter cold. Bundled up, I trudged out into the snow, cold, and shivering, dreading every minute. I walked down and said, why don't you come in, it's cold and we have some wood in the garage. "I started this job and must finish it, he replied." I was confused about why he would turn down the warmth of my house to stay outside. I helped pull the wagon up the hill loading and unloading the wood. After a while, I was too frozen to even move. I asked again, "Why don't you come inside?"

He replied, "You may go in, but I will stay and finish the job. I am not a quitter."

I wandered inside, thinking nothing about it. I was a little girl who was cold, so I was going to go inside. That's what was in my brain that night.

One night, I remember lying on the couch with my older brother, watching a Disney movie. My dad was working in the office, with the help of my mom. Being little, I had an early bedtime and my parents always read to me. I was getting impatient waiting for them, so I walked upstairs. I said, "You have been at this all day! Can you come read to me?"

"Yes," he replied.

As I was lying in bed I asked him, "Dad, doctorate degrees seem hard to get. Why are you still working on it after all these years?"

He said, "It was something I wanted to do, and now that I have started, I will not give up." I fell asleep that night with a thought in my head: I will not give up.

As a little kid, I lived in a small town. My house was six miles away from our school and was at the top of a steep hill. My dad always rode his bike to school unless circumstances wouldn't allow it. Owning a trail-along bike, my brother started riding to school with him every so often. I thought that it would be so cool to fly down the hill on my own bike someday. As the years passed, I was finally big enough to ride the trail-along bike with my dad and my brother would ride alongside us on his own bike. It felt easy zooming down the hill behind my dad and slowly climbing up it with him doing most of the work. The time didn't slow, and soon enough I was able to ride alongside my dad and my brother, zooming down the hill. There were days when it felt as if I was never going to make it back up the treacherous hill. Every time I felt like I was falling behind and

they were out of sight, I would yell, "Wait for me!" and an assuring sound of an awaiting came echoing back.

Sometimes I would tell my dad, "I can't do this. This hill is too big. Can I just get off and push my bike the rest of the way." These thoughts swarmed my mind as we climbed the hill.

My dad would always respond, "You can get off your bike and push, but don't you think you can peddle a little while farther? Don't give up yet, make it a little farther."

With my dad always saying just make it a little farther, I would make it a little farther every day by not giving up. I remember the first time I made it up the hill without pushing my bike at all, feeling like I wasn't going to make it. I felt accomplished by not giving up.

As I entered high school, the workload of homework grew and grew as the semester went on. I felt as if my life was unbalanced, and I couldn't keep up with everything. Like I couldn't balance seminary, homework, family time, my social life, sports, and my religion.

While working on homework, I realized I had four math assignments due on Friday and it was Thursday night. I still had two math assignments left, both of which I couldn't understand. In frustration, I slammed my math books on the floor and said "I give up," and walked into my room. As I glanced to the side of the couch, I saw my dad. He didn't say anything or give me any sort of look. He just sat there like nothing had happened. I walked into my room and sat on the edge of my bed. I was upset that my math

homework didn't make sense. I realized the statement I had let out of my mouth. I give up. It pounded in my head. I felt as if the whole world was going to collapse. Even though my dad never let out any expression when these words came out of my mouth, I felt as if I had disappointed him, like I had let him down. I walked back out into the living room, grabbed my math books, and continued to try and figure it out. After all, giving up was not an option.

Thinking back to when I was younger, my little brother would always make little sayings. One of the things that my dad told him when he was little was "Farris are not quitters." I would repeat this all the time because that's what little kids do: they repeat things.

My dad has had a huge impact on my life, always pushing me to do my best and to never give up. He has taught me that never giving up is one of the most important ethics. As the years have passed, I have found myself in many situations where something is hard and I want to give up. I think of the example he has set for me and keep pushing. I keep on keeping on and don't give up. Giving up is for the weak, I was told as a little kid. As I continue to go throughout my life, I hope I will impact someone with this ethic. So I encourage everyone to NEVER GIVE UP.



THE FIRST STEP

By Aidan Freeman
Hot Springs County High School

Sitting on stage in a grand concert hall full of red velvet curtains, gold lights, and beautiful marble balconies, I was surrounded by life-long friends from left to right. Dressed in flawless black suits, everyone was holding a glimmering metal instrument capable of producing magic with a simple movement of the fingertips. Those near the back of the stage were shuffling papers and arranging their living, breathing marimbas, xylophones, timpani, and chimes; large, beautiful beasts getting prepared to sing their songs and tell their stories. Music is a language that expresses indescribable feelings and produces unthinkable emotions in a way that everyone can understand. Music is the universal language of the world.

After practicing for countless hours in my small, dingy room downstairs, I finally stepped out of my comfort zone and took a shot at auditioning to the Wyoming All-State Concert Band as an alto saxophonist. This annual band was composed of some of the best musicians in the state, and I was struck with dizzying anxiety and fear that I wouldn't make the cut. After months of anticipation, I finally received an email. Because I took a chance and put myself out there, I was miraculously accepted into the band where I would meet wonderful new friends and be able to feel the magic of music along with other nerds like myself.

That first step out of my comfort zone reminded me of my first shaky steps after my surgery years before.

Persistent back pain has always been in our family. My mother has a long and painful history of a displaced disk in her back that constantly had to be worked on. Whenever her back was acting up, she would trick little 8-year-old me into walking on it, disguising it as a thrilling game of balance when she really just needed a good massage. Because of our history, I assumed that my early back pain was normal and just an aspect of our family. When the pain started hindering my focus in class; however, we started to worry. As a family, we began traveling endlessly from state to state to find out what was happening to me.

Through our travels and our search, I was determined to succeed. I wouldn't let my back take my life from me. Looking out the window as our large truck drove down the cracked highway, I anxiously

pondered over what would happen. As the thought of giving up crossed my mind, I was reminded of my grandmother. About how she gave up. About how I couldn't let that happen to me.

I never knew my grandmother, but I've heard stories about how wonderful she was. How caring and funny she was, how much she protected those she cared for, and how she would cook the best biscuits and gravy my mother had ever tasted. Ignorance consumed my thoughts of her until I was old enough to finally ask my mother why I had never met her before.

Believing that I was old enough, she sat me down with a heavy sigh and explained. My grandma passed years before my mom even met my dad. She had always had major depression that she usually handled well with exercises and medication. But before the incident happened she suddenly dove down into a spiral of alcohol abuse and self-doubt. My mother paused, and in that space of time, my young brain already pieced it together.

"She hung herself," she mustered out. The room fell silent.

Within a span of seconds that felt like years, my mind was flooded with a tsunami of questions. I imagined the face I had only seen in pictures happily baking with me, smiling as I clumsily tried to balance on my mother's back, or watching me play music in front of a crowd. All of those memories, and future memories she would have made with our friends and family, were lost. Lost because she didn't have the courage to continue fighting. I wonder if she would be proud of me if she saw me today,

fighting a similar battle that she lost years ago.

After months of searching, I was diagnosed with a progressing case of severe scoliosis. My spine looked like an S, with a 56-degree curve on top and a 52-degree curve on the bottom. Pain shot through my right shoulder blade and left hip—where the curves were the worst—like hot needles piercing by the thousands. The sizzling aches often crippled me to my chair or bed, unable to move without assistance. If my spine continued to weaken I would never be able to pursue my passions; I wouldn't be able to kick above my head for martial arts or handle fast skiing or trail riding, and because my spine was actively compressing my lungs, I wouldn't be able to continue playing music. The doctors concluded that my spine needed to be completely straightened and fused from the upper thoracic spine to the lower lumbar spine. As is the case with all spinal injuries, if the surgery went wrong there was a chance I would be paralyzed and unable to walk again.

On the day of the surgery, I stepped into the Denver Children's Hospital. Unstable on my feet and sick to my stomach, I waited as my parents checked me in. The dwelling tension between the three of us and the unknown creature that awaited was burning through our bodies. The doctor's description of the surgery echoed through my head.

The general procedure of this surgery was pretty interesting to learn about before it happened, though I didn't care much to think about it at the time. The surgeon

makes sure the patient is getting constant blood and oxygen flow and cuts an incision from the top of the hips to the nape of the neck. Spreading the muscles for access, they drill a hole on each side of every vertebra in order to screw supporting titanium bars to the manually straightened spine. During this process, the brain is monitored and constant shocks are sent to the foot of the patient. The doctor knows they impaired the spinal cord when the shocks disconnect from the brain. If this happens, they will loosen the screws and give the cord time to recover. After each bar is placed, a glue is spread on the spine so it heals into a solid bone mass. The incision is stitched up and the patient goes through recovery.

Somehow feeling like I was both drowning in freezing seawater and sinking into rough quicksand, I made my way to the hospital elevator. The massive building had towering walls with colorfully painted circles and flowing lines that attempted to make it look fun and inviting. After a disorienting elevator ride, we finally made it to the orthopedic floor where my parents checked me in. Still shaky, I tried to distract myself by looking at a fantastic LEGO rendition of the hospital that was displayed in the hall, but no matter how much I love LEGOs I couldn't stop feeling that pressing weight on my neck. All I remember from then on was going into the sanitary back room surrounded by professional-looking people in clean coats and gloves, laying on a comfortable bed, and feeling a prick on my wrist.

I woke up in a daze in a completely new environment, surrounded by unfamiliar doctors and nurses. It

reminded me of an old folk's home, with plastic-treated wood floors, white walls, gentle green curtains, and an inviting stature. I tried to move but my muscles didn't cooperate. I had been asleep for days.

Finally, the pain started to seep in.

I was unable to bend my back and was faced with unbearable pain when I tried. It was the type of pain that was indescribable, the type of pain that must be felt to understand. It took me days to finally be able to fall asleep at night because of the constant burning aches and sharp pricks, and I couldn't hold food down. Starving, exhausted, and in constant pain, I continued fighting. Days passed and I was finally able to eat my first food: a cold quesadilla that looked like it was made in seconds. It was the best food I've ever tasted. After uncountable hours of physical therapy, the doctors finally stated that I was ready to stand. With the help of my mother, I stood up from my bed and took my first shaky steps.

Years after my recovery, I got home from school and was greeted by a mysterious letter addressed from "The Honors Performance Series". The letter read that I was recommended because of my attendance at All-State to audition for a position in a large concert band that will be performing in New York in February. Once again taking a step out of my comfort zone, I spent countless hours in the mornings and evenings preparing for the audition. As I sent it in, I was struck with the overwhelming fear that I would be rejected.

This February, 2023, I will be

traveling to New York to perform with some of the most honored students in America. There are over 500 musicians who were selected to spend a week in New York, touring famous sights such as the 9/11 memorial and spending nearly 5 hours every day rehearsing in the grand Carnegie Hall. I had the courage to pursue my passion without simply giving up. I wished my grandma would have been there to see me recover and to celebrate with me.

Before the surgery, I never liked to take chances. The fear of rejection crippled me and forced me into my shell of comfortability, void of risks. But developing the courage to continue fighting through the surgery, to relearn how to walk, and to constantly perform exercises that were somehow both monotonous and painful, pushed me out of that shell and broke the wall of fear I built myself. Courage drove me to audition for All-State and receive the recommendation that I did. Courage pushed me to audition for the Honors Performance Series after receiving that letter. Courage inspired me to take my first steps toward recovery and finally have the opportunity to pursue my passions again after months of being bedridden. I had the same courage to continue fighting that my grandmother lost many years ago. After anyone in this world takes a risk and jumps off the towering peak of their comfort zone, they will be introduced to new and fulfilling opportunities and experiences; they will be introduced to the wonder of living in this unpredictable, terrifying, absolutely beautiful world of ours. All it requires is the courage to take the first step.



FEAR IS AN ILLUSION

By Grace Gibson
Lingle Ft. Laramie High School

Fear is one of the seven universal emotions and is also known as the "most powerful emotion" due to its strong effect on your mind and body. Fear is defined as an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous or likely to cause pain. The fear of failure is one of the many kinds of fear; the feeling that you lack the knowledge or skill to achieve your goals, also known as self-doubt. Next, the fear of opinions and rejection leads to taking on too many tasks and overworking yourself out of the fear of saying no or letting someone down. Change, not leaving a job even though it causes anxiety, or even just the lack of control and not knowing what will happen next, Lastly, the fear of

loss: when something is important to you, you start to fear losing it or getting it taken away, which can cause you to react irrationally and impulsively; a common representation of this is jealousy.

While we've all experienced these fears at some point in our lives, I'm sure there was one in particular that you could relate to more than the others; I know I did: the fear of failure. There have been many times in my life when I either didn't do something because I didn't believe I was good enough, or I did but discredited and discouraged myself along the way. I'm an athlete, more specifically a hurdler, and I have other students around me, friends even, that I have friendly competition with, which I love, but there are moments that I discredit myself when I'm around them because I have doubt in my ability because of the constant struggle of comparisons and standards. I struggle a lot with self-doubt, which leads me to discredit myself to others to lower their standard so that they are not disappointed in me, thus setting myself up for failure. "You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take," said Hall of Fame hockey player Wayne Gretzky. This quote means that you can't succeed unless you try. This quote holds a lot of deep meaning that someone, like myself, should live by in order to motivate them to beat fear and self-doubt because you will never beat fear and achieve your goals unless you take action.

Let's take a moment to consider the origins of irrational fears and why we experience them. At one point in your life or another, you've experienced an unpleasant situation that caused you to fear it. For

example, two years ago, on June 26, 2020, at 1:00 am, someone broke into my home while we were sleeping. My mom heard someone open the front door, so she peaked out of her room and saw him standing there, so she grabbed a weapon and got my brother, my friend, and myself, and we went to the basement while my mom called 911. Everyone was fine in the end, and he left without taking anything. The trauma after that night still taunts me to this day, causing me the inability to sleep without checking if all the doors are locked or fear every time I walk into my home alone. All in all, at some point in your life you will have experienced something that will cause you to have lasting fear, but you should never let it hold you back because the only way to overcome a challenge is to go at it head-on with a proactive mindset.

11 percent of the world's population suffers from the fear of opinions from day to day; however, all of us, at some point in our lives, will experience the fear of rejection. Experiencing this as a child may cause the vast majority to continue to be tormented by it well into adulthood. On the contrary, don't feel like you have to go through it alone; surround yourself with supportive family members and friends and not with people that make you feel self-conscious, judged, and invisible. Are you a people-pleaser? If so, this is one of the tell-tale signs of this fear, along with a lack of assertiveness because you just can't seem to say "no." I have a hard time when it comes to saying "no," even though I can tell in certain moments I am being taken advantage of. It is just easier to say

"yes" than to be confrontational and just say "no." As a fairly emotional person, I don't like being told "no." It makes me feel sad and embarrassed. Therefore, I don't like to tell other people "no," because I don't want to make them feel the way that I do. This will eventually lead to overwhelming stress and the nagging feeling that others are unfairly treating you. What you don't realize is that there are three ways to say "no" in this situation: the broken record technique: do not apologize or justify; tell the truth; and spare the details. The broken record technique is exactly what it sounds like: you repeat yourself in an assertive manner until the point gets across. Do not feel like you have the obligation to apologize to someone just because you don't want to give or do something, along with the fact that you do not need to justify your reasoning for doing so. On the other hand, if you do feel like you need to give them a reason, just tell them the truth and don't get too far into detail because they should just accept the fact that you don't want to do something.

Metathesiophobia is the scientific name for the irrational fear of change. This condition stems from a sudden change in your life that may cause you to become overwhelmingly stressed, which is the leading cause of panic attacks. Consequently, individuals who suffer from this cope by avoiding new situations and lacking interest in exploring new things, thus disabling them from achieving their goals and improving their situation. In my case, I haven't gone through many changes in my life; I've practically lived in the same town and gone to the same school up to this point, but the one major change

that I have experienced is my parents getting a divorce. To give some context, I am a sophomore in high school, and my parents got divorced when I was in the sixth grade. It can be really hard a time because everyone envisions this perfect life in which you live happily ever after with a husband and wife, 2 kids, and the white picket fence: unfortunately, that's not case fore everyone. I honestly have it pretty good compared to others: both my parents live in the same town, and neither is very strict when it comes to a "schedule." I am fortunate to have grown up in the environment that I did, so this change didn't leave me with lasting trauma, deterring the development of this type of phobia, but that is not always the case for many children. Going through this event as a child may cause them to fear that the change was their fault. This self-blame will continue to hold them back in many situations in life.

The fear of change and the fear of loss go hand in hand. For instance, you may be experiencing a change along with a loss, such as a family member, friend, job, item, etc. Losing a love one can cause lasting trauma on people mental and physical well-being. Grieving can be incredibly difficult making you feel overwhelmed with emotions. During this you will experience the five stages of grief: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. Denial occurs right when you lose someone you care about, during this you become numb and in a sort of haze in which you are in a state of disbelief. Anger, you start to lash out because you are experiencing extreme emotional discomfort. Trying find a way to blame yourself

or someone else for the loss, as a sort of outlet. Bargaining, this is a fairly short lasted stage in which you try to find a way to negotiate with a higher power or yourself to try to undo the loss. The depression stage may feel like it last forever, while it does not actually, it is the stage in which people do seem to stay in the longest. You may start to feel stuck or even trapped in your own sadness. And lastly, acceptance, at this point you've finally come to terms with loss and the emotional struggle surrounding it. Throughout this experience try to surround yourself with things and people that bring you joy and that allow you to feel comfortable expressing and sharing your emotions. You should never go through something like this alone.

The word irrational has been repeated multiple times through this essay, which is exactly what these fears are. The longer we allow these to continue the more it will start to take control of your life. Have you ever heard of Murphy's law? This law states that, "the worst possible thing that can happen will happen." To translate this means the more you fear something, the more likely it will occur. When you give into negatives you are allowing it to take control. Think of it is as a manifestation in a sense, transmutation of a thought into its physical equivalent. We are not born with fears, we create them; hence why they are an illusion. We create fake scenarios in our minds and feed off of them. If you ever feel overwhelmed with fear and lack courage to commit, try and remember this quote by Sir Winston Churchill," Fear is a reaction, courage is a decision."

This quote represents how, in moment of weakness, you have two choices, quitting and letting the fear win or making the decision to not let the fear negatively impact you whether its mentally or physically.

To recap, there are 7 different types of fear and not one of them are real. We are not born with them, we create them. Don't let these fears hold you back from your goals and aspirations. Life will be so much more fulling when you beat something that scares you; rather than being riddled with regret when giving up on something you truly care about. Stand tall, have courage, and be confidant.

"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear." - Nelson Mandela



LOVE ETHICS

By Jesse Harmon
Sundance Secondary

Love is the most essential part of our lives and without it, the foundations of our world crumble. Love was the first thing introduced into the world by God and it was the main purpose for our existence as humans. Love is what brings people together despite any differences between one another. Love is the bond that we were all meant to have with each other but without it, conflicts and perilous acts begin between people. God first loved us so in turn, we need to love not just our family but everyone else as well.

Respect and all the other ethics are important in life but none are as crucial as love. When God created the world He created all things out of love, especially us. All people have different ideas, goals, interests, and opinions but learning to love everyone unconditionally is the foundation of

everlasting relationships. Loving people unconditionally means that no matter the condition your relationship is in, no matter the situation, you love them the same throughout any of life's battles. Loving unconditionally means that you don't get to pick and choose when to love but rather that your love never changes in life for anyone. When Jesus came to the earth, He showed the true meaning of love, that it has no boundaries, it has no instruction, it has no anger or want for revenge. Jesus loved His disciples just the same as He loved the men who crucified and killed Him.

In our lives, there are going to be people who do not like us or who do not agree with anything we believe. When you try your best though to love everyone despite any situation you may be in; it can inspire change to happen not only within you but within everyone else as well. When you choose to not see people by their appearance but rather look at the heart of someone and choose to love them it will encourage them to love too. If we as people could choose to not judge by outward appearances and determine people's worth by the way they look, the world could come a long way. If we as people could choose to follow the plans that God intended for us and to follow His version of loving one another, the world could heal. If humanity could just learn to love as it should have always been, there would be no conflict but only happiness and people helping each other get past adversity. That is the true ethic of love and the future that could take form if humanity grasped this foundation of life.



COURAGE IN DIFFICULT TIMES

By Kinsey Jones
Burlington High School

I can hear the fast thud of my racing heart beating against my chest, my palms are clammy. The blood is rising to my face and I can feel the heat in my cheeks. It seems as though every pair of eyes are fixed on me, that every sound and every movement I make is carefully watched, judged, and mentally ridiculed. I can't think, I can't focus, and most of all, I can't function. Then, breaking the silence, the chime of a bell sounds throughout the school, signaling the end of another perfectly normal school day. I keep my head down as I walk quickly to my locker, the only thoughts going through my head are about getting out of this place. The sooner the better I think to myself as I shove an overflowing binder from my unkempt locker

into my backpack littered with overdue assignments and absence slips. My school, nicknamed the Burlington penitentiary, by my Dad, was the bane of my existence (not an exaggeration). I can still feel the dark pit of dread taking root in my stomach the mornings of school days that loomed over my entire day until the evenings when I walked through the door of my house. This has become an everyday thing. Of course, I hadn't always been this way, if you google it, the video of the smiling outgoing girl doing the chicken dance in front of the entire crowd at a varsity basketball game is still on the school's website, as well as the straight A's from past school years still on my record. But what changed?

There had been no traumatic events and no life-altering changes. I had a good life, I had parents who loved me and each other, siblings who were kind to me, and good friends. Well, the answer is simple. Genetically, I was doomed from the start. Mental illness floods my family tree from both sides. I grew up hearing about aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins' problems with their mental health, but what affected me most was my own Dad and siblings' struggles. As I grew up, I watched my older sister and brother struggle with depression and anxiety. I would tag along as my sister and brother went to therapy. What can I say... the doctor had a really nice dog. Even as a kid, I noticed the tension and strain that these issues were putting on my family. While my siblings struggled, my dad did also. I can still remember when my dad would go through his bad spells of depression. Seeing my

Dad cry and hearing his constant comments about wanting to "go to sleep and never wake up again" as a child was difficult. As a kid, my parents were my rock, I relied on and depended on them completely. They were my role models, the people I looked up to most, and for a kid, seeing them struggle was earth-shattering. My mom would try to explain to me in simple terms, "the chemicals in their brains aren't quite right, honey." I never quite realized exactly what was happening, but now, I understand. I understand not being able to eat in the mornings because if I do, I know I'll just throw it up. I understand not being able to sleep at night and only having terrible nightmares when I do. I understand trying and trying so many different medications that only seem to make things worse. I understand how it ruins your life

I remember Sundays when I physically couldn't force myself to leave the car and enter the church. I would sit, for the full two hours of church, in our car. At night I would force myself to stay awake because I knew that when I woke up, I would have to go to school. I wasn't able to function in any of my classes, and I wasn't able to function socially either. During summer break, Sundays were the only time I left my house for any type of social event ever. Family gatherings at my house were the days I never left my room. Simple everyday things like going to the grocery store caused me severe anxiety. Every day was something to be endured, not enjoyed.

"Get out of the car, you need to go to school" It's 7:58 on a cool March morning. My mom and I sit in the car as she tries her best

to get me to leave. By this point, I am already sick to my stomach. To me, nothing was worse than the moments before leaving my car and walking into the front doors of the school. That meant I had the whole day to somehow get through. She was right though. I was one attendance point from forfeiting credit for all my classes. The second part of the anxiety cycle is avoidance. Which, based on my attendance records, was definitely my specialty. When you avoid situations that make you uncomfortable, your brain gets rewarded with short-lived relief. If you continue to do this the same situations start becoming harder and harder until it reaches the point where you simply cannot face these normal everyday things anymore. I know that now, of course, but I didn't then.

I think back to the time when, sitting at our kitchen table, my mother asked the question, "Do you have a plan?" I think back to how I looked her in the eyes and said plainly, "No." Which, of course, was a lie. As it were, taking my life was a thought that frequently inhabited my mind. It started out as just a thought, nothing that I would ever consider actually doing. But, the worse things got, the more reasonable that idea sounded. It was a late night in early May. I stared at the medicine cabinet filled with prescription, and nonprescription drugs. I had totally and completely given up. If this was what living was like, then I wanted absolutely nothing to do with it. It was around one in the morning at this point. Which was, coincidentally, the time that my Dad woke up in the night to give our orphan baby lambs their nightly

feed. Maybe that wasn't such a coincidence after all. Looking back now, I know he saved my life that night.

While on my journey to recovery, something I've come to know is the importance of courage. When one thinks of courage, great sacrifices and bold and heroic acts come to mind, such as going to war or saving someone from a burning building. And while those things are very courageous, I believe courage comes in many different forms, small and large. Courage can be forgiving someone or yourself. It can be taking accountability for your actions. It can even be as simple as getting out of bed in the morning because courage is an everyday thing. Every decision we make, every word we speak, and every action we take requires courage. For me, courage is overcoming my anxiety. It's continuing to try medications until I can find one that helps. It is continuing therapy so I can continue to get better. For someone else, it may be something completely different. This is why I believe every person is just as courageous as the next, that we are all made with courage built into us. Even the first steps we take as babies take courage. And as humans, we all "live each day with courage" because life isn't easy. But even though life is tough, we are tougher, after all we are cowboys.



UNTITLED

By Katherine Maxwell
Kaycee High School

I was sitting on my tiny, pale-blue camping chair when I heard my Grandpa's voice cut through the silence of the night, telling me to come over and sit with him. I slowly stood up and walked toward him as he stared graciously into my eyes. I walked past my Mom and Dad, as well as my Grandma until my pink cowboy boots were at the edge of the chair where my Grandpa was sitting. Then suddenly, he reached his arms out for me. It felt like just an instant before my feet weren't on the ground anymore and instead, I was on his lap and my cold feet were dangling off of the edge of his chair. At that moment, I took it for granted, but looking back now, I know that some things aren't for sale.

I so clearly recall being a tired, young girl nestled on my Grandpa's lap, resting my tiny head on his

rough and tattered jacket. It was dark and cold except for the rays of warm, orange light coming from the campfire, hitting my face. I was slightly uncomfortable as my head was laying directly on his shirt pocket which had a button that pressed into my cheek. Even though we were sitting on a camping chair with the cold, crisp, mountain air blowing on us into the vast, dark mountainside, I still felt so warm and content with my Grandpa's heavy arm around my little body. The smell of smoke and tobacco filled my nose, which wasn't exceedingly pleasant, but I didn't care because I was surrounded by his comforting arm. Through the fire, I could make out the outline of my aunt's face as she stared at the charred wood that sputtered and kicked sparks out, and still had light coming through the cracks. As I sat there without a care in the world, he started to sing. The loudness of his voice shocked me for a moment, as the woods had been almost silent before. I could hear nothing except for crickets chirping, the river running, wood crackling, and Grandpa's strong, raspy voice singing the song that was very familiar to me. It was my song. When I was little, I thought that he wrote the song for me because it had my name in the chorus, but I had figured out by then that he had just enjoyed singing it to me ever since I was a baby.

It was the first night of our annual family camping trip that we always took over Labor Day weekend. Everyone came including my Grandparents, Aunt and Uncle, my cousins, and the rest of my immediate family. My cousins, my sister and I had been exceptionally

close since we were very young. All of the girls had matching outfits and matching teddy bears. My cousin Jay, on the other hand, was the only male cousin at the time, so he never got the joy of matching with us, but he was my best friend. We got to the camping spot that we called Whiny Rock. We named it this because whenever me or my cousins would whine or complain, they would make us climb up onto the big rock and sit there until my parents or other family members came and got us. I was sitting in the tan Lexus on the squeaky leather seats anticipating the time when we would arrive. I sat staring out the window as I saw the pine trees fly by, wondering when I would see Whiny Rock.

We finally arrived and I hopped excitedly out of the Lexus and looked at the tall formation of rock. After embracing my cousins with a warm hug, we climbed up to the very top of Whiny Rock and looked down on our parents. After sitting up there a while and recalling the times that we had been there before, we climbed down and I sat on the ground in front of my grandma, which was extremely uncomfortable because of the pine needles poking me through my jeans. Grandma took my pink headband off of my head and started roughly brushing my strawberry colored, shoulder length hair. She soon started to french braid my hair like she always did on this trip. She braided and braided so that since we couldn't shower, our hair would stay semi clean and neat. I always loved having my hair braided by her. She would tightly twist my hair into the braid section after section. By the time that she braided three heads of

hair, it was time to start a fire.

My dad and grandpa grabbed a few big pieces of firewood that they had previously cut that afternoon, and set them not in the fire pit, but next to it. As my grandpa crumpled some paper towels and set them directly into the middle of the firepit, my dad grabbed small twigs and pine needles to set on top of the paper towel. He carefully and steadily leaned the twigs up against the paper towel one by one to form a teepee shape. Then they added slightly bigger sticks, and then slightly bigger ones, following the same steps as the twigs. Shortly after, my grandpa grabbed a red lighter and lit the paper towel on fire through the small gaps in the sticks. I saw the tiny spark as it reached out from the paper towel that was crumbling and turning brown, to the long dry sticks, and pine needles. I watched, and as the sun set, the fire grew and grew. Then came the moments that are priceless to me now. Soon it was dark and the whole family sat, talked, and watched the blazing orange flames as they kicked sparks onto the dirt.

When my Grandpa started singing, I felt anxious, as I always did when I was the center of attention. As well as this, I felt safe. I loved when I would hear his bold voice surrounding me and filling the silence in the atmosphere. I sat there, with my face tucked into his jacketed chest as I held back happy tears. I wanted to cry simply because when my Grandpa would sing to me, I felt a strong connection with him that made me so carefree. I felt like nothing else in the world really mattered.

The next night, the routine was

the same. We started a fire, ate, and then I was called over to sit on Grandpa's lap. It wasn't as cold that night, but I still snuggled with him because it made me feel secure. He once again started to sing the words that I knew and recognized as my song. "Well, it's two eggs up on whiskey toast and home fries on the side".

There were lots of times when we would be in my grandpa's wood and welding shop, and he would play his old country music while dancing with me. I wasn't really old enough to comprehend how to two step, so he told me to put my feet on his and hold his hands. I followed his directions. One after the other, he moved our feet, mine on top of his, to the beat. I smiled and looked up at him. I took it for granted back then. I didn't realize how happy it made him, for us to dance together to his favorite music. And I now realize that I would never be able to get that moment back, even for every cent that I have.

Grandpa finished his song, and I just sat with him until I felt safe and cozy enough to fall fast asleep on his lap. He didn't mind. He let me sleep and sleep until I slightly woke up when he transferred me to my mom's arms, to take me to bed.

My grandpa took me on rides on the fourwheeler to feed the horses; he would sing silly songs to me and my cousins; he would pull me and Jay around the field on a sled in the winter; he would give us Hershey's with almonds everytime we came over; he would take me to his shop and give us popsicles and Sprite in the summer, even though my parents had told him not too. And he would sing to

me. I think when I was younger I took small moments for granted. I didn't realize I would get too big to stand on his feet and dance, or that I would stop laughing at his funny songs. Sometimes I wish that he would give me popsicles and Sprite. I wish that I could still stand on his feet and dance with him. I wish that he would load me up with Hershey's before I went home, or that he would pull me and Jay behind the side by side on the sled.. But most of all I wish I could sit on his lap and have him sing my song, to me one more time.

Moments like these ones shaped my childhood. I didn't know how important it would be to me, hearing a strong voice that was familiar to me. But I know that special moments are worth more than all the money in the world and they are not for sale.



COURAGE FROM THE SHADOWS

By Sarah Palmer
Wyoming Girls School

I'm the girl that everyone had a class with yet no one truly knows her until she's gone. I've always been there in the background. I've experienced everything with everyone else but still wasn't a part of anything. I am the background character in a Hollywood blockbuster film. The shadow that's always with us, but we don't really pay attention to it. That's me. That is who I am, but that doesn't stop me from living each day courageously.

Courage means so much more than doing something you don't want to do. Courage is waking up in the morning and deciding to get out of bed or to get dressed, or maybe even to eat breakfast. Courage is those first steps taken. It is the

determination that helps us keep moving forward when we want to quit.

Ever since I could remember, I was always the happy kid in the family. The energetic little girl that didn't have a problem in the world. I covered up my pain and suffering with comedy, hoping that my family couldn't figure out how broken I really am. I come from a great supportive family, both parents are still married, one brother, one sister then me. The happy family that all my friends would use against me, for reasons I would never understand. My family has been there for me all along, trying to build me up. Even with those great things, with each new day I felt myself slipping away.

Each sip of alcohol. Each puff of the drugs that I wasted my young, innocent life away to. I slipped further away from my happy life. Thinking it was bringing me closer to parting from my pain when in reality it was getting worse by the day. The addiction, the suffering, and the vicious thoughts of ending my life were all so tempting. They ate away at my brain piece by piece, consuming every thought. The drugs got so intense but that just fueled the desire to continue to use them. What they really did was keep the misery in my life. The only way out I knew was to 'put myself into eternal sleep'.

A wise man once said, "I think the saddest people always try their hardest to make people happy. Because they know what it's like to feel absolutely worthless and they don't want anybody else to feel like that." - Robin Williams.

People pleasing is what I do, but

the ironic thing is that I can't seem to please myself. I do so much for other people to make them happy, why can't I do anything for myself? I'm still trying to figure out why I hate myself so much. Why do I rely on outside forces to make me happy? I hear from people that I am a likable person. If I'm such a likable person, then why can't I like myself? When I look at myself in the mirror, my eyes dart straight to my stomach. I inspect every single perceived flaw. I eyeball the inch-long scars on my thighs, reviving the memories of the pain I released when carving them into my thigh. Feeling better but so much worse at the same time. I cover it up, fearing that people will see how much torture and mutilation that I put myself through.

I put on a mask every day for so long that it became a part of my daily routine, just like putting makeup on. Covering up feelings and hiding emotions from everyone became normal. I hear my family saying "you are so beautiful" I know they are right however, the devil on my shoulder says "don't listen to them, we all know the truth about you". Every time I look in the mirror I see what I think to be true. I see the ugliness and the bitterness within, despite what my family claims. My thoughts are the loudest voices I hear. Everybody else's voices are muffled. I hear people talking to me but my thoughts are keeping me from listening. The shoulder devil whispers in my ear repeating horrible words over and over. Every positive word said is morphed into the negative version.

The words become more grotesque and I become "ugly... disgusting... horrid...hideous." Those painful words are replayed over and over; so many times that I begin to believe them. Each hurtful word brings a wave of even more distressing thoughts. Harming myself feels like the only way to feel anything other than this mental pain. Whether I harm myself by using drugs or scarring my skin I feel anguish. As I run my hands over the wounds I have made upon myself, I feel how jagged and scabrous those scars have become. For some odd reason, I liked the feeling. It gave me the illusion that I am in control. Courage is being okay with giving up control.

I thought I was showing more courage by experimenting with different drugs, but I was far from correct. I assumed being strong was not letting my emotions control me. I couldn't have been more wrong. Pushing myself to become more adrift each time I used drugs. I was so absent that the more I used, the more I was led astray. It was like I was on a ship lost at sea. Each turn I took in the storm, I thought I was finding my way through it, but the sea was so big that it made it impossible to tame the storm. I could have sworn I was brave for taking those turns and trying to find my way through the thick abyss I call addiction. I should have gone straight through to get to the other side. That would have made me face my addiction straight on, and deal with my emotions rather than refusing to even acknowledge them. Things seemed to calm each time I used drugs, but really, I was moving closer to the eye of the storm. Taking these detours, trying to cut out my emotions. I was

trying to mask the pain with drugs and every time I slipped up and let someone see a glimpse of what goes on in my head, I would go chasing dragons again. Searching like a lighthouse for something, anything that will paralyze the nuisance I have become.

I was still searching for the solution when I got sent away to the Wyoming Girls School. Now that I am 7 months sober, I can see how bad of a decision that was. From there, I have discovered that there is so much more to life when it is taken away. Courage is getting my life together again. I wake up every morning, fighting for my freedom back. Courage is so much more than trying to act okay. It is admitting to myself that there is something wrong and I need help getting through it. The Cowboy Ethics have shown me that I only have one life, so don't take it for granted. I have got to get the most out of life by waking up every morning with the courage to be the best I can be.



WHAT IT MEANS TO “RIDE FOR THE BRAND”

By Mackenzie Priest
HEM High School

Most people hear “ride for the brand” and think of cowboys and rodeos, but it can mean much more than that. Some “ride for the brand” exactly how it sounds however, it can be different for everyone. You could be “riding” for a brand could be quite literally on a ranch or in a rodeo, your brand could represent where you come from and your family, or your brand could be what you believe in and want to stand up for. One person can have many meanings of the “brand” they ride for. For me to “ride for the brand” is to stay loyal to those who stand behind you and not give up on them in hard times. Riding for the brand means to stay loyal and that you represent more than

just yourself through your actions. I represent my family, my school, and my coaches and advisors everyday. I ride for my own brand in my own way.

I represent my family through my actions because without them I would not be who I am today. I want to be able to prove to them that I can act the way I was raised. Whether that is through simply using my manners or through putting in the effort to make things happen. Not only that but to represent them and make them proud to be a part of my life. No one wants to let down their family, by striving to make them proud is how I stay loyal to them. Even the parts of my family I do not see often mean a lot to me. These are the people that gave me the things that make me, me. From my blue eyes to my last name, they represent my “brand” which I will carry on. For the older generations of my family my brother and I are the future of their brand. Carrying on their traditions and lessons is one huge part of riding for that brand. To “ride for the brand” of my family means a lot to me, not only to be loyal to them, but to make them proud of the future of the “brand” they have created.

The brand you ride for could be your school. I represent my school through my work and being a good student. Being a successful student shows that the work that my school puts into my education has paid off. Having a 4.0 and the ability to succeed through my schoolwork and clubs shows not only is beneficial to me, but to those who have worked to help me. Being involved in activities and clubs is another way I represent my school and my advisors or coaches

as well.

I “ride for the brand” through FFA. I am an officer and active member of our FFA chapter. I choose to be a part of this club, and a good part at that. Whether it be at contests, traveling, local events, or helping younger members, I ride for the brand our chapter is striving to create. The Bow River FFA is a huge part of my life not only as a student, I have been raised around FFA, and by being so involved I represent not only my passion for the organization but my families as well. The FFA as a whole and our local chapter are very important to my life. I have stayed loyal to our chapter through ups and downs, constant switching of advisors, and changes in leadership. By being a member and wearing that jacket I am proud to represent a new era in agriculture and a new generation of those who respect tradition but embrace change.

Next to the FFA, another brand I am proud to ride for and represent is my sports teams. I participate in three sports throughout the school year. I am proud to represent my school, my team, and my coaches. My “brand” is the same as my teammates, we should all be proud to wear that jersey and play on that court or field. We are a team and it is the most important to act like it. Staying loyal to a team can be seen in a lot of different ways. Showing up-early mornings to late nights-working hard, having good sportsmanship, and staying no matter what. Just because we may not be the best in the state does not mean we should all give up. It can still be fun to play with those who chose to show up, work hard, and love the sport. In our school sometimes we do not have huge

sports teams or amazing athletes. However, that does not give me or anyone else an excuse to give up on us. Even with past losing seasons behind us, we can show up the next season ready to work and have some fun. When I put on that jersey I am proud to play for those who believe in us as a team. Basketball, my favorite sport, is a tough sport. It takes a lot and my coach pushes me to be my best and has since day one my freshman year. Not only do I ride for the “brand” on my jersey but for the one that she has installed in me. One of the hardest things to let go of when I graduate in a year will be this time spent on the court, at practice, and everything in between. No matter what others may say, or do, to put us down I am proud to stay loyal to my team I have played for since junior high.

Red Steagall says “A man’s brand is his own special mark that says this is mine” (Schweiger). Everyone has a different “brand” they ride for. Family, school, FFA, and sports are just some of the parts of my “brand”. I am proud to represent all of these aspects of my life and to stay loyal to them all. No matter what your “brand”, ride for it with pride.

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GIVE YOURSELF TIME

By Isabelle Scales
Glenrock Jr./Sr. High School

Every day I put on that backpack. The backpack that is quite literally falling apart, held together by a whole roll of tape, covered in many mysterious stains. A lot of people ask me why I keep it. Why don’t I just go buy a new one? It’s actually quite simple why. That backpack was with me through my hardest days. It may seem silly, but that backpack reminds me to always get back up. To give myself time. To always stay strong even if I feel like giving up.

For years, I suffered from constant headaches that felt like someone was ripping apart my skull from the inside out. My arms randomly going numb in the most inconvenient places. And getting so dizzy, that I once

puked in the middle of Kohls. It wasn’t till January 2021 that my mom and I decided something needed to change. I was in a new school after being homeschooled for the duration of Covid, and I really didn’t want those annoying symptoms to get in the way. After about a month of waiting, I finally got into the neurologist; he immediately wanted to take an MRI. After the MRI, my mom’s biggest fears came true. She had passed down Chiari Malformation to me.

My mom was diagnosed when she was 26. Her symptoms have never been as bad as mine. But just the thought of me having it made her sick. Having Chiari Malformation basically means that my skull is too small for my brain, so in turn, my cerebellar tonsils push down into my spinal canal, causing unnecessary pressure on my brain and causing all my symptoms. Everything made so much more sense after the diagnosis.

My doctor immediately referred us to a neurosurgeon in Denver at the Children’s Hospital; from there, everything is a blur. In minutes of meeting the new doctor, he was talking about brain surgery. At that moment, all I was thinking was, “Wow, someone is gonna touch my brain.” Obviously, they gave me some time to decide if I wanted to go through with the surgery. But my mom and I knew as we walked out of that building that we would be back very soon.

The day before my surgery, I packed everything I thought I would need into that backpack that would mean so much to me later. Around 4:00 a.m., my whole family loaded into the car to

make that 4-hour trip to the hotel where they would be staying for a week while I was in the hospital. When we got to Denver, we did everything we could because we knew it would be a while before another family outing. We went to the zoo and Super Target and ate all kinds of food we couldn't because of living in Wyoming. Before I knew it, the day was over, and it was time for bed. Everyone dozed off really quick except for me. I lay there for hours just thinking about everything, and nothing but two thoughts crossed my mind: "What if something goes wrong?" "What would my family do without me?" After however long of those thoughts racing through my mind, I heard my mom get up and felt her sit next to me. What she said to me will stay with me forever, and every time I wanna give up, it rings through my mind. "Isabelle, I know this is extremely difficult for you, but you have to remember that no matter what happens, you have to get back up. Every time you get back up and dust yourself off, the fall makes you stronger and pushes you to be better. Everything is gonna be just fine."

In a blink of an eye, I was sitting in a hospital bed in a bright green gown that now sits in the back of my closet, waiting for all the doctors and nurses to come talk to us. A lot of before the surgery has escaped my memory, but I do remember being wheeled into the operating room and how cold and bright it was. Then the anesthesiologist put the mask over my nose and told me to count down from 10. Then the lights went out.

Pain. That's all I could think about, all I felt. I felt like my head had been ripped open and sewed back

together again. Slowly coming out of my haze, I heard my mom speaking to the nurse. Something about it being normal for kids to cry after major surgery. Wait, was I really crying? As I lifted a hand up to my face to feel for tears, I saw 3 more tubes sticking out of my hand, and at that moment, my mom ran over to me and started whispering sweet nothings.

It's bizarre. I don't really remember much after waking up. I have very few hazy memories of the week I spent in the hospital, but they're pretty much all just me puking and watching T.V. I don't even remember the drive home. The drive home felt like 5 minutes to me, but if you ask my mom, it was more like 5 hours because we had to keep stopping. After all, I was in so much pain. But I felt at peace once we got home, and I could finally sleep in my bed. But little did I know the roller coaster was just starting.

For three days after I got home, I was bombarded with hugs, kisses, flowers, and 'get well soon' balloons. I knew that I was pushing myself too far, but I wanted to be strong. I wanted everything to go back to normal. But, as I said, I was pushing myself way too far. On the fourth day home, I went downhill fast. I had a high-grade fever, I was puking, and I could barely move. In true mom fashion, my mom was extremely worried, so off to the E.R. we went.

As soon as we got to the E.R., the doctor was extremely worried and started running tests on me immediately. A C.T. scan revealed what was wrong. I had blood in my brain fluid which was extremely bad because my brain was treating

it like meningitis. Which basically means my brain was attacking itself. Luckily, there was a simple fix to it, and I didn't have to undergo another major surgery.

After that E.R. visit, everything was looking up. I was recovering amazingly, I had a great summer, and I was able to go back to school. Now every time I'm at school, that ratty backpack that was with me through the most challenging part of my life, follows me around. Even though it is falling apart, I carry it with confidence because that backpack symbolizes my strength and always reminds me to stay strong even if I want to give up.



BE TOUGH BUT FAIR

By Shawn Turner
Cheyenne East High
School

Being tough but fair is an important trait for anyone in a position of authority or leadership. It means that you are able to set high expectations and hold people accountable, while still treating them with respect and kindness. It requires a delicate balance between being firm and uncompromising on standards, while also being empathetic and understanding of individual circumstances.

To be tough but fair, it is essential to have a clear understanding of what you expect from those around you. This means setting high standards and being clear about the consequences of not meeting them. However, it is equally important to be open and approachable, and to listen to the concerns and needs of those you are leading. One of the

most important aspects of being tough but fair is consistency. You must apply your standards and consequences equally and fairly to everyone, regardless of their position or relationship to you. This builds trust and respect among those you lead, as they know that you are fair and impartial in your dealings with them.

Another important element of being tough but fair is being willing to give feedback and constructive criticism. This is often difficult, as it can be uncomfortable to tell someone that they are not meeting expectations. However, it is crucial to provide honest feedback, both positive and negative, in order to help people improve and grow. At the same time, being tough but fair also means being willing to recognize and reward those who meet or exceed expectations. This helps to build morale and motivation among those you lead, and creates a positive and productive environment. Ultimately, being tough but fair is about finding the right balance between high standards and kindness, between holding people accountable and being supportive. It requires a certain level of emotional intelligence and empathy, as well as a strong sense of ethics and integrity.

As a leader, being tough but fair can be challenging, but it is also immensely rewarding. By setting high expectations and holding people accountable, you can help them to achieve their best work and reach their full potential. And by treating them with respect and kindness, you can create a positive and supportive environment that fosters growth and success.

In conclusion, being tough but fair is a crucial quality for anyone in a leadership or authority position. It requires a delicate balance between high standards and empathy, between accountability and support. By consistently applying your standards and treating people with respect and kindness, you can create a positive and productive environment that enables those you lead to achieve their best work and reach their full potential.



UNTITLED

By Matisse Weaver
Lander Valley High
School

While many of the principles resonate with me, “Take Pride in Your Work” is the most important in my mind. Pride to me is doing one more rep on the football field. Pride is completing the extra credit on an assignment that is already a perfect score. I take pride in everything I do and not just for the benefits it has for me, but also the fulfillment the people I love take in my achievements. The hunger for learning and the passion for improvement I have practiced in athletics has correlated into successes throughout competition. In football I was honored to be named captain of my team which put me in a position to be the best I could be and bring energy and encouragement to my teammates. I put my full effort into practice, film and games. This resulted in an overtly successful football season for me; I ended up earning All

Conference and All State, but more importantly my team was able to make the playoffs. The sense of fulfillment I gained from these accolades paired with the pleasure it provided to the important people around me was overwhelming. It was pride that drove me to continue to strive for perfection and push myself past the perceived limits I had about myself. This resulted in me putting myself out into a vulnerable position in an attempt to further my athletic career past high school and try to earn a spot on a Division 1 football team. It was a journey of perseverance, and included lots of failed reach-outs, letting go of my ego, self reflection and a renewed focus on why my work mattered. I finally was able to earn a dream offer from the academically and athletically prestigious school of Dartmouth College. This was one of the ultimate rewards of my efforts and I took incredible pride in this achievement because of the immense time and effort I put into continually improving myself and being ready to engage when this opportunity was given to me. I will continue to build a reputation of being the best I can be and the pride I feel in all of my experiences because of the honor I deliver to the closest people around me. These are individuals that have invested so much of their time, talents and efforts into my advancements. I strive to perform tasks well and have high expectations of myself and will continue to encourage those around me. My striving for high standards doesn’t just exist on the field, I carry this same sense of pride through to my academics as well. While excelling in my classes, I also try to bring others along

with me because of the mutual benefit it has on the classroom environment. I have been told that this significantly improves the level of learning that I am a part of and promotes progress for all. The pride I take in encouraging others pushes me to continue to do so because of the happiness it brings me to see others succeed. Pride isn’t just an intrinsic ideal felt by an individual, it is a powerful extrinsic force because of the fulfillment it brings to the group. It presents a happiness unattainable from other opportunities. The explicitly positive effects of having pride in all aspects of my life has been incredibly important to me being able to set and achieve large goals.

THANK YOU TO OUR STATE JUDGES

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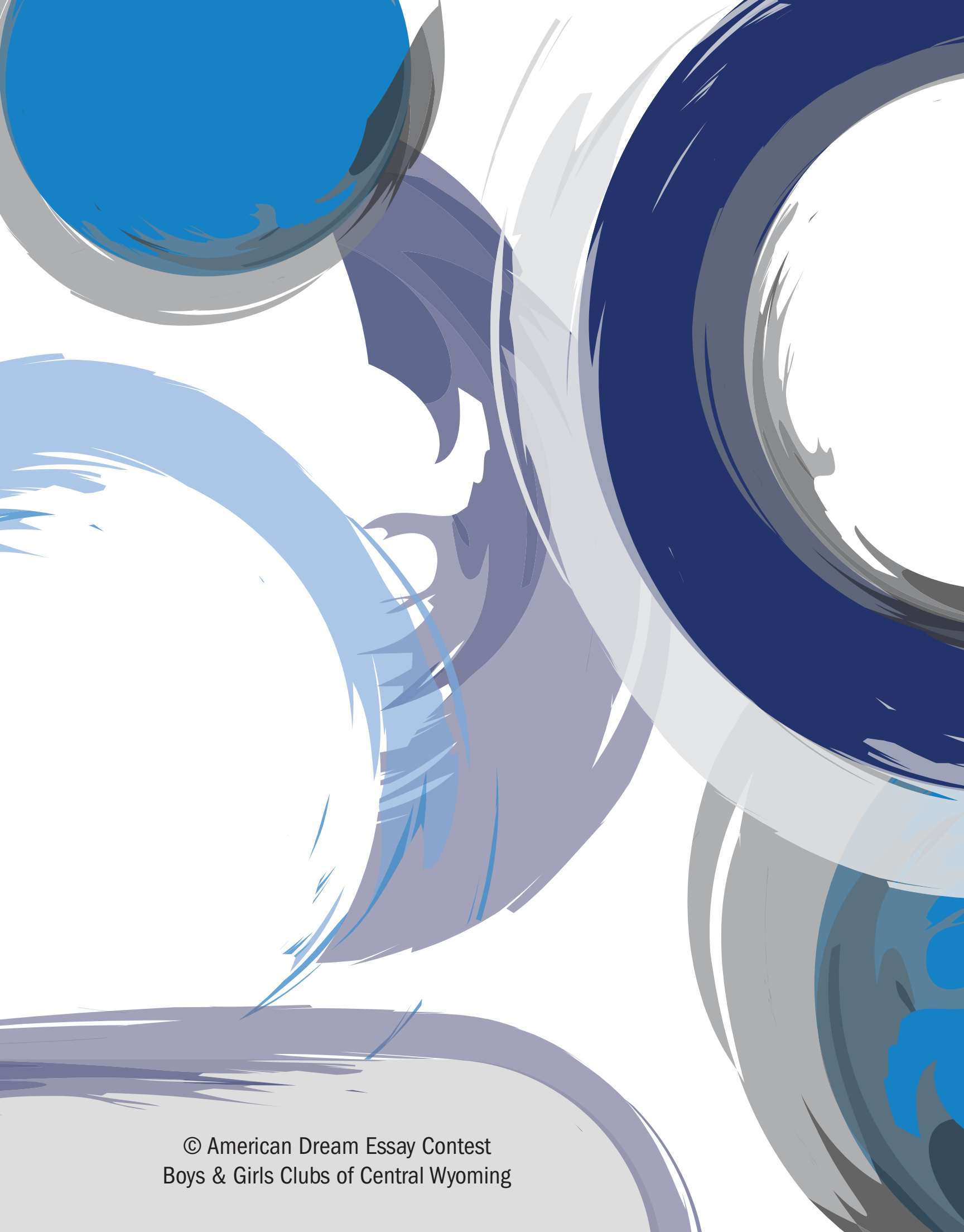
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