

**i AM
GOOD
VIBES**

An Anthology of Personal Narrative Essays
By Seventh-Grade Students from
Washington Heights Academy / M366
Manhattan, New York

Principal: Mr. Renzo Martinez

Assistant Principals:

Ms. Lynne Doherty Herndon and Ms. Mercedes Diaz

7th-Grade Classroom Teachers:

Ms. Stefanie Darabos and Ms. Isvette Filpo

Dean of School Culture:

Mr. Manuel Estrella

School Counselor:

Ms. Antoinette Ansalone

Teaching Artist:

Ms. Samantha Thomson LoCoco

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INTRODUCTION

I AM GOOD VIBES is an anthology of personal narrative essays and one collaborative poem by the seventh-grade students of Washington Heights Academy. The title comes from a warm-up activity wherein all students participated in completing the prompts, “I am...,” “I was...,” “I’m afraid...,” and “I hope...” thus illustrating their hopes and fears and examining who they were and who they are now. Their collaborative efforts formed one of the poem lines published here, “I am good vibes.”

For ten days, students honed their writing skills in preparation for the college application essay. They learned about sensory language, paragraph structure, delicious details, important moments, values, reflection, audience, and voice. The students examined the poetry of Renée Watson. They viewed an animated essay from StoryCorps. They listened to a performed personal narrative from The Moth and analyzed sample college essays from Johns Hopkins University. Each author and artist studied served as inspiration for students to create their own personal narratives using imaginative language and their own experiences. The essayists of Washington Heights Academy discussed poetry with sophistication and responded to writing samples with complex reflections and individuality. Art in its many forms spoke to the students – this is evident in their brave and vibrant personal narrative essays.

In this anthology, you will find one collaborative poem – “I Am Good Vibes” (mentioned earlier). Working individually, each student developed their essay by defining their core values and identifying an important life moment wherein they recall utilizing those values. They expanded upon their essays through reflection and analysis, taking time to discover what they have learned from their experiences and how they might have changed. Every student challenged themselves to step out of their comfort zones and push past what they initially thought they could achieve.

This anthology would not have been possible without the relentless commitment of all the teachers. Thank you, Ms. Herndon, Ms. Darabos, Ms. Filpo, and Mr. Estrella, for helping us bring out the essayists in these young writers. This collection is a testament to what is possible when there is inspired collaboration amongst dedicated teachers.

Reflection and introspection, voice and self-definition, these are the skills the students developed during my time with them. Being able to define who we are and how we respond to and live in the world are timeless and powerful skills that will continue to support these students in their development of voice and growth of self. I could not be prouder of their work and dedication.

Samantha Thomson LoCoco, Teaching Artist, Teachers & Writers Collaborative



COLLABORATIVE POEM



I Am Good Vibes

A Collaborative Poem by the 7th-Grade Students of Washington Height Academy

I fear...

clowns, drowning, and being alone
dolls, GIRLS, and roaches
heights, spiders, traps, and the dark
the death of people I love

I fear...

experience, anxiety, and getting shot
wild animals running after me
not having a chance to be someone
and my family getting hurt

I fear...

losing my mom
losing my loved ones
having nobody to take care of me

I fear...

bodily harm, failure, and awareness
or not doing what I love as a career
being buried alive and forgotten
or getting nowhere in life

I fear...

rats and bugs and geese
death, dying, and having no friends
being in the middle of the ocean – alone
and not being successful

I fear...

having a horrible high school
or 8th grade
or being hurt and left behind

I fear...

that when I am on a roller coaster or
water slide, the ride will break
and fall

I fear...

being in a boat on the water by myself
being young, dumb, broken, and alone
the unknown,
anomalous demons,
and success

I fear...

blood
because it gives me a bad vibe

I fear...

nothing

I very much fear being myself.

I hope...

to become a dentist when I grow up,
a basketball player,
a chiropractor, a chef, an engineer
a successful, confident person

I hope...

to own my own cooking business
that I make it to the NBA
that I'm successful with my music
or in neurosurgery,
neurology or cardiology

I hope...

that my Day 1s don't switch up on me
that I don't fail the grade
that I go to a good high school
and pass the state test
then get into a good college

I hope...

I become a billionaire
and have a nice future
and find a good career
maybe my family could win the lotto

I hope...

I get what I want in life
to travel the world
to be dedicated
to achieve my goals

I hope...

to grow up
that I don't die at age 25
that I resolve my issues
and leave bad people
or get new friends

I hope...

I get new shoes
or a new X-Box controller
that I can buy a house, food, and clothes
that I will be able to support my family –
especially my grandma

I hope...

I can make my family proud of me
that I reach my dreams
of being something great one day
and to live a long, happy life

I hope...

I was...

good at baseball
super fast when I was little
an amateur gamer
a quiet, innocent little girl

I was...

curious, childish, hyper
creative, innocent, hopeful
young, dumb, and stubborn
very disrespectful

I was...

very shy
very lazy
very childish
very nosy and annoying

I was...

bad at Fortnite
really bad at writing and math
very unaware of the real world
and what could happen to me

I was...

an introvert
a quiet person
talkative and patient
more confident, less insecure

I was...

a little kid
a baby
a wild child who thought little of others
and wanted to doodle her inner
thoughts with a sharpie

I was...

a liar
lonely
rude, unaware, careless

I was...

not honest
gullible and unreliable
clueless

I was...

shy but evil on the inside
not very bright
immature and short

I am...

cool, confident, curious
knowledgeable, wise, and patient
respectful, loving, cooperative
talkative and sometimes rude

I am...

good vibes, loyal
talented, smart, and sometimes funny
strong, creative, and enthusiastic
empathetic, dramatic, and self-aware

I am...

scared, ignorant, depressed,
nosy and annoying
insecure and introverted
though people think I'm not

I am...

weird and very tired
smart, tall, and immature
forgiving, kind, respectful
honest, still young, and short

I am...

lazy at times,
not true to myself,
very uncontrollable,
and a lie

I am...

interesting, an ace of cards
amazing and glorious
a smart 7th grader
who is responsible and
knows where they want to go in life

I am...

an athlete, an artist, a cutie

I am...

a dedicated and faithful child
honest, loveable, trustworthy,
always super sleepy all the time

I am...

a wild child
who resists all temptation
to assert themselves
by society's standards

I am...

serious
not letting anybody take me down

I am...

myself.

Class 7-505



The Icing on Top

Josue A.

Ever since I was little, I wanted a phone. I always begged for one. I knew I was too little to get one, but since my mom, my dad, and my sister had one, I always got jealous and sad.

“Mom, I really want an iPhone,” I said.

“You're too young to have a phone,” my mom replied.

“But she has a phone,” I answered back, referring to my sister.

“She's thirteen already, and you're eight,” my mom said.

“OK,” I sighed.

I was sad, as the gust of wind swept the sky. It was many years before I finally got my phone.

Every time I saw my sister's and my parents' phones, they were begging me to get one of my own, like I begged my parents for one. I was decorating my Christmas tree with shiny ornaments, and I saw the reflection of my sister with her phone and got jealous. I was green with envy. On Christmas Eve, I went to a party. Hours later, my cousins found out what my presents were because my sister had told them. I had confused feelings about what I got.

“Josue, can't wait to see what your parents gave you,” one of my cousins said.

“I wonder what I got, too,” I replied.

“Josue, I heard what you got. It is trash; you won't like it,” my other cousin said.

I mean, at this point, I was as confused as to how Donald Trump is the President.

It was Christmas morning, and I was excited. I saw so many gifts. I started unwrapping them like a wild animal. I got clothes and a PS4. But then, I saw my mom with a box that looked like the shape of a phone. I got so excited. But I realized that it might not be what I was expecting, so I toned it down. I was unwrapping so many layers because my mom always likes to do that to annoy me. Finally, the last unwrap. I saw the Apple iPhone box, and right away I hugged my parents and felt so lucky and grateful. I felt like a kid in the candy shop.

Overall, I sound like a person who was so obsessed with getting a phone but that's just me, I guess. When I first got my phone, I wasn't addicted to it. But now, I am. Now, I know the feeling people get when they get their first phone. When I think back on this day, it makes me feel happy and lucky because some people don't get to experience getting a phone.



A Day to Remember!

Iliana B.

...Whip...Whip, the sound I heard as a burst into joy and laughter. Blue, green, yellow, orange, red, purple, and pink colors flying all around the starry black sky bringing it to life. People dancing and laughing as if all their worry and stress was lifted off their chests; it was wild. There were masks and costumes; danger and excitement flew through the yard that went from blah to wow. There was the pitter-patter of feet, the slapping and clapping of hands, and swinging and spinning as the music played against the roar of the whips, bringing sound into the once boring air.

Excitement when I woke up and went to sleep. I woke up to singing and smiles as I was praised with birthday wishes. I ran to get changed out of my PJ's. I wanted to help prepare the party, but when I got outside, my aunt took me to see the newborn bunnies and other animals. I saw the miracle of baby bunnies. They filled the air around them with happiness and love. Their eyes were filled with mystery as they experienced life in the new world they were born into. I truly believed that they knew they were about to embark on the best journey: life. They knew they would bring joy and love everywhere they went to all those around them. With their tiny twitching noses, soft brown fur, lovely black eyes, they were adorable. After that, we went to see the noisy roosters that woke me up every morning with their loud shouting (*cock-a-doodle-doo!*) it was so bothersome. As we left farm animal land, we saw the playful full-of-life dog that roamed the streets. It jumped and did tricks. It was the highlight of the whole "farm animal adventure."

Next, we left to help decorate the party. We were going to make it epic. There were boxes full of party decor. Streamers, balloons, party games, prizes, party hats, and more. I was excited to decorate and get the party started. But, my family refused to let me decorate. They said, "The birthday girl must not decorate her own party! She must get ready to enjoy it." And so, they sent me to the house where my cousins and I got ready for the party. There was a hair section, a makeup section, and a changing section. It was all so organized as if my cousins had been planning for weeks on how to make us all look our best for the party. I didn't complain because I felt like I was a princess getting ready for a ball (which is what I think they intended). I first put on my dress which was pink and sparkly. Then, I did my hair. I had my hair all washed and curly and my cousin tied in up in the front with two twists that wrapped around my head to form a tiara. Lastly, I put my glossy lipstick and eyeshadow that I bought at Toys 'R Us. I made a mess of the toy makeup on my face. So, my cousin cleaned my face and put some of her "big girl" makeup on me. I felt so grown up.

It was complete. I had my pretty princess look on, and I was ready for my ball. But I wasn't the only one that looked and felt like I was going to a ball. My cousins, aunts, and uncles, grandma and grandpa, brother, mom, and dad all looked amazing as well. They had dress clothes on and pretty hairstyles or fresh haircuts. It was party time, and we all looked the part. We went outside, and the guests were pouring in. I saw people I loved everywhere surrounded by their hard work to make this day amazing, and it was. I felt

like I walked into a fairy tale full of great times. We all partied like there was no tomorrow and laughed as if we wouldn't be able to laugh ever again. It was a crazy amazing time.

All of a sudden, these people with masks that were like pieces of art showed up. They started to praise me and everybody at the party with their dances and entertainment. And as I looked around, I saw the best gift ever. The people who loved me and worked to make me happy had the biggest smiles on their faces. There was laughter, dancing, singing and more. Then, I realized that the greatest memory in my fairytale party was the moment I realized that everyone would remember this as the day they experienced all kinds of emotions: joy, excitement, surprise, exhaustion.

My fairytale land was full of streamers, balloons, lights, cake, and decorations everywhere. There was a blast of pink and light blue all over the place. We had a huge feast. There was running and jumping, shouting, "Tag! You're it!" and, "I found you!" Children and adults with smiles on their faces and happiness in their eyes all around everywhere I looked. I loved that day; it showed me how much I loved others and how much they loved me. It was truly a day to remember.



Imagination

Wilton C.

Imagination. Many people think that technology is eliminating the imagination of children. But that's not true, at least for me. I use my imagination all the time, even when using technology. However, when I do use this imagination of mine, I'm always called "weird."

For example, once while at home, I was pretending to run on top of a rooftop. In reality, however, I was just running around the house and jumping on furniture. I turn to see my brother with a face of disgust and disbelief. "Stop that! You look like a weirdo." The words smacked me with shame.

This was when I lost it. My imagination was gone. Ever since then, I have refused to use my imagination, although sometimes it slips through the cracks.



The Game

Danny C.

Ever since I was little, I always loved playing basketball with my dad in the park. Every Saturday morning, my dad woke me up at 8 A.M. to play basketball. My dad would have my clothes ready for me on my bed and breakfast on the table. To me, playing ball was a way for me to be free and have fun. When I practiced basketball by myself, I felt calm and isolated from others. This made me become more concentrated and focused when practicing.

When I was nine years old, my dad signed me up for a basketball league during wintertime. My first game was in December. First game with a clock and referee. I was very nervous because there were a lot of people watching. When I went to my dad, he told me not to be nervous and to always stay positive throughout the whole game from start to end. I thought I was going to play terribly and didn't trust in myself. Before this game, I wasn't making very many shots, and I didn't feel ready to play. My coach started me as point guard. In that game, I scored the most points and had the most steals out of both teams. When I arrived home, my legs were sore, and my dad told me to put ice on them for 10 minutes. The next day, my body was still sore, but it didn't stop me from going to the gym with my dad and playing basketball. Since that game, I kept practicing to become better for each game ahead.

Since then I've always been practicing on my game by going to the gym as much as I could. I have learned that playing basketball has made me more determined and more hardworking in school and as a person. The sport of basketball has made me determined to be the best that I can be. I'm working hard to become a better basketball player to make my dream of becoming an NBA player come true.



Traveling Extraordinarily

Janisse F.

We were going to crash! I was so scared; I didn't know what was happening. I had a million things going through my mind... I thought I was going deaf. I couldn't hear anything. I was screaming for my life as if I was actually dying. I was screaming so loudly that everyone was looking at me as if I had five heads and eight eyes. I was screaming so loudly that my throat started to hurt. In my head I was telling myself, *This is it, I'm going to die. Goodbye, world!* But then my uncle tapped me on the shoulder and tried to calm me down by telling me what was going on. But I could barely hear him. It sounded like he was speaking underwater. I tried reading his lips and what I read was "Ey, relax, you're not dying. We're going to be fine."

Turns out we were actually landing at the airport in Georgia, and when I thought I was going deaf, well it was actually that my ears had popped. Once we got off the plane, we had to get our luggage. It looked so different from New York. In Georgia, it's not as packed and crowded. Also, it wasn't so loud.

I was wondering where my luggage was, if I was ever going to see my belongings again or if someone had stolen my stuff. I started to pace back and forth. I was panicking. I was really creating a whole scenario inside of my head. That somebody had the same color suitcase as me but they took mine by mistake. Or that maybe my luggage was still at La Guardia Airport back in New York. Or even that somebody had just taken it because they felt like it. My uncle and I finally arrived at baggage claim. There was so much luggage, all different types of styles and colors. But anyway, we got our luggage and I was so happy after being so worried. What a sense of relief. WOAHA! Oh, and my ears still hadn't popped back to normal, so I sounded like a crazy person talking excessively loudly. So, I stopped talking so I didn't seem cuckoo. My uncle and I had to wait for someone to come get us. Meanwhile, I still felt deaf.

A few minutes later my cousin came to get us. I was so excited to see her that I forgot about my unpoped ears. We got in the car, and once she started driving, I felt the fresh wind hitting my face. My cousin offered us gum. She said it supposedly helps to unpop your ears. Of course, I didn't believe her, but I also still wanted the gum. So, I popped the gum into my mouth and started to chew. I was thinking about life, when suddenly...POP! POP! POP! My ears popped, finally! I was so amazed at the fact that I could've been hearing perfectly fine if I had just chewed some gum. I honestly didn't think it would work. It seemed so dumb that gum could unpop your ears. But, hey, it worked. Wow! Everything turned out great. I didn't lose my luggage after all and I could hear normally once again. You could say that traveling with me is extraordinary or even unpredictable.



Whoa

Elizabeth J.

Everyone is afraid of something. Animals, the sea, or anything you can think of. Heights were my biggest fear, like being high up on a plane. I didn't want to fly, but sadly I had to.

I was super sweaty, knowing that I was about to get on a plane with my sister and no one else. My heart was beating so fast. As we got closer to the airport, my heart felt like it was going to pop out of my chest. I looked out the window. I saw planes landing and leaving. People coming in and out of the airport like it was downtown Manhattan and people are trying to get into stores for a big sale or something. Then, the car stopped.

“We are here,” my dad said.

I hopped out of the car and took my bags with me, helping my sister and mom with the rest of the bags. It was so loud. Cars were everywhere; it was like a five-year-old took cars and slammed them everywhere. We got into the airport. My parents checked us in. My sister knew that I was scared of heights. My mom sat next to my sister and me.

“Mi amor, todo va a estar bien,” my mom said to me in a calm voice.

“You know I’m scared of heights, Ma,” I responded.

“Sé que sé,” my mother replied.

“Remember, I’m going too,” my sister added.

“Come on girls, let’s go,” said my dad.

I got up, my legs shaking and feeling like they were going to break. We got to the waiting area. I looked around, and I saw kids crying. But they were a lot older than me. Fifteen-year-olds became big crying babies. I looked around some more, and I saw our flight attendant. She came to us with a big smile on her face. She started calling our names. My mother took pictures of us. My sister and I left crying.

We got through security, and they checked our bags. Soon we were going to get on the plane. The flight attendant got us to the gates, and it was there that I saw the plane. We got onto it, and they showed us where we were sitting. I was told to sit next to the window, which made it worse for me.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are going to depart from the airport. Please stay in your seat until you’re allowed to get up,” said the flight attendant.

The plane started to move. I looked out the window. The plane was getting ready to run. At this point, I felt like my heart was going to stop. My sister was right next to me, looking out the window. The plane started to move again, but this time it was on the runway. Next, the plane started going up. My heart felt like it dropped. A few minutes later, I looked out the window again, and I felt like a giant. Looking down, I saw tiny cars. I was feeling better. A few hours later, we arrived in Mexico! I saw my whole family. I called my mom on the phone.

“Ma, I think I’m not scared of heights anymore!” I yelled.

“That’s good, my heart,” said my mom. “Now enjoy yourself until you come back.”

I had the best time ever, and I was happier that I faced my fear of heights. On my way back home, I was happy, and I just kept looking out the window.



Brownie

Neolany J.

As a child, I always wanted a pet. I asked for a turtle, a fish, a hamster, and even a dog. I ended up not getting a hamster or a turtle, but I had eight fish who were named Blue, Blue Jr., Bluey, Blue the Third, Red, Red Jr., Red Number 3, and Rainbow. But the problem with a fish is that I couldn't play with it, pet it, play catch, or even cuddle with it. One day my dad and I went to the airport to pick up my grandma but what I didn't know was that she had a little surprise for me. She came out with a little kennel, and I asked her, "What's that?" She told me to look inside. It was a dog!

We went back to the car, and I took the dog out of its kennel. He was the size of both of my little hands combined. He had brown fur, which reminded me of a brownie and inspired my four-year-old brain to name him, Brownie. My grandma then told me she bought the dog for me. My mom wasn't really happy with the fact that I brought a dog home, but she secretly cared about him. I remember the first time I brought him to my grandma's house. Everyone thought he was just a toy dog in the carrier, then they opened it and, ZOOM! My dog beamed out. My whole family grew close to him, and he was now officially part of my family.

It had been a few months since I got Brownie, and one sunny day, my dad and I decided we wanted to order food. A few minutes later I heard a Ding! I went and told my dad the food was here. My dad opened the door to pay and told me to hold the door open so he could get some singles when suddenly SWISH! Brownie ran past the door and out of the apartment. I chased after him. The downstairs door was open. I ran as fast as I could, but Brownie was running as fast as a cheetah. My heart was pounding. I could feel my heartbeat, every single pound, *boom, boom, boom*. I ran and ran and but Brownie was out of sight.

At the time, I didn't realize it but tears were running down my face. I lost my dog and became lost myself. Then suddenly, two women came up to me. They were twins named Victoria and Veronica. They asked me what happened. I told them everything and they said they were going to call the police. I thought I was going to be in trouble. I looked to my left because I heard my father's signature whistle. Now that I think of it, it's funny because you know where in most movies, they have that scene where things move in slow motion? Well, that's what happened to me. My dad and I walked back home with no dog. I stood in front of our building for five minutes hoping Brownie would return. Then I saw a woman holding a dog that looked like Brownie. I went up to her and said, "That's my dog, not yours!" I snatched my puppy away from her. She apologized and said she found it and thought it needed a home.

It was finally summer, and it was time for vacation. My father and I went to the Dominican Republic, and we brought Brownie along. It was so hot. I could feel the sun burn against my skin like bacon in a pan. We went to my aunt's house and spent a week there. It was the first memory I have being there even though there are pictures showing me otherwise and people who tell me I basically grew up there. When it was time to go, I

put Brownie in his carrier, but my dad told me to take him out, and I asked why. My dad told me we brought him to leave him there, which broke my heart. I didn't have a choice. I said my goodbyes and left to go back home without a dog.

It was New Year's Eve and a few months had passed since I left Brownie in the Dominican Republic. I got some news that Brownie had crashed into something. My heart dropped, but apparently, he was fine. He had just broken a leg. A few months later, Brownie ran away chasing a car that looked like mine, but this time they never found him. Brownie was gone forever. I still don't know if he died or is still alive living with a family who found him. But something I learned from that experience is that when you have something you care about, don't take it for granted. You should care for it and never waste time because before you know when they will be gone.



Where is She?

Hillary L.

The air around me swirled and twirled. I was alert, but also, I wasn't. I heard whispers from everywhere, but not voices. I was filled with emotions. Happy, proud, I didn't know what to feel. I walked up and down, up and down. Fear was running through everyone's veins.... my veins. My mom, aunts, cousins, all stressed and worried. I was so confused. They were one step away from calling the cops!

I was home just relaxing. I was doing me. My excited, happy me. My mom called to me, so being obedient, I responded. My mom wanted me to go with her to get something from my aunt's car, but I was impatient. I ran down the stairs, not knowing what was needed. I went to my aunt's car, greeted her, and got something. I didn't know what I needed to get but ended up getting something. I checked the streets for I don't know what, not knowing that instead, my family was searching for me. They went door to door, asking neighbors if they had seen me. They were going crazy. I was so irresponsible. I went up to my aunt's house and stayed there. My mom called my aunt; my aunt called my mom. Approximately ten minutes had passed. I had a gut feeling that I was being looked for, but I wasn't sure of anything. Eventually, my cousin was aware of the news. She called my mom saying, "She's here, she's here!" I could only imagine my mom's reaction, my family's reaction.

I got home. Everyone was relieved. Even I was somehow relieved. I felt guilty because I put everyone through such trouble. I felt loved though and appreciated. In the moment, I felt too much authority, power, which is why I did what I did – I left without my mom. I realized, I needed to be responsible when listening to directions, and be patient. Despite that, I wasn't being me, my obedient me, I was more my excited, happy

me. It all happened so fast but felt like it took so long. I learned a lot, and I know better now.



My First Day in Pre-K

Katherine L.

I was running around in my family's apartment in the living room. I was at the right age to go to Pre-K, but I didn't know about school at the time. Then the day came, and my mother received a letter from a school that was quite near our building.

My mother told me about it, but I was still clueless. Weeks passed by and then it was time for me to go to school. On my first day, I realized that the other kids were wearing light blue polo shirts and navy-blue pants while I was in a white long sleeve shirt with a red apple in the middle and red jeans. I was really confused. My mother then left me in the classroom.

The teacher invited me to the circle that the kids were making and since I didn't know better I slapped the kid that was sitting next to me.

"Do you want to go sit in time-out?" The teacher asked me as she pointed to an isolated chair.

"No," I answered.

Now, thinking back to that time, I sure have changed a lot. From someone that was clueless and straight up to someone who is quiet and sometimes shy and keeps everything to themselves.



Being Successful

Wilson L.

So, I never really liked playing basketball. I played it just to play it. Then one day it just hit me: I did like playing basketball. Now, the ball didn't actually hit me; I just started to like playing basketball. I don't remember when it happened, but I just liked to play.

Overall, I wasn't a good player (I am still not), but I persevered and enjoyed getting better. I like to learn how to do new tricks, but when I try them, I can't do them at all. That made it hard to learn new tricks. But I do practice a lot and try to get better each day. So, every time I have a chance to use a basketball or play basketball, whether it is in my school gym or during recess or even in the park, I take it. I like playing in the gym the most since

I'm able to play with my friends and they help me improve. I will always like to play so that I can succeed in what I like to do and get better every day.

I always like to get better, as I said, and I do like to do new things and see what I can improve on every day. Then, after I practice successfully, I know I still can do better, and that I do the best that I can. And with that, I know that I can be someone in the future without a doubt! I just need to persevere in that sport and have the courage to play and do better!



The Lost Adventure

Randy M.

One day, I thought it was a pretty nice day out, and it was mostly warm, so I decided it was a great idea to go to the park. I asked my sister if she wanted to go, too. She responded with a yes, so I immediately started getting ready. The AC was blasting cold air, but it was still blazing inside with the hot sun.

It was finally time to go to the park after two hours of my sister trying to get ready and me rushing her. I got my keys and my phone, and we were out walking. It was one of the hottest days of the year. After a few minutes my sister brought up the topic of the forest in the park. She suggested we go in and I told her no way. But somehow I was convinced, and we went in anyway (to this day I still don't know why I agreed).

We finally arrived, and I saw the huge forest, and I was already hesitating to go in, but at that point, we considered it too late to go back. Our first steps in the forest weren't so bad. There were lots of birds and plants and tall green trees. You could even smell that excessive park smell of grass and trees and peace. You see, we were distracted by the scenery until we saw some old campsites. These campsites mostly consisted of tents made out of wood logs and sticks and were built pretty well in my opinion. They even made cool designs on the ground with the leaves, and you could tell it was a huge group since there were a lot of logs placed as seats around the campfire. The paths got narrower but not uncomfortably narrow. We began finding weird caves. We even stumbled upon this small cave, like a cave for a small animal like a bat or an owl or something like that. We saw this green glow from a distance, and we went close to it, and it was the cave. The green glow was light from inside the small cave. It interested me, but I honestly didn't want to look so we just backed away from it. There was also a bit of gunk or slime around it causing it to look greener than the plants. After that distraction, we just kept walking... and walking... and walking for about 15 minutes straight.

This is where this peaceful and gentle path takes a HUGE turn. All of a sudden, there were huge stones on the ground that we had to leap over to avoid all the mud. I hadn't worn nice shoes, but it was still worrying to me. We had to keep doing this for

about five minutes, which was a pretty good exercise, I'll admit. My sister and I then stumbled upon this huge rock, and with the huge rock came four other paths. One going to the right, to the left, center and so on. I thought at first that we should probably turn around, and I almost said it, but then I thought we couldn't get lost. We decided to go on the path to the right, and the muddy path continued again, but it was now going downhill. Now the mud was acting as if it was some sort of stream falling or a really, really small avalanche. We leaped over rock after rock and made it to solid dirt at last.

We got further into the forest, and I was now kind of scared due to how far we were from the entrance. At that point, I couldn't even see it. We decided it was time to go back, so we started retracing our steps. A few minutes later, we were lost. By that time, I was petrified of what could happen to us if we didn't find the entrance since we were so far away from the main path. And the path split apart a lot, so we did not remember where we went. At that point, we tried to pull up Google Maps on our phone, and that didn't even work. So we just walked around until we could find something to remind us where we were going.

After a few minutes of walking, I stumbled upon a mountain to the right, and we saw this huge happy dog running toward us. I was thinking, what if this dog thinks I'm their owner and just jumps on me, knocking me out? But it didn't; it just ran past us really fast, kind of startling me. After another 30 minutes of walking, I saw the huge rock from earlier in the distance, and I screamed at my sister with joy. We walked up to the rock, and there were the paths. Without hesitation, we chose the path to our left and hoped it was the right one. We went on the path and started walking. We went up the small mud avalanche, and we met up with the main path. I screamed, "WE MADE IT!" We walked home and got chips and relaxed for the rest of the day.



Joy

Alexander M.

My story is about the adventure I had when I got my first pet. The date was August 11, 2014 (my birthday). The only thing I was expecting to get on my birthday was possibly a couple of games here and there, maybe even a pair of socks, but never an ACTUAL live animal. I remember my parents were attempting to get the animal to quiet down. As I was nearing my last present (which was the one containing my new pet), I finally removed the covers on the present, and it was a parrot. A green-cheeked Conure.

I was extremely over-hyped as if I had drunk some coffee. I was bouncing all over the room from excitement. I began feeding her many treats (millets). I began interacting with her every single time I got back from school. I was just super excited.

And then it got to the point where I had to name her. I decided to name her Joy, as in the emotion. The first couple of days were my learning and panicking days. It's like getting your first phone; you are extremely cautious, and then the next couple of weeks you see people throwing their phones across rooms just to turn off the light. It's exactly like that, but with a living being.

Anyway, I just HAD to know everything about the green-cheeked Conures as they were so beautiful. Joy even had a little bit of red on her right wing! I needed to know what they eat, how they sleep, even down to how they breathe. My bird had a broken bottom beak meaning Joy couldn't bite as hard which also meant I could earn her trust faster. Even with the broken beak, it luckily did not affect how she ate. Joy also couldn't fly, which was honestly disappointing, but makes it easier for me and everyone else in the apartment to earn her trust. She doesn't go out of her cage very often, meaning she feels very safe and cozy within her cage, which can also help me to earn her trust. Everything was going great for the first couple of weeks.

Joy began flying toward me, possibly showing hate. She began biting me and destroying objects. (Puberty maybe?) She seemed to have had a change of heart, like Joy now hated me. Joy was perfectly fine with the rest of my family, but why me? A couple more weeks passed by, and still no change. She was still flying toward me and biting me. Joy was acting like an extreme brat.

If there is something Joy has taught me, it's that I will love my parrot no matter what. Joy has truly been a gift.



The Movement

Bryan M.

I was excited the day before basketball practice. Practice was at 8:00 A.M. I set my alarm for 7:00 A.M and thought I would change and do everything and eventually be done by 7:40 A.M.

The next day, I woke up and looked at the time. I looked so dumb and felt like I was stuck to the ground and someone that was 200 pounds had fallen on me. I was so mad when I looked at the time. It was 7:50 A.M. So, I screamed out, "OH SHOOT!" Next thing you know I heard steps getting closer to me. It was my mom. POW! By the time I was ready, I had left the house and ran as fast as I could to the bus stop, which is six blocks away. I finally arrived. I had to wait, so I stood there waiting for the bus. Then the bus got there, but it was packed. I had no choice. I got in there. People were pushing me, but I couldn't do anything, so I stood there. The bus got to my stop, and I pushed everyone out of the way. I had to run two more blocks. I got to my school, and I saw that school was closed. I stood there, so confused, like, what is happening? Suddenly, one of my friends

arrived, and I asked him to call someone to see if there was practice. He texted someone, and they responded that there was no practice.

The lesson I learned was that you need to be prepared before anything exciting happens. Next time I will make sure to listen to my coach and wait for him to finish talking. Lesson: Always listen closely, so you know the plan.



I Finally Realized

Mabel O.

I was a little kid who did not listen to her mother. I didn't appreciate anything she did for me. She called me a tiny devil. One day my mother and I were crossing the street, and I let go of her hand. I could have died just by letting go. I was a kid that didn't listen much. I would get in trouble for not listening. I regret not following the directions my mother had given me.

My favorite day came: Halloween. Who knew something so small would turn into something so big? I was trick-or-treating with my friend, and my cousin called out to me and said, "We have to go somewhere." I got scared, so I got in the car. We arrived at the hospital, and I was wondering what was going on. When I got to the room, I saw my mother in a coma. A couple of hours had passed, and she could not see or talk to us, but she could hear us. So all of my family members left the room and stayed in the hall. My sister, my dad, my mother, and I were in the room. We were in tears because she could not see us or talk to us; she could only hear. When we were done talking to her, a close friend came in, and she wanted to be alone with my mother. Five minutes later, I came out of the bathroom, and I saw my family rushing into the room. Before I knew it, my mother had passed away.

What I learned is that you have to appreciate what you have in life before it's gone. So far, it's been really hard, but I will never forget the times I had with her. The times we used to spend together at Christmas. And the way we used to be all together wrapped up in a blanket and my mom and dad would tell us stories of how it was "back in the day." These are the stories that are going to be pushing me forward in life.



♡7th Grade Survivor♡

Andrea P.

My name is Andrea, and I am a seventh-grade survivor. Oh, my Lordy, it has not been easy. Some problems I have experienced are the following; finding out you have real

friends, making good grades, and high school and college being the biggest things in the world. I sometimes can't stand people, especially on days when I wake up on the wrong side of the bed. On those days, I need three things to get me through the school day: my phone (in my bag), my friends, and my drawing pad. Not in that specific order. My point is that I never feel good enough because of the way I dress and how my hair looks or because of the birthmark on my nose. But at some point, I stopped caring. As you can see, it has not been easy being a seventh grader.

Now, for some reason, college is more important than high school. I like to say to myself, "Well, I might just skip high school because college is so important." But let me think for just one second. (*contemplating my life situation*) OK, to go to college, I have to go to high school first. So, that is important to me when I think of my future. For me to have a good future, I have to go to a good high school. And I already know which one I hope to be accepted into. It's a specialized school called Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts. (Yes, that is the actual name. Very long, I know.) Because it's a specialized school, I am required to get really good grades. Now, my grades aren't the best, but they're not the worst either. They are decent. Yep, decent. That is a good way to describe them. They might be good enough to get me into LaGuardia.

Being accepted to high school is a big enough pressure, but now my school is kind of obsessing over college. I can't even think about college yet. To have the kind of future I want, I have to start off with getting into a good high school so that, if possible, I can one day move out of my parents' house and get a job and make my own money and live by myself. When I live by myself, no one else but me, I can finally buy a dog that I'm not allergic to and get a cat that I am also not allergic to. I think some of us need to relax. We're young and sometimes stupid, and school shouldn't be everything (unless you're one "those" people). It's good not focusing on the future all the time. We're seventh graders. We need to have a little fun.

That's my story. Now, even though I'm not done with school, I did like some of the seventh grade. Okay, fine, I admit it. But it was so hard to get through! I'm pretty sure we will all get through it. These are just some of the challenges I have faced in the seventh grade. I have survived, but the eighth grade is just around the corner, and we'll have to make it count.



The Summer I Will Never Forget

Melanie R.

That warm breeze hit my face once I landed in Puerto Rico. As I was driving to the hotel, I passed by multiple palm trees that took me by surprise. I'd never seen them in person before. They were taller than the houses! Ever since my mom told me stories about

her time living in Puerto Rico, I have always imagined what it looked like. I went to see the house that my mom lived in when she lived in Ponce. I was born in the Bronx, but I always imagined what Puerto Rico looked like, and last summer was my chance to see it in person.

The heat took me by surprise. I was freezing on the plane, but once I stepped out from the plane, that quickly changed. I love planes. I don't know why but I have loved flying on them ever since I was little. I am not a morning person, so I didn't want to wake up the first full day of being in Puerto Rico. I finally got up and got ready for the amazing day ahead of me. But to be honest, I only got up because I was hungry. I visited a forest and was bitten so many times by mosquitoes.

Puerto Rico was not like what I had expected it to be. However, it was beautiful. I did so much while I was there I don't think I could even fit all of what I did into one narrative. There was one restaurant in particular that I loved. In English, it was called Mr. Frog (I do not know how to spell it in Spanish). I had ordered a burger even though everyone was eating Puerto Rican food. The plate was so funny. It looked like a mouse with its cheese: the burger was the cheese, and the fries were the mouse. For most of the trip, we were shopping in little towns and markets. The beach was beautiful. For once the water was actually clear! The beach was called Luquillo Beach, and you could bring anything into the water.

Puerto Rico is the best place when you are talking about food. There is so much flavor in one dish. Everywhere you turn people are selling coconut ices. Once I went to El Morro. It was cool; it had objects there from previous wars.

My trip to Puerto Rico was mostly about spending time with my family. It was a nice bonding experience since I am always in my room being an introvert. Even though my brother was annoying, we had our good times there. We have all become closer as a family. I wish I could go back in time and experience it all over again. When we are all home, we have to be very responsible and do a lot of chores. It was good to leave it all behind.

Some people might not understand how I could feel the way I did when I went to Puerto Rico. It was not only my emotions that made me feel happy. It was the way that my family acted. We all felt like we were where we belonged. I thought of it like just another vacation that I was excited about, but it was different that time. I learned that there might be just one place that I belong and that is Puerto Rico. Even though I have to learn how to speak Spanish fluently. I am so excited to go back. Even though I don't know when I am going, I am counting the days until my next trip.



Luna

Sebastian R.

December 24, 2015. I was ten years old and had just come home from school to start Christmas break. I was relaxing, eating and watching something, minding my own business. All of a sudden, I heard the doorbell ring. I had a moment of panic. I had to think fast whether or not to open the door. I said, "Oh, well." The next thing I noticed was my aunt at the door with a towel shaped like a ball on her arm. I was confused as to what the purpose for that was until she unwrapped the towel. I asked, "What is that mysterious thing?"

I had a moment of silence, as my aunt unwrapped the towel. I became happy with excitement. I became more and more excited as it unfolded, and the next thing I see is a little white female Maltese puppy struggling to move and breathe. She still had her eyes closed. I was surprised to see that I would get a dog, but I also had a moment of doubt. I knew that having a dog would not be permitted because I would not be responsible, and the dog would at least last no longer than a month with us. I let go of the dog. She ran faster than sonic sound, bumping and smashing into every wall. Seeing that the dog was excited, I knew I would always keep her, but I had to ask for permission. I begged and pleaded like a little kid (of course, I was ten at that time).

I believe this was the most important moment in my life. I got the dog with one condition: I had to be responsible. I knew by naming her I would keep this little canine for years to come.

Luna!!!



The Start of a New Friendship in Washington!

Brittney R.

One significant experience I had was when I went on a trip to Washington D.C. for a night with my friends and classmates which was very fun. I wish I could travel back in time to experience it again! I think I got to know my friends better and found out more about them. When we went to visit, it looked nice, but some places smelled weird and nasty, but it wasn't as noisy as New York City.

As we got into the coach bus, my group of friends and I sat in the back. I saw Emily sitting alone at the front of the bus. Emily and I were not very close since she didn't talk to me as much. When we were in the middle of the road, I was only able to see trees and farms with the beautiful blue sky. We were listening to music, talking and having fun. But Emily looked lonely as if she was the black sheep of the group. After we got off the bus, we visited many museums and learned a lot about Washington D.C. Then, we went out to

eat in a luxurious restaurant; the food tasted delicious. To end the day, we went to our rooms in the hotel. Everyone was soaked since it was raining cats and dogs.

“I’m exhausted,” I said.

We woke up early at 7 A.M. Everyone was tired but had to get ready and take a bath. We fixed our beds, organized our clothes, and left the room.

“Oh my God, this hallway is very long,” I said. We took the elevator to get to the front desk and put our bags on the bus. While we were walking, we smelled some good breakfast, so we started running to get there since our stomachs were angry. When we finished eating the good food, we got on the bus to look at more museums and statues. When we were heading home, we were all chatting, so I told Emily to sit with us. She came over, and we were listening to music, others were dancing, and overall, we were having fun. Emily and I then started talking about the summer and what we would do and if she would go out of town.

Now, Emily is more like my little sister. I value her because she’s my best friend. Ever since that trip, Emily and I have been laughing almost every day and cracking jokes. Overall, I learned that I could make new friends anywhere I go.



The Start of a New Family Relationship

Marianyeli R.

One night, I was going down the stairs when I heard my parents talking about a special trip. I stopped and stood at the door listening to what they were talking about, and my mom said, “This is going to be so fun.” I wanted to hear more about what they were talking about when my dad also said, “This family trip is going to be so fun.” I started jumping excitedly because I knew it was going to be such a fun trip. But then I overheard my dad say, “I’m so excited the girls are going to meet their family.” After that, the trip did not sound as great to me anymore because I didn’t know them. So, I thought it was going to be weird. I went back upstairs after so much excitement for nothing and went to sleep.

The next morning my mom woke me up.

“Hurry up and take a shower!” she said.

“Hold on, Mom, where are we going?”

“Don’t worry; we are going to have so much fun!”

“Mom, can you please tell me where?”

Then she decided to tell me. She said we were going to a waterpark with her family. After she told me where we were going with her family, I wasn't as happy anymore because I had never met them, and I know that if I met them, it wasn't going to be such a fun trip.

We finally got there, and when I saw my mom's family waving at us, I just acted like I didn't know them because I didn't. As soon as we got there, we chose our rooms and guess what? I was stuck in a room with all my cousins! I was so mad, but I had to deal with them because there was nothing I could do about it. A few hours later we were called for dinner, and my girl cousins were trying to talk to me, but I kept ignoring them. After we were done eating dinner, we went back to our rooms, and I went to sleep. The next morning we went to the pool but before I even noticed I was talking to my cousins and it was not that bad, and at the end, they were very fun people to talk to, and we were having so much fun.

I learned that giving someone a chance doesn't turn out so bad at all.



Ball is Life

Glenn S.

Ever since I could hear a basketball bounce, I thought it was fascinating. Basketball has shown me at a young age that to be successful, you need to face adversity and go through hard times.

I remember the first time somebody challenged me to a game of one-on-one. People were telling me my opponent was way better than me. They said in a blink of an eye he would have already won. All these things people told me affected me. The way I approached the game was negative because of the things I was told.

We started playing. My opponent passed me right away, leading to a point. The people on the side were already booing me. Next possession, I took to the hole, and I got blocked. I felt like less of a player. I took the ball and passed it to him. In a second, he scored. That was game. The kid shook my hand said, "Good game." He also told me, "You have to lose to win." I asked him what that meant, and he told me that to have good games in basketball you have to lose some.

From that day on, I realized to be successful you have to face adversity and learn from your mistakes and improve your skills. I still have to improve a lot, but with basketball, I could really make it somewhere.



The Nike Store

Darien S.

One day I was walking in a mall. I was waiting until my family walked past a Nike store. I felt excited because I thought my parents would buy me something. I was so hyper and wanted to find a shoe store, so I was speed-walking. It took my family almost two hours because they were going to a lot of stores and then we went to the food court. I felt like a child running through the halls. I also felt nervous because I thought the mall might close before going to my favorite store. I started to daydream about what I wanted from the Nike store. I was thinking of getting two hoodies and one pair of sneakers. Suddenly I stopped because I heard a voice saying, "Let's go. We're going to the Nike store."

Once I heard that sentence, I got so hyper and started to say, "Hurry, let's go!" over and over again. My parents started to get annoyed. Twenty minutes later, we arrived, and I went inside. I started to go crazy for what I was trying to find, but it was difficult to do that because there were so many people. I could barely see where I was going because there were people taller than me blocking the way. Somehow, I managed to get through to the clothes section. When I got there, I was looking for a red hoodie and a white hoodie, but no luck. The store had run out. I was disappointed they didn't have the colors I wanted. So, I had to get a blue and black hoodie, but I was happy anyway.

Now I had to go back through people to get to the sneakers section. The number of people got larger, and it was more difficult to walk. I had to shove everyone out of my way until I got to pick the sneakers I wanted, and then I went to the line. The line had a lot of people because there were only two cash registers. Forty-five minutes later, I got my items, but my feet started to hurt, so my family decided to go home. From that day on, I learned you can never expect what will happen in your life.



My Near-Death Experience

Emily S.

It started as a regular day for me and my mom. You know, going to places, meeting friends all around and even making new friends. Finally, we got to our destination, which was my mom's friend's house. We had an amazing time. Realizing it was getting late, we said we had to go. When we finally made our way home, we were going up the stairs ready to continue our night. That was before we noticed some thick red liquid.

We're going to get kidnapped, I thought. I was so scared. I felt my bones jump out of my skin when I heard the alarm sound and heavy footsteps rushing down the stairs. I looked back to see a man, in his late twenties, running down our halls. I thought he was coming towards my mom and me. I felt like I was in a horror movie. I was so scared that

my hands started shaking and when I tried opening my door, my hands wouldn't let me. I turned my head to the side and heard my mom screaming, "OPEN THE DOOR!" Of course, I didn't listen because I was too curious. I turned my head to look at the man, only to see him running towards the exit. I was too in shock to even notice that my brother had opened the door for us and rushed us inside.

I was still shocked by everything I had just gone through. My mom and brother kept asking me, "Are you okay?" My only reply was, "I'm fine." But they knew me like the back of their hands, so they knew that I wasn't fine. Realizing it was time to go to bed and that I was tired, I got ready and fell into a deep slumber, seeing only darkness.

The next morning, I felt better, finally letting it go, thanking God my mom and I didn't get kidnapped. I was fine the whole day and acted like nothing had happened. Sometimes my life seems like a whole movie because of the events that occur. This taught me that I should be more alert about things like this.



My First Pets

Alex T.

At the age of seven, I was a childish kid asking for animals (like a whole zoo). One day, my cousin slammed into my room with a turtle and asked if I'd be honored to take care of it. I looked at the red-eared slider and held him up. I ran to ask my parents, "Can we please get a turtle?" They looked at the turtle and me with a devilish look.

I gave him food and I played with him, but he seemed sad. As if he had no one to talk to or play with. I saw it in his little green eyes, as he crawled to his tank of a paradise, ate food, and hid under a rock.

It scared me. I thought he was dying, but he wasn't going to die. I screamed with emotional pain. This is when I picked him up and cried. But he woke up faster than a cheetah. After taking care of the turtle, I decided to convince my parents to get my first pets.

I did it. I convinced my parents. I ran to the pet shop before I could even blink. I got two red-eared sliders and one painted turtle. This was legendary, as I never thought it would happen. (I would later go to D.R. and try to get a dog.)

This changed my life, as I would then get more pets. I cried and felt successful.



A Miracle

Avril V.

Spend the most precious time with the ones you dearly love before it's gone.

My brother and I were two of the closest siblings in the whole family. We went everywhere together. He got me everything I ever wanted until he had to go somewhere, and my parents couldn't tell me where. I haven't seen my brother in eight years.

My parents always told me he's coming back home, and I always used to question myself: Is he really coming back home? I used to cry and cry. I started to be disrespectful, getting into trouble after my brother left. I never knew something so little could hurt so much. I was in suspension one day, and my sister came to pick me up early. I was so confused. She said, "We have to go home. I got a surprise for you." I looked at her straight in the eye, and asked, "Is it my brother?" And she said, "No, he's not coming home." I started getting sad and depressed. Then, when we got home my dad says, "Avril, get me the charger." And when I went to get the charger, I look up and see my brother standing right in front of me smiling. I got so happy I started tearing up and smiling. We all had family time, and everything was back to normal.

All in all, always spend time with your family and do well in life because something unexpected might come – just like my brother.



Class 7-508



Becoming Best Friends

Aleanna A.

09/09/10: A date I would never forget. The day I met my Kayls Bayls. Have you ever met someone who's your friend but then, over the years, you become more like sisters? True friends are hard to find, and when you have them, you should never let them go because they complete you like no one else can. Kayla has always been there for me through thick and thin. Whenever I'm down I know, I can depend on her to bring me back up. The best thing about our friendship is that no matter the problems we had we still are friends because I've always told myself that the past is past so forgive and forget. I can be me, and she can be her, but we still find a way to love each other, and that's what I consider true friendship.

Kayla and I have always been in the same class, which has made our bond stronger. But in sixth grade, they separated us because we were too crazy together. As I said, she was my other half. She completed me. In sixth grade, something happened. We drifted apart. I met a new friend. I began to love her like my sister, too. Kayla wasn't forgotten, though. Seeing her in the hallway was so fun because she was so affectionate. We would always give each other the tightest hugs. But we only got to see each other for a few minutes.

Just because we were apart in distance didn't mean we were apart in heart. We spent a few days not speaking over the months because at times we had arguments, just like any normal relationship does. When we spoke, it was like no time had passed. We had so many things to talk about. From kindergarten to sixth grade, we have grown up, not apart. This is why she's my sister.

Seventh grade has been amazing so far. Kayla and I are reunited in the same class, which has been a blast. We have taken so many pictures and videos, and we will forever have those memories. When I'm with her, it's nothing but laughter, which makes me happy because she's good vibes all the time. She's a very outgoing person. One of my favorite things about her is that she's so friendly. Whenever I'm having a rough day or not feeling well and don't feel like talking about it or expressing it with anyone, she will notice by my body language and always gets me to talk about what's going on inside which makes everything feel better. She is always sympathetic and shows empathy for what I am going through. Kayla is like my mom – just like I'm like her mom because we want the best for each other and to see each other grow and become amazing human beings together. Our bond has gotten so strong because I feel like I can trust her with anything, which is the best thing you can have in any type of relationship because you can depend on them and tell them anything without being scared.

Many people say that friends are fake and that they don't exist, but I know that I have found a friend for life. Kayla has met most of my family. She loves my mom as if she were her own mother, which is one of the many reasons why she's like my sister and, at times, like another addition to my family. Kayla is like my diary because I can tell her anything. Whether friendships or relationships; all bonds are built on trust. Without that,

you have nothing. The past eight years with Kayla have been a blast. Trust takes years to build, which is why she's my sister now because we've been through everything together. From sadness to boy drama and everything to just growing up in general, she has been part of my childhood. Sisters by chance, friends by choice. ♡



Future Plans

Kenji A.

When I first started kindergarten, I realized that I could be anyone that I wanted to be. When I woke up, I felt nervous. When my mom said that it was time for me to go to the first day of school, I kept telling her that I didn't want to go. But my mom tried to comfort me the best she could, and she let my dad go with me. She told me he would be with me until the "end of the day."

When my dad and I went inside the school, I felt a bit confident when I believed that my dad would stay with me until the end of the day. But once we entered the room full of kids and parents, I felt like I wasn't the only one who was scared. The room was a pretty room with a section to play dress up, a section of computers, and a little rug of the ABC's. After five minutes, all of the parents had to go, and I was upset about it. But I knew that I would be brave and confident to be in school by myself. After the parents left, the teacher wanted the whole class to go to the rug.

Once we went to the rug, we all sang a song to make us feel calm about being in school. After that, we started talking about what we were going to be in the future. It was hard for me to say what I wanted to be in the future because of my shyness, so I wanted them to skip me for last. Other people said that they wanted to be a doctor or a lawyer, so I wanted to be someone different than the others. When it was my turn, I said with full confidence that I wanted to be a police officer or a firefighter. I didn't know what to choose with all the time I got to pick, so I picked either one of them. After we were done at the rug, we went to our tables and got to know each other at the table. After that, I was still thinking about what I wanted to be in the future. Police officer or firefighter? It was so hard to choose because they are both good. I started to think that I should be a firefighter but there was still this tiny piece that said I should be a police officer.

Later, when it was time for me to leave, I was so happy to be back with my mom. But I was still thinking about what I wanted to be in the future. I asked my mom what she wanted me to be, and she said, "You could be anyone that you want to be. You could be both a police officer and a firefighter. Just think about what you want to be first." That made me think. Can people actually do both things that they want to be? So, at the next day of school, I asked my teacher if it's possible for me to do two things that I want to do, and she said that she used to have another job other than being a teacher. So, it is possible

to have two jobs. I was glad that I didn't have to push myself that much to decide what I want to be and that I could be anything that I wanted to be anyway and at any time.

Now, I am almost a high school student who wants to be an artist, game developer, and a cartoonist. And I'm not shy about anything. I believe that I can do all of them without hesitating and I value that I want to do something different from the others. What I learned was that I can have more than one job and that I can be anything that I want to be, and I always want to do something different.



Buckets

Juan A.

When I was six years old, I first realized I loved basketball. I was with my brother, and I was watching a basketball game, and I had no idea what I was watching. It was the Miami Heat versus the Boston Celtics. At that time, LeBron James was part of the Miami Heat, and he was my brother's favorite player. There was one play that LeBron dunked on Jason Terry off of a turnover from the Boston Celtics. My brother went wild. I was so lost at the time because I didn't know anything about basketball. He was so loud that the neighbors started complaining that we were making too much noise.

After watching the game, my brother wanted to play basketball, and I wanted to go with him. We went, and all I saw on the basketball court was a lot of basketballs flying at the rim. I sat down on the bench, and my brother shot his first shot of the day... AIRBALL! The ball did not even hit the backboard.

I was laughing so hard and he just told me, "You didn't see that." After that, he told me to try to take a shot. I was terrified because I knew that it would be my very first shot and I would probably miss badly. But, he said he would lift me up like in the movie, "The Lion King," so I could be closer to the rim. It was easier because I was closer to the rim, but I was still scared because the ball was so big for me at that time. It was almost bigger than me. He gave me the ball and told me to shoot it as hard as I could. He lifted me up closer to the rim and when I tell you that I was frozen in the air, I was not moving. That's how nervous I was. My brother shook me and told me to shoot it. I said to myself, "JUST SHOOT IT." I finally shot it and it bounced around the rim. All I said in my head was that I missed the shot. When I looked back, I saw the ball go straight through the net and my brother ran towards me celebrating. I was so happy and excited because I actually made it.

My brother was so happy that he took me to an ice cream place and bought me ice cream. He told me that if I keep playing that I'm going to make buckets (making shots in basketball). And now I'm 12 years old. My favorite sport is basketball, and I make buckets. This experience taught me that trying new things can affect your life in a good way.

First Day of Middle School

Miguelangel B.

There are many points in life that a child my age goes through that can seem a little extreme or sophisticated. Things such as puberty, acne, and girls give us a lot to think about despite it not looking like a big deal. But no time can compare to the first time entering high school or middle school. Both middle school and high school are very impactful events that occur in one's life. Many obnoxious things throughout these times overwhelm our still childlike mind.

Entering the sixth grade for me was fascinating and a pretty big moment in my life. The first day was frightening but cool. I saw my friends again after what felt like ten years, I had completely new teachers, and some new children who looked dazed as they were being taught harder subjects than they've ever seen before. At that time, ya' know, I had been changing mentally and physically, especially physically. On that first day of sixth grade, I was looking like a whole *batata*. All of us were changing a lot. Already, on the first day of school, I could tell it was going to be a giant adventure.

So, I began my first day of middle school. It's the first day, and I'm in math class, my favorite subject, by the way. As I enter my new environment (my brand new class), I soon realize that there is a new teacher! I soon come to see that she is the new installment to the official staff of WHA. I walk into her class for the first time ever! Shivering in fright, I yelp, "Hello, my name is Miguelangel. I'm in your class." I soon came to realize that she had already applied her own set of rules to the new classroom to which I was a stranger. I was flabbergasted about how new everything seemed to me despite me being in the same school for five years.

After math, I then transitioned to ELA and had a pretty good time. In this class, there was also a new teacher. Now English Language Arts is not my one of my strengths but this new teacher made it interesting! We had laughs, we greeted each other, and we had cool topics that we read about. Besides all the fun we were having, we got hungry. So, then came lunch time. We ate and then had recess, which was a blast because we were playing ball which made all our bodies sore. With all that rustiness from the summer, I couldn't even make a shot if my life depended on it.

Overall, I had a blast with my friends, meeting new people, and trying to reminisce about the shots I couldn't make anymore. I think I speak for everyone that was present on that day when I say that I loved my first day of middle school.



Kindergarten

Sherly B.

As a child, I didn't go out much. I guess that's why I was very shy as a child when I first went to school in kindergarten. I didn't go to pre-k because my mother thought that I didn't need it. As you can probably tell, this didn't work out for me when I first started school. After a few days, I got used to it. It was mostly just fun and games. But I soon learned that it's not always fun for everyone.

There was this girl in my class whom I noticed was very quiet and shy like me. I also noticed that she was getting picked on by the boys and the girls who thought that they're all that or "cool," as they said. In addition to that, I noticed that she didn't talk to anyone in the class. I guessed that she didn't have any friends based on this. I didn't pay much attention to this though.

One breezy autumn day, we went to recess. I looked across the schoolyard, and I saw the girl again. But this time she was crying. I'd finally had enough of these people bothering her for no reason. So, I finally gathered up all my strength and went up to her. This was a big deal for me because I didn't really know how to make friends or talk to people properly. I asked her if she was okay. She looked at me, confused. I guess it was because no one talked to her in the class. She told me that all the boys and some of the girls circled around her and started calling her names such as stupid, lonely, ugly, etc. I felt really bad for her. After all, some of the girls in the class did something like that to me, too. She also told me that they pushed her on the ground and she scraped her knees and elbows and had to go to the nurse to get a Band-Aid. I told her about what happened with me and the girls. I asked her why she didn't tell the teacher what had happened. Then I thought about why I didn't tell the teacher. I didn't tell anyone because I thought it would make me seem weak. We talked for the whole day after that.

After that day, we talked all the time. She became one of my best friends that year. After that day I could tell that she was really happy. We had a great time together that year. She left that same year though. After that day, I became more aware. I became more aware of what people think and how they feel. I learned that some people don't feel the same way as I do.



Becoming an Aunt

Kayla C.

I've always wanted a little brother or sister or any baby figure in my house. There were times when I asked my parents to have another child, but my mom kept refusing to have one because she had enough with me. This, in my opinion, this was not fair because I knew I would be a great caring person and role model to a new baby in the house.

On March 8, I found out some great news from my big sister. She told me in a whisper, "I'm pregnant." My heart was racing. I was as cheerful as a cheerleader! I knew I was going to be the best aunt. That whole day I couldn't stop thinking about the fact that my sister was expecting. I had so many questions. Was it a boy or girl? What type of name was my sister going to choose? Who would it look like? Would it have my curly hair? My sister's eyes? Since that day, I became obsessed with the fact I was going to be an aunt.

June 17 was the day I got most of my answers. A gender reveal would let us find out if it was a boy or a girl. This was amazing. The theme was tutus or footballs which meant a girl or a boy. That day, my sister was so happy because she was anxious to know if her baby was a boy or a girl. That day I was Team Girl all the way because I really wanted a niece. All the decorations were beautiful. My cousin made blue lemonade and pink lemonade to signify boys and girls. We took pictures and had a great time. At the end of the day, we opened a box that had pink and blue balloons. When we opened it, the last balloon was blue. Everyone was screaming with joy, and my sister was so happy, and I loved to see her like that. Even though I wanted a niece, I was still okay with the fact that I was blessed with a nephew. My question was answered: it was a handsome baby boy.

On October 28, I received the best message ever from my sister that said that she was going into labor. I dropped my phone and started screaming with excitement because it was official: he was finally coming! That night I was in my house so nervous and scared because I didn't know if my sister was okay. I knew she was in pain and that hurt me because I love her. After 24 hours of delivery, my nephew was finally born. When I got the text with the first pictures of him, I cried tears of joy. I knew from that day on; I was going to be the best aunt to him. When I carried him for the first time, the first thing I said was "Welcome to the world, Armani." I was so excited to see him. He was so adorable, especially his little hands, they were so soft. Oh, and his smell, he smelled so good. His little face was so cute. I was obsessed.

Now that he is here, he's the best thing in my house. I look forward to going home just to see him. His smile brightens up my whole day. I love the way he looks at me when you say his name. I love waking up in the morning to see him. He's the calmest baby I have ever seen. When he laughs, it makes me smile just to hear his chuckles. He has changed so much from October 28 until now. Every month, he discovers something new about himself, which amazes me. I can't wait for him to walk so I can take him out and enjoy more with him. It's amazing how he went from drinking milk to eating solid foods. I want to be a part of his growing experiences from his first time crawling to his first steps. I will always want to be a part of his journey because he means the world to me.

All through these six months, I've learned that the responsibility of taking care of a baby is very different if you're not ready for it. But I also know that I will be a great mom one day to my kids because I've seen the two most amazing women do it which would be my mom and sister. Now that I'm an aunt, I can be the best one I could be to him. My nephew will always mean everything to me because I will love him forever.

Struggle

Joellies C.

At the age of ten, I was in the fifth grade. I was struggling a lot in school. I didn't understand the ELA content. My teacher taught in a unique style that kept me from growing as a student. I would ask my teacher to explain it, but she only repeated back what she had already said. I continued to struggle. Struggling in school shut me down and made me frustrated. I struggled at home when I didn't understand the work and kept getting more and more frustrated with myself because I wanted to succeed.

One day I asked my mom for help, and she broke down the question for me and asked me if I understood.

Me: "Mom, I need help with this question. Can you explain it to me?"

Mom: "OK." (*Starts to read the question out loud.*) "The question is asking why were women not happy with the way they had to live."

Me: (*I start to think.*)

Mom: "Do you understand?"

Me: "Yes. They didn't like the fact they only could be housewives."

I started to ask for help in class and telling my teacher that I needed her to explain it to me in a different way. My mom started to get help for me in school. I learned to communicate. Since I learned how to communicate better, I started to ask for more help. Now in seventh grade, I got the help I needed. My grades have gone up, and I understand my ELA class much better.

After all this, I realized that my mother will always be there for me. The struggle I went through helped me with many things and helped me realize things about myself that I didn't know. The small things in life may seem like nothing, but they will surprise you at the end.



Coney Island

Oliver E.

The time I went to Coney Island, I saw an advertisement on the internet of an amusement park, and I wanted to go, but when I asked my parents if we could go, they said, "Next week." So, when it came to Saturday, I got ready and asked them what time we were leaving, but they told me we couldn't go. I was really mad. Then in a few days, I had forgotten about it. I saw the commercial again, and I remembered. It was the perfect day. It was a Saturday, and it was 77 degrees, so I asked my parents, and I was so happy with the result: they said yes. We started to pack, and I couldn't find my charger, and my

phone had no charge. I had a burning feeling in my stomach, and I thought my perfect day was ruined. I searched the whole house and found it. I felt like I had run a marathon. I was tired, but I was happy.

So, when we left the house, the car didn't have a lot of gas. We went to the gas station, and when we stopped, I bought a lot of snacks so that I could eat on the way there. When we arrive, the park was incredible. I couldn't believe my eyes. It was cooler than I expected. I didn't know what to ride first. There were so many rides, I was astonished. We started slow and rode small rides like the spaceship. My brother mainly liked this one, and it was a little fun. So, we were all hungry, and we bought a funnel cake. It was a weird and funky food. This was my first time trying this exquisite meal. After that, my father and I needed to use the restroom, so we went around the whole park looking for it.

Then, it was around the middle of the day, and we were going to the bigger rides. When we got to the roller coaster, I was very surprised at how big it was. It gave me the chills. I thought I would die! Then we got on line to the roller coaster. When we got on the ride, I was going up an inclined plane, and my fear went away. I felt fearless like I was touching the top of the world. Then we were going down the roller coaster, and I got the most adrenaline I ever had. It felt great. When we came back around for the second spin, I already expected the fall, so it wasn't as cool.

That was the best ride I had ever been on. Later that day, I had a few extra dollars, so we got popcorn. When we ate it, we moved on to bumper cars. I rode with my brother, and it was very fun. When I got in the ring, I tried hitting as many people as I could with my car. When the ride was over, I was very dizzy and vomited. A couple of hours later we got tired and sat at Applebee's. When we left, we went to the beach, and it was very refreshing after a tiring day.

Today was a good day, I thought. It was a new experience. I had never experienced something so fun. That day was one of the best days of my life. It was something I begged for a lot, and eventually, I got it. When we got there, it was spectacular, and when we left, I still liked it. This day was a very good day.



No Matter What Happens, Follow Your Dreams

Lissette G.

When I am stressed out, I always express my feelings with my voice. I've always liked to sing with passion. I love to put my feelings into my voice so every time I sing something, I want to feel like it is coming from the bottom of my heart. When I am in a bad mood, singing helps me relax

When I was six years old, I was home taking a bath, and I was feeling the water through my body. I started singing this famous song by Celia Cruz. I would think in those times that I was like her from the story I heard about her. Everybody around her was being

negative and giving hateful comments, and they didn't let her in that easy. As time passed, I kept my talent to myself. I used to sing only in the bathroom, and when I felt that my mom was getting closer, I would be quiet. I was afraid to sing in front of people because I used to think they were going to say something bad about my voice.

As I got older, one of my goals was to sing in front of my parents and family, but I never had the guts. One day, my mom asked my sister and me what we wanted to be when we grew up. My sister said she wanted to be a lawyer, and I was thinking to myself this is my opportunity to tell my mom what I want to be, and I told her I wanted to be a singer. My mom found it weird because she never heard me sing and she smiled at me, and she asked me, "Since when do you sing?"

One day, my father's friend decided to put a machine in my dad's salon just for fun. I was so nervous because my mom already knew that I could sing, but she had never heard me, so it was my time to shine. My mom asked me to sing a song for her.

"What song do you want me to sing to you?" I asked her.

"I Will Always Love You by Whitney Houston," she said.

"Sure," I said, even though I was really scared.

They gave me the mic and played the song. When I started to sing, everybody was looking at me, and I was asking myself: Am I doing something bad or something? But their faces didn't look that way, so I didn't pay mind to it, and I kept singing. When I hit that high note everybody started crying with joy because they had never heard me sing. They never knew I had that talent. They made me cry, too.

Since that day, I have never been afraid to sing in front of people.

A few years passed by, and I was in sixth grade. We had a performance at my school. I chose a Spanish song from a Dominican girl, La Lupe Que Te Pide. I sang it at karaoke, and my dad was so happy because this song talks about a love story. She says, "What did I ask of you, other than loyalty and understanding, other than realizing that in this life, there's no other love like mine?" When my father heard me sing that old song and heard those lyrics, it made him so happy because he never expected his 11-year-old daughter to sing that song. I think when that song came out, he wasn't even born yet, but that's me. I like to hear songs older than I am and songs from my country. I told my sister that I was going to perform and asked her, "Should I sing that song?" She said yes.

The day of the rehearsal, we all had to go to the gym so we could practice. I was so scared! I was backing down, but I said to myself, "I can't let my father down like that." So I went to the stage, and I started singing. At first, since it was an old song, the kids were looking at me weird. But when I finished singing, everybody clapped for me. Some of the teachers got so emotional they got me emotional, too. After that, it was dismissal time for everybody, but not for me because I had after school. I went to my class, and everyone was talking about my voice and how nice it is.

The next day was the real performance. I felt like I was in a singer's world, so I sang, and everything went well for me. This was one of the best experiences I ever had in my life. I went from being afraid to show my talent, to being the best. I learned a lot from my story because back then, I didn't believe in myself. Look at me now, killing it! That's

why I'm always saying, "Follow your dreams no matter what – because you're always going to find a hater who's going to tell you can't make it." But if you think about it, who's that person to tell you what you can or cannot do?



Family & Life

Joel G.

In June, I got the news that my mom was pregnant and that she was going to have a boy. So, I'm having a little brother. His name is going to be Matthew. Months pass, and I was getting nervous waiting for the time my brother will be born. It was October 17 or 18, but possibly 18. My mother was in the hospital, and my dad was with her. I was in my house alone and bored. Just resting, doing my homework, and making a meal for myself. Basically, the same things as any day. I felt really worried about how my mom would be. I felt that I should not go to school. But I had to go anyway. It's for my education.

So, the next day I went to school. Just a normal day. After I left after school, I got a message and a picture of my brother. All of the pressure that I had in my mind, it had left. I felt so relieved. On Saturday, I went to the hospital, and for the first time ever, I met my brother in person. He cried a lot. Days pass, and he begins to be much calmer, and he laughs a lot. Whenever he sees me, he smiles or just laughs. Knowing he will learn how to walk, I feel happy for him. Right now, he is starting to do new things, and I feel proud of him. Now, he is one of my valuable things in the world. I really care for him. That's how much I love him. I plan to do a lot for him.

Ever since I was born, my family has always been taking care of me. They really like me and care so much about me, which makes me feel so important to my family. They buy me a lot of things. It mostly depends on my grades, which is good. So, for me, I will do good things only for the things I want. However, my parents buy me things because I need them. For example, school supplies, clothes, etc. This is why I feel that my parents really care about me and I care for them back. If anything happens to me, I can predict that my family really is going to take care of me because I'm one of the most important people to them. And if anything happens to them, I will take care of them, and I will make them the most important people in the world to me.

I feel my grades are important because it contributes to my family and I do it so I can get the things I want like my sneakers. They are like rewards to me. Also, the reason I said sneakers is because I'm a sneakerhead. This means that I like to buy sneakers and that's my favorite clothing for me because of the style. Back to my grades. Good grades make me feel better and that I can do much better. For example, comparing the first marking period to the third marking period in the progress report, I got better grades. It's

the best scores I had in my life so I feel I should keep it up and it could be a great last marking period to show the high school that I want to go to.



Love at First App

David H.

Butterflies in my stomach. My fingers were shaking. I've had a crush on Jay since October, but this is the day, I take my chances with the girl of my dreams. My heart was racing. Jay and I were texting like always, but she started to complain about how she was in pain. I didn't know how to ask her out, but I had seen an opportunity. I gathered up all my courage and said what I had wanted to say for at least five months. At this moment, my life changed for the better.

I was a normal school kid who played football and played video games for fun. I had a good amount of friends, but I kept my circle small. The best friend I had was Alexander. He had my back through thick and thin and never switched up on me. He was a ride-or-die friend, and so was I. I think I got "okay" grades for a seventh-grader, but I know I could do better. I had known a couple of people I was thinking of including into my circle, but I had to get to know them first. Let me say now that I loved pranking people, but sometimes these pranks of mine didn't go as planned.

Another one of my friends at the time was Jay. Perfect girl, smart, funny, beautiful, just flat out amazing. She was just the best girl I'd ever met in my life. Eventually, there was an app called "TBH." People used this app to find out how people feel about you. I also used this app, but I used it to prank people. Jay was the first victim of my pranks, but she was also my last. As I pranked Jay, it started off as a joke. As I started talking to her, actual feelings began flooding from my mind. Jay and I later became best friends. It had been five months since I started liking her. It was February. Valentine's Day had just passed. Me and Jay had exchanged gifts. Jay was complaining that she was in pain. What I was about to say could have the biggest effect on my life. I told her that if she dated me she would feel better.

She said YES! Finally, I got the answer I wanted after five whole months. Took long enough but I did it, and I'm so happy. Now we are in June, and my life is amazing. I have a little brother, my grades are good, and I got my fantasy girl. Seventh grade was easily the best school year of my life and my birthday is coming up, so I'm finally going to be a teenager. It feels great; I'm finally going to stop hearing the little kid jokes. Now endings aren't my thing, but I feel like seventh grade, is chapter one of my legacy.



Lost Phone

Ariana H.

My heart felt like it had stopped. I looked around my car, in my backpack, even in my lunchbox. I couldn't believe it. I had lost my phone. I had attempted to call it, but I didn't hear it. Then, I had remembered that I left my phone at school. I had only brought my phone to school, and not home with me, so I knew it had to be there.

I was panicking. I felt as if a hurricane was occurring in my head. I had to be honest. I kept thinking about what my mom would do, where exactly I left my phone, who could have my phone. I tried to remember when I last had my phone but I couldn't, so I decided to tell my mom the truth.

I looked up at my mom and took a deep breath in.

"Mami..." I said, nervously.

"What?"

"I lost my phone."

"Ariana, you better find it because I'm not getting you another phone!"

I began to tear up. I felt disappointed in myself. That was the first time I realized that I might never get to see my phone again.

I knew my friend was still at school, so I had been able to call her on my mom's phone. I told her to check everywhere. The cafeteria, the classrooms, the bathroom, the principal's office, literally, everywhere. I began to lose hope but then I remembered that I had put it in my locker before leaving. So, I told my friend to check in my locker.

My mom's phone began to ring. I quickly picked it up and answered.

"I found it!" my friend said.

A big smile popped up on my face. There it was. After minutes of looking around in the silliest of places, my phone had been in the most obvious place in the world. All the answers started rushing back to me. I had put my phone inside of my locker at the end of the day; then I had forgotten to take it out before I left. Thank God my friend was there for me when I needed her. I don't know what would've happened if I hadn't found it that same day. But I can imagine.

This incident taught me to be careful and responsible with my material things.



A Determined Life

Alexander H.

"Whatever you do, do with determination. You have one life to live; do your work with passion and give your best. Whether you want to be a chef, doctor, actor, or a mother, be passionate to get the best result."

- Alia Bhatt

We may not realize it, but almost every minute of the day, there is an accident or someone getting sick in our home called Earth. But don't worry, because doctors are always there to save the day!

I love science, and I love helping people in need. That's who I am. Since I was a little kid, I always had a passion and ability to build something amazing out of nothing. Growing up, the natural thing for me to be would be a mechanical engineer. For hours, I would watch documentaries about how things are made and how we can make our world better. But then something changed. I no longer felt much of a passion for building.

I remember one day I was sitting on my couch and I was bored out of my mind, so I decided to watch something on TV. The problem was, I couldn't find anything interesting to watch, so I decided I would try to watch something new. I heard a lot of good things about a show called Chicago Med. It was from that moment on; I realized my true passion and goal in life: becoming a doctor. It fascinates me because not only can I still practice science, but I can give hope where there's none left and save a life against all the odds.

If I were ever able to pick any superpower that existed, I would most likely pick healing. One of the reasons I would pick this is because I love helping people in need and because being able to heal anyone instantly would be awesome! If I had this awesome superpower for a whole day, the first thing I would do is go to almost every hospital in the world, or at least in New York, and heal everyone with cancer or other diseases. That way everyone would be happy, and kids that have been stuck in the hospital ever since they were born will finally be able to live their lives to the fullest. The next thing I would probably do with my power would be to patrol all of Manhattan and keep everyone safe and preventing illness like the well-known Zika virus. Having one power for a whole day would be awesome and the coolest thing ever, and if I had the chance I would be an instant healer.

Superpowers are awesome. Think about all the good they could do for our world. They could give us hope, something many people don't have. Being a doctor is all about responsibility. That's why I decided to pick the superpower healing. That's how I could save lives and give people hope.



Good Game!

Deannie I.

My heart was beating *fast*, nervous to serve the ball over. Worried if I didn't hit the ball over the net my teammates would get upset. When the referee passed me the volleyball, I started bouncing it so that I could prepare for the actual hit. The referee blew

the whistle, and that was my green light. I threw the ball up and hit it with all my strength, trying not to go over the line. Everything was in *slow motion*. Looking at the ball as it flew over the net and the other team couldn't hit it. I scored a point. I smiled, but I went right back to serious. It was my turn to serve the ball again...

It hit me. I was nervous again. Serving is the main thing in volleyball. If you can't serve, you can't play. I threw the ball up in the air, and once the referee blew the whistle, I hit it. This time it was different. I didn't hit the ball over the net; the other team got the point, my teammates still cheered me on and said I did well. Since I missed the net, it was the other team's turn to serve. The other team has many strong players, so it was going to be a bit of a challenge. As the other team served, my teammates got into the ready position. The ball went over the net, and we hit it back over. It kept on going until the ball hit the net and the other team got the point. They served again, and the game kept going.

Finally, it was my turn to serve again, but before I did, my coach substituted me with someone else. A wash of relief rushed through me. Serving may seem easy, but it's really difficult. Hitting the ball at a certain angle to get it over the net is hard, and you feel like there's a bunch of pressure on you. You feel like everyone is watching you. As I sat down on the bench, I heard all types of compliments from my teammates saying I did well when serving and that I was great when playing. I said thank you and started paying attention to the game.

At first, the game was going well, 21 to 19. But then we lost our point. The referee gave the other team the point because we apparently touched the net with our hands while trying to get the ball over when we didn't. My team got angry because that just cost us a point for something we didn't do, and everything went downhill from there. Since the other team got the point, it was now 21 to 20, which means they were only one point away from tying us. It was our turn to serve the ball. Again, the ball didn't go over the net; the other team got the point. Now we were tied. Everyone in my team started panicking. The other team was scoring serving points and then **BOOM**. We lost....

That day I learned not ever to doubt yourself. I thought I couldn't serve the ball over the net, but I proved myself wrong. My team may have lost, but we've learned so much since then. This year we've won almost all the games. It really was a **good game**.



Dreams Do Come True

Amayranis J.

There is a point in life when you really want something, and you dream about it for months and months, and you become obsessed with it and would chase it and risk anything to get it. Let me just get to the point already. So it's a month before my birthday. I am 12 years old. I ask my mom for a guinea pig and tell her that I watched a lot of

YouTube channels during the spring break, so I know a lot about them. I want a girl guinea pig so bad, and I'm in love with two breeds: the Abyssinian and the teddy bear guinea pig. I ask my uncle every day, "When will I get a guinea pig?" I'm just chillin', waiting and waiting for a year now, and I'm like, "Gosh, this is taking months." Plus, my grandma hates guinea pigs.

Let me get to the real deal. I'm going to the Apple store with my mom, brother, and my two uncles. I'm sitting next to my uncle, and I ask him, "Hey, can I get a pet?" He says, "Maybe. But what kind?" I look around and say, "Can I get a guinea pig?" In my head, I'm thinking, *Wow, the crazy things I say, like Amy, you need to take this slower next time.* My uncle says, "OK" in the most chill voice in the world. I'm like, *What the heck, has he lost his mind?* Then he hits me with that, "But I'm going to warn you if you get hit with the secret weapon aka una chancletazo, don't blame me?" And I say, "OK."

Meanwhile, I'm thinking, *Wow, how crazy am I, like am I even ready for all this?* My uncle asks me, "When do you want to get a guinea pig?" And I say, "Um, tomorrow?" In my head, I'm like, *Amy, what are you talking about? You are thinking way too quickly!* So quick I start to get a headache. I go home and eat dinner, which was my favorite: mango with fried salami and fried cheese. Mmm... yummy. After that, I text my best friends, Jazmyn and Melanie, and tell them that I'm going to get a new pet. I ask if they want to know what it is, and they text me back and say no. I tell them anyway: it's a guinea pig. At this moment, Jazmyn calls me to say congrats and asks when I'll get it. I say I don't know, and we say goodbye. We both have to go to sleep because it's getting very late.

Let's fast forward. I'm at school and, you know, it's Monday and the most boring thing in the universe besides waiting for a five-million-year-old woman to cross a street. Finally, school ends but my backpack is filled with so many homework assignments and a lot of other things. Just imagine me leaving school, limping to the side a little bit. I finally get home, and my mom is in front of the building, and she says, "You ready?" I say, "Are we going now?" My mom says, "Yes, of course." I respond, "Oh shoot, let me go upstairs and drop off my book bag." Then I come back downstairs.

The cab is about to abandon me with my mom and brother inside. I run to the cab and hop inside and almost hit my head trying to act cool. We get to the pet shop, and I ask the man, "Where are the guinea pigs?" He tells me, "We only have one left." He guides me to my guinea pig, and I'm hoping it's a girl. He says the last one is a boy, so I get a little upset but happy at the same time. I look at one of the cages, and I don't see anything. He takes out the guinea pig and tells me the guinea pig is only a few months old. I do the math in my head, and figure he was born in August.

The guinea pig has black hair and some blonde fur on the top of his head, and he has two white paws and two black paws. They put him in a box with holes, and we make our way back home in the cab. The cab driver tells us his pig died, and I say I'm sorry for his loss. Then I say guinea pig names and come across the name Leo. It's perfect. Leo starts to squeak like crazy, and I'm confused, so I open the box, and he is in the corner scared. When I open the box, he stopped squeaking.

We finally get home. My mom and brother set up his cage, and I feel scared to carry him. I tell my mom to help me carry him, and she almost drops the box with Leo in it. I say, "Mom, you almost killed him!" She says, "What do you expect? I'm so scared." I sound sassy when I say, "Go be scared somewhere else!" My mom starts laughing and goes to her room.

It is just my brother and me; then my grandma walks in the door. She has a lot of bags and drops them and starts laughing, saying, "Yay! Woohoo! Congrats!" in Spanish.

That's my story of how my dream came true. If you want to achieve something or do something you dream of, just take a risk like I did. My story can show you that your dreams can come true, too.



A Lifelong Friend

Penelope L.

The first person to make me feel invincible was Gisselee. I was eight years old, and I was very shy. At the time, I was lonely and barely had friends. I was in the bathroom, washing my hands, and I saw a girl.

"Hi," I said.

"Hello."

The bathroom was rather grimy and nasty; it looked so unhygienic. It was a weird place to meet a friend. She seemed new in our school. She had creamy dark brown hair and was about my height.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Gisselee. What's yours?"

"Penelope."

Gisselee had a very friendly smile. She seemed shy and timid like me. We talked and walked to our class together. After class, we went to lunch. The lunchroom was filled with thousands of scents. Gisselee and I sat together. There were tons of kids screaming and yelling. Then after lunch, we played tag. The gym floor was as shiny as glass. The gym was bright and clean. There were a bunch of little eight-year-olds running around like crazy people. Gisselee and I went upstairs for class.

When we were in class, the teacher told us it was time for a snack. That day we got animal crackers. Gisselee and I started playing with animal crackers as if we were in Africa. We mostly played with the elephants. Our favorite part was biting the noses off the elephants; they looked funny. It seemed never to get old. We laugh about that all the time. Afterward, we read for a bit. We talked about the books we had read. Then we had show-and-tell. Soon after it was time to leave.

After leaving school that day, I realized that Gisselee would always be my friend. To this day, she has stayed my friend. She has saved me thousands of times.



Ball is Life

Valentino M.

When I was 11 years old, I lost a basketball game. When I lost this game, it made me angry, and I was surprised. We went to the gym, started to shoot around, and picked our teams. Then the game started.

That morning, I had bought a bacon egg and cheese sandwich. I arrived at school, and I went to math class, we took a test about probability. The period ended, and our next class was ELA. Then we started to do our entrance slip. We were working hard to write our essays. Fifth period began which was gym time. The teacher told us to line up, and we all ran down the stairs as fast as we could.

My friends and I started to shoot around. Then we started our game. I was playing as a point guard and my friend, Juan, was shooting guard. Miguel was center because he's tall. The other team had Chris as a point guard, and David was the shooting guard and Oliver was center. Then the game began. The other team had the ball first. I passed the ball to the other team. Chris tried to drive in but got blocked by Miguel. We had to have the ball. Miguel passed the ball to me, and I shot the three. SWISH! We scored our first points, so it was 3-0. Game is 10.

The other team has the ball. Chris passes the ball to Oliver and Oliver shoots the mid-range and makes it in. The score is 3-2. They have the ball. Chris passes the ball to David and David dribbles. He steps back and shoots the three and makes it in. The score is 5-3. They still have the ball and Chris passes to Oliver and Oliver passes back and Chris shoots a three and doesn't miss. Score is 8-3. They still have the ball. Juan steals the ball from Chris and Juan drives in to the basket and jellies in to the hoop. The score is 8-5. I pass to Miguel, and Miguel shoots the three and bangs it in. Score is 8-8. The game starts to get intense. We have a ball game. I pass to Juan, and he shoots but misses. Oliver gets the rebound and passes to David. He shoots like everything became slow motion, but he makes the three for the game. Final score is 11-8.

We all go to lunch surprised and angry, thinking we were going to win. The other team is so happy that they won and they start talking trash. I said, "Don't worry, part two is coming."

The lesson I learned that day was don't get too confident. I'm always going to try hard when I play a game, so I can win because I'm tired of losing games. If I don't try hard in my basketball games, I will not become an NBA player.

My Trustable Friend!

Gisselee R.

When I first came to PS 366 in second grade, I thought I wasn't going to make any friends. Much to my surprise, I made one quickly. I was at a new school, and I knew no one. So, it was very hard to make friends the first couple days of school because I was a very shy person. This might sound weird, but I made a friend in the bathroom. It was very awkward, and I was very confused why this was happening in the bathroom. Her name is Penelope.

Penelope is a funny, kind, and trustable person. Every time we hug each other, I feel like I am hugging a teddy bear. I don't want a friend who uses me because I am smart. I want a friend who is like a diary to me so that I can tell her all my secrets. And I guess Penelope turned out to be that person. That person I don't want to lose.

We were friends until third grade. In fourth grade, we were not in the same class, and we only saw each other when we had parties or trips. I was a little sad for not having her with me for a while. After a few years, which felt like centuries, we finally were in the same class again in seventh grade. We see each other every single day. She earned my trust and kindness, and I earned hers, too. She is the most loyal person I have ever met. I'm not sure if we'll be friends forever. But it's just like the solar system – all the planets are far from each other, but the forces are keeping them together.

I am glad I made a best friend at this school, and I hope Penny and I can stay best friends. If we go to the same high school, I would be very happy and excited. We have been through many things. She has changed me. She made me feel invincible and more confident in myself. I thank her for being there for me.



The First Serve

Asrar S.

I was nervous, maybe even shaking a bit. I hesitated a few times. Everyone on my team was telling me not to be scared, but how could I possibly not be? My elementary school's team was there watching the game, my fifth-grade teachers were there watching, and my older brother was also watching. All eyes on the court and the benches were on me because I was the first one to serve at my school's first ever volleyball game. Not only that, but it was also the first volleyball game that I ever went to.

I was just sitting down tying my shoes when I started to hear my name being called. At that moment I knew what was going to happen. I felt as if my heart skipped a beat but then right after that my heart started to race. I didn't want to go; I was afraid of not being able to make it across the net. I would get embarrassed. I felt glued to my chair. I asked

the coach, "Why me?" He responded with, "You're a good server." The coach saying that made me believe that I could do it and gave me the courage to try.

I stepped onto the court. The referee passed me the ball. He blew the whistle. I started bouncing the ball. While I was bouncing the ball, I looked at all my teammates sitting on the side. I turned my head to the other side and saw everyone looking at me. My legs started shaking. No matter how hard I tried not to be nervous and not shake it didn't work. I picked up the ball. I spun it in my hand a bit. I put my hand where I was going to hit it and then I went for it.

I watched the ball fly across the court hoping it would go over the net. I felt frozen in place. A moment of intensity raged in my eyes. When it got close to the net, I already knew what was going to happen. A deep sigh escaped my mouth. Disappointment was in my eyes. "I didn't hit it hard enough," I said to myself. I looked over at all the people sitting on the benches, scared that they would be laughing, but luckily no one was so that helped ease off the pressure a bit.

Then we rotated, and it was the other team's turn to serve. After 15 minutes of playing and rotating back and forth it was finally my turn to serve again. I took a deep breath in and tried to relax. This time, I kept my eyes on the ball and nothing else. I didn't look at anyone on the court or the benches. I bounced the ball, positioned my hand, and hit it. At that moment, I had already lost belief in myself that I could make it over, but I watched the ball fly over the net! I was frozen in place. I couldn't believe I made it over. A big smile spread across my face. I watched the team try to hit the volleyball back to my team's side, but they couldn't. The smile got even bigger. Since the other team wasn't able to hit the ball back to my team, I got to serve again. I served four times in a row until the other team was finally able to hit. After that, the game continued. We ended up losing. Even though I was sad that we lost, I was proud of myself because I knew I gave it my best.

As I was going up my building's stairs, happiness rushed through my body.

"Mom, Dad, I hit the ball over the net!"

"Wow, good job!" said my dad with a smile on his face.

I felt proud of myself. I went to my bed and started reminiscing about the game and what I could do better during next Saturday's game. I couldn't wait to play with my team again because even if we lose, I still get to do what I love the most, which is to play volleyball.



Stressful Night

Alexander S.

Throughout all my life, my brother has been, well, a very special kid. He's never been the easiest to handle, but he's a loveable person.

So I get home as usual, and my brother has just gone outside. I sense a ghastly breeze across my body. I close my window and notice something. "Wait, he doesn't take his book bag when he goes outside." Fast forward, I begin to question my intelligence, because I have his Facebook account. Later on, I check his messages and see that he claimed to be in Brooklyn, alone. At this moment I know something is up.

At this point, my homework is done, I'm showered and ready to completely knock into a sleep coma. I jump at the sound of "*Pring! Pring! Pring!*" I pick up the phone and ask who it is. It's 9:00 P.M. at my house, with only my mom and me. Usually, no one would like to wake up a mom like mine. I run so fast that I feel the future knock me back. All this, only to find out that it's my father.

To my astonishment, I begin to ask for a lot of things from my father like, "Can I have pizza? And can you give me \$30?" Honestly, his tone already says it. "Alex... Yo soy Bill Gates?" I say goodbye and don't bother listening to the rest. I slowly begin to fall asleep, not knowing what my brother is up to or if he's safe.

It's now the devil's hour, 3 A.M., and I'm woken by a short female with a high-pitched voice, yelling at a phone. My heart is now on a treadmill doing about 40 mph. I'm expecting to go to sleep again to prevent heart failure, until my mom tells me, "I'm sorry, Alex, but you have to get up. We're going to Brooklyn to pick up your brother from the precinct." Once again, I'm forced to pay the lord with my hours of sleep because my brother decided to do something not very smart. My mother and I have to take TWO shivering trains to get there. Within the darkness of night, the raindrops coat my disappointment and anger. At this point, my mind is in an abyss because I've never seen my brother arrested.

As my mother and I take our time, choosing when and where to take our steps, we're both thinking about what to say to him when we see him. Walking under the gloomy train station, I feel an ache in my head. This is a migraine warning. Doing nothing about it, I walk towards the precinct, and an officer tells my mom and me to wait by some gate. I'm tapping my foot now because I'm already growing impatient.

Believe it or not, I don't like my brother at this moment, because my brother isn't only my sibling, he's my best friend. When I'm about to do something explosive at home, or when I'm unreasonably angry, he's there for me. Maybe he's not the best role model, but that's what makes me love him because he can then use me as inspiration to change.

The second they uncuff the tight handcuffs and release him, my mom goes berserk. She gives him a look like, "You're in soooo much trouble." To my amazement, she doesn't scream and grab him by the ear – at least, not yet. She says, "Let's go talk outside." In this very moment, my mom is about to use every word in the English and Spanish dictionary against my brother.

Exiting the building, my brother is making excuses for how he got caught and laughing at the same time. I tilt my head, looking at my mom, and she's just too tired, so all she says is, "Okay, sure, I believe you." I take no part in this conversation, and we eventually walk back a block to take the same two trains. I let my hair dry in the train car, and I have hundreds of questions for my brother. "What happened? Where? Why? How come you didn't tell me?" Later on, I push the questions back in the train car as we leave the train station.

Finally, in my home borough, the Bronx, we walk out of the station, going down three blocks to my house. I let my mom walk ahead so I can talk to my brother. In my brother's mind, he's only been put in timeout. He turns to me, "Bro, you okay? It's my bad you didn't sleep." I notice his empathy, but that doesn't give him an excuse to rob someone. For the rest of the night, my brother and I talk about our lives, compare struggles, as if the night was frozen.



Compassion and Empathy

Antonella S.

One important moment in my life was when I realized how compassionate and empathetic I am. I was in school, and the last period was Dance. In Dance, you learn about movement, choreography, and different dance stuff from other cultures. In this particular period of dance, we were all being punished for talking too loudly, so we all had to sit and wait until all of us stopped talking. And by all of us, I mean ALL of us. Too bad everyone was shushing each other.

I was conversing with my friend when I was interrupted by one of my classmates, who shushed my friend and me. My temper flared like the sun, and I became furious like a bull seeing red.

What happened next was possibly comparable to WWII. I shot back furiously with insults, and my classmate did the same. Everything turned to miniature hellfire in the classroom. Then my friend left the classroom in anger, and most of the class laughed. The teachers shamed most of the class for doing that stuff. I know adults can be nonchalant, but I was glad they acted quickly and efficiently and that I wasn't alone in defending my friend.

In summary, I learned to be compassionate and empathetic through this particular incident. And to never be afraid to stand up for others. Oh, and that people can be really mean.



The Power of Modeling Another World's View

Samantha S.

I have an attitude problem. As a kid, I used to be very hyper and as I got older, I developed my personality traits. Sadly, one of those character traits was my attitude, and it's gotten me in trouble, and I've had my items taken away. Here's the day I learned something new about myself, something I'd never noticed about myself that my attitude helped me learn. I'm part of the ALZA afterschool program. Essentially, one day in afterschool I wasn't having the brightest day, and I gave the afterschool art counselor that same attitude that gets me in trouble. I didn't want to acknowledge her when she demanded I do the artwork she had assigned. Instead, I read a book I was fascinated by, something I'd been reading for a while. She then demanded I go to the office. I still didn't acknowledge what she told me, but then after a while, I did.

Once I was in front of the office, my legs felt like jelly, and my palms were sweaty. I didn't like getting in trouble, but unfortunately I was. When I got to the office, the afterschool director told me to think about how much work and effort my counselor puts into the assignments she gives us. I thought about it and slowly broke; tears filled my eyes. They ran down my face like drops of water on a rainy day. I felt bad as if there was a pit of pain in my stomach. The director asked me why I was crying. I told her that I felt bad about what I did. She then told me I was an empathetic person. I asked her what that meant. She told me it's the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. I partially understood. I remembered all the times something tragic happened to someone I know or when I would watch a movie and something tragic would happen, I felt melancholic, or I cried. So then I understood.

Once I was sent back to class, I immediately apologized. From that day on I knew I had to control my attitude. The way I acted and treated people and the way I talked to people. I had to CHANGE. Not everything, just my unbearable attitude.



Having Fun with My Family

Jazmyn V.

I'm happy that I grew up with my family because my family makes me happy when I'm sad. Once my family and I went to the park on a beautiful day, and we had a great conversation and a great walk around the park. My family and I love each other because we care about each other's feelings. My family has loved me since the day I was born. They do everything for me. They buy me everything - for example, clothes, shoes, and toys - and when I'm feeling sad or mad, they make me feel happy.

When I was in third grade, a classmate was making fun of me. They were saying bad comments about me. This made me feel sad and mad at the same time. My mom told me not to pay attention to them and not to listen to what they say. When I struggle in school or I don't pay attention in school, my family helps me to get focused and helps me to stop struggling at school.

When my family and I go out, we have fun. On the holidays we get together, have fun and eat dinner. During the holidays my family and I just talk and invite people over, so we can celebrate together and give joy to people. When it's time for summer, my family and I sometimes go to the park and take in the fresh air on a beautiful sunny day.

I love spending time with my family because they care about me and I care about them. Being with my family is the best because we spend time together and do everything together. I hate when people try to hurt my family because my family means a lot to me and I love my family.

When my family and I are having a great time, we go to a restaurant, so we can eat and have a great conversation and go to different places so that we can spend more time together. When I'm trying to have fun with my family, I tell them, "Let's go somewhere," so we won't be bored at home.

Spending time with your family is the best thing that could happen to you. When you love your family, you want to spend more time with them. Spending time with your family makes you happy and makes them happy because they know you want to spend time with them.



Money

Yoshuah W.

Isn't it upsetting when you lose something? You feel like you're losing a part of yourself. This is the case for me. I lost \$5 in my house. The story began when I started out with \$10 in an eyeglasses case. I spent half of the money on unrelated things, so I had \$5 left. I had left the eyeglasses case with the \$5 on my bed, and I planned to buy Dunkin Donuts with it the next week. But then I couldn't find the said eyeglasses case, and I got very upset. So after that, I went on a search.

Money is money, and when you lose it at a young age you might just think there's more, but not me. When I lose a single quarter, I get so upset and think it's just unfair how life works. You need to have money to buy happiness, and I don't care what anyone else says. "Money doesn't buy happiness." But happiness is a house and how else will you get one? Happiness is being healthy with a family. How else will you deal with sickness? And finally, how will you please your children without money? You think they would enjoy only your loving? That's honestly just not true. Children without valuable things are

unhappy thus making that quote untrue. I also think the fact that parents don't give children over the age of nine money to buy their own stuff is ridiculous. Money is a good source of fun. You can buy toys and such.

If I hadn't lost the \$5 I would've been happy – with \$10 to buy anything I pleased, including Dunkin Donuts and soda. Ever since that day, it was a mystery. One night I woke up and found an eyeglasses case and then something I'd wanted for a long, long time: my cleaning wipe for my eyeglasses. Still, not my money so I just went back to bed very depressed. The next night I started to look around a lot but couldn't find much. I did find three extra dollars, so if I ever found my \$5, I'd have \$8.

One day I checked in my drawers and found another eyeglasses case. I was skeptical and didn't think much of it, and of course I was right; it was empty. No money in it. Then, one day, I found it! A third pair of eyeglasses case was found but still no money.

I stopped caring for a while until my sister found the money. I was pretty excited, but it was so long overdue. And then I realized, oh wow, I could do a lot with the money. I was pretty hyped so I went out to buy a ton of stuff. But then I thought, why don't I save this instead and buy more necessary things? I realized it's better to organize my stuff, and I became a more responsible human being with my items. I will keep in mind that everything I do will have consequences, whether good or bad. And I'll keep my stuff in proper order. I'll never forget this moment.

