

Smyrna School District

Essay Contest

2007

Adult and Student Winners

A decorative border of various pencils surrounds the text. At the top, three pencils are arranged horizontally. On the left and right sides, pencils are arranged vertically. At the bottom, three pencils are arranged horizontally. In the bottom right corner, there is a pencil holder containing several pencils.

I ♥ The Smyrna School District

The seventh essay contest to support the five Smyrna School District core values of *Respect, Responsibility, Perseverance, Integrity, and Compassion* was held during the month of January 2007. There were two categories of winners: adults (18 and over) and students (K through Grade 12). During “I Love the Smyrna School District” day on March 3, 2007, first, second, and third place winners received medals and certificates noting their accomplishments.

The 2007 writing contest focused on the value of *Perseverance*. Hundreds of touching and heartfelt essays were submitted. This booklet contains the essays of first, second, and third place winners at all levels.

I hope this booklet is a source of inspiration for both the readers and the writers.

I extend my sincere appreciation to all who contributed their time and effort to enter this contest and share their thoughts.

Debbie Wicks

Superintendent

For the seventh annual “I Love the Smyrna School District” essay contest, students and adults were asked to write about *Perseverance*, a core district value. Contest rules and a writing prompt were disseminated to students (via their teachers) and the community in January 2007. The writing prompt was created to mirror the type of prompt students might encounter on the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP) writing tests given each spring.

June Wicks, district reading coordinator, prepared the prompt and assisted with coordinating the essay contest. Janet Garrett, retired Smyrna High School business teacher, completed the typing and formatting of the publication. Karen Kennedy, Smyrna School District Curriculum Office secretary, assisted with the layout and editing of the publication. Alexander “Sandy” Shalk, Ed.D., conducted the contest and edited the final publication. District teachers encouraged their students to write and helped select essays. Appreciation is extended to all for their time and effort in making this publication possible.

ESSAY CONTEST

Contestants are asked to write a maximum 500-word essay on the following topic (deadline is January 31, 2007):

Write about an experience in your life that exemplifies the value of perseverance. Discuss the goal you achieved by persevering, what you did to achieve it, and how you felt when you accomplished that goal. If you prefer, you may write about the experience of someone you admire, rather than your own personal experience.

Perseverance means the inner strength to remain constant to a purpose, idea, or task in the face of obstacles. This includes dedication, consistency, and having a positive attitude.

ADULT WINNERS: First (gold), second (silver), and third (bronze) place winners receive medals and certificates noting their accomplishments. Winners and runners-up were recognized during the “I Love the Smyrna School District” day (March 3, 2007).

STUDENT WINNERS: First (gold), second (silver), and third (bronze) place winners are selected at each grade level (K-12) in each building. Winners receive medals and certificates noting their accomplishments. All winners were recognized during the “I Love the Smyrna School District” day (March 3, 2007).

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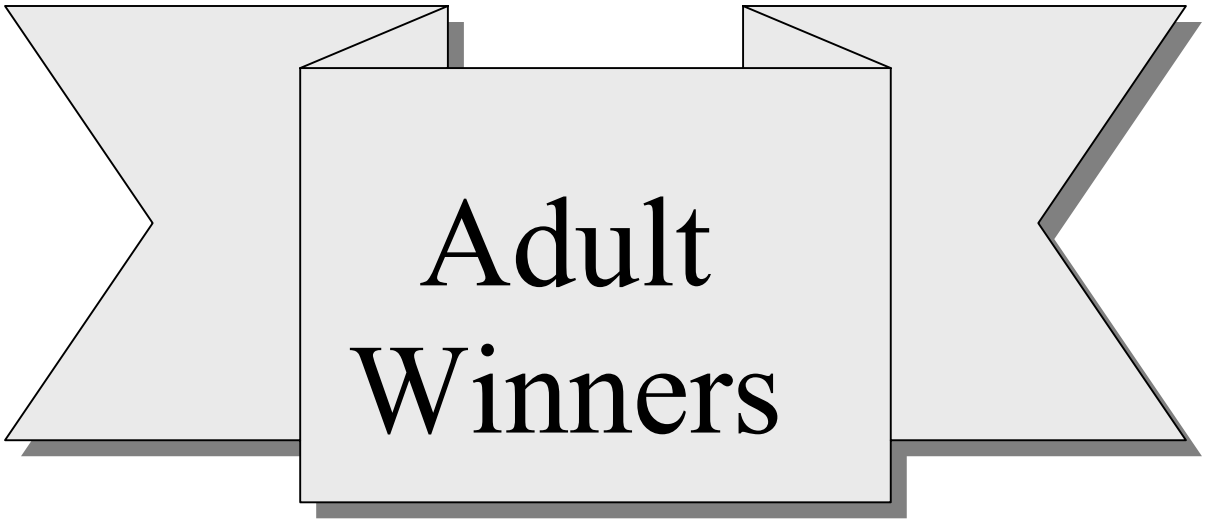
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When I hear the term “perseverance,” my mind automatically shifts to my own mother, Jennifer. At the age of 58 she is a published author, a holder of a Magna Cum Laude undergraduate distinction, and a possessor of a Master’s Degree in Creative Writing. No one would ever guess that throughout her life she has faced a mountain of obstacles. As I know her today, Jennifer’s inner ambitions seem strongly synonymous with perseverance.

Defined as “the inner strength to remain constant to a purpose, idea, or task in the face of obstacles,” perseverance often conjures up the image of one who is wholly determined to succeed academically.

My mother, a brilliant woman, certainly did not face any intellectual obstacles. This was one of the few early advantages on her side. Like many other individuals, she grew up in a highly dysfunctional home. From early childhood she witnessed alcoholism, abuse and domestic warfare. In that same environment, my mother was smart, creative, and independent. Notwithstanding, no one encouraged her to exercise her talents or even checked her homework. In short, no one at home really cared about school.

One of her most vivid childhood memories is a school day on which standardized testing was being conducted. She remembers leaving home that morning very sick and, like every other day, not having had breakfast. Still, she managed to score in the 99th percentile on that test.

I’ve often meant to ask her if anyone from her household ever even asked to see the results. It would seem that any normal parent would brag endlessly about such an accomplishment. But, of course, her home wasn’t what you’d call typical.

Frustrated and unhappy, she left home before her senior year of high school. At seventeen she was a wife. At twenty-two, she was a dually-employed single mom. Like every other solo parent, she was tired, overworked, stressed, and didn’t have two nickels to rub together.

There comes a point where many of us accept the hand that fate has dealt us. It is so easy to just become complacent, and accept our circumstances. However, my mother had other ideas. Without a cent to her name and still a working single mom, Jennifer went back to school. She graduated from Cleveland State University with a 3.89 cumulative average and later went on to complete graduate school. Her dream was to publish a novel and in 1996 her dream became a reality when her novel was marketed by a highly respected New York publisher. At the time, she also became a college professor dedicated to helping other students follow their dreams of “perseverance.”

Catherine Dryden

First Place, Adult

Perseverance is a trait we normally associate with human beings. I have come to know a four-legged friend named Hope who exemplifies the meaning of perseverance. Her life has been a journey in which she has never given up. She lived in conditions that were cruel yet she never lost her will to go on in the face of it all. Our hope is to reward her perseverance with the home and family she deserves.

Hope had developed a yeast infection of the skin in the summer of 2005. The infection and lack of care caused her to lose all of her hair. The smell that accompanied the infection was so bad that her “family” had relegated her to the backyard to live. They had abandoned her in her own home. Her only escape from the heat and sun was a hole she dug for herself under the shed. When it rained the hole filled with water forcing her out. She would go to the porch and know that someone would come for her.

They did come on August 30, 2006. They picked her up and put her in the back of a truck. It was a small metal box but it was cool and out of the blazing sun. The ride was a long one and Hope was fearful and unsure of her future. The people in uniforms took her to a shelter to spend the night.

The next morning she was back in the truck. Hope felt so embarrassed; she was naked and she smelled awful. When Hope came out of the truck a lady approached her. The lady didn’t turn away; she smiled at Hope and took her inside. Her foster mom gave her a bath and tenderly dried her. After her bath she put a t-shirt on Hope. It was warm and soft; Hope no longer felt naked. It was dark outside and Hope thought she would have to sleep outside but tonight was different. Tonight she would sleep inside on a soft clean blanket. Life only got better after that first night. She got a bath and clean t-shirt every day. After a few weeks Hope was beginning to get a little tired of the baths.

Her foster mom took Hope to the veterinarian. They had determined that the infection was caused by food allergies. She would need medicine to get rid of the infection and then a special diet to keep it from coming back. With the food and the medicine Hope’s hair soon grew back! She was a beautiful black and red German shepherd. Her hope now was for her very own family.

Hope, who we have named Czara, came into our lives on January 28, 2007, almost five months after being rescued. Czara lived a life that most people would not be able to survive and she did it without any understanding for why she was treated so poorly. Czara holds no ill will towards anyone she meets. She comes to greet you with a slight wag of the tail and gently offers her paw. The reward for her perseverance is food twice a day, a nice walk, three other dogs to play with and a family that adores her. Czara is a true example of perseverance and an inspiration to our family. We are blessed to have her in our lives.

Christine Malec

First Place, Adult

Perseverance is the steady persistence in a course of action in spite of difficulties. Without perseverance I would not be here today.

My whole life I wanted to be a nurse. I attended college and went through the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program. During this time I spent time in the operating room (OR) observing the nurses and procedures. Well, I was hooked! I knew from that moment I wanted to be a nurse in the OR. However, I knew I would have to be a registered nurse (RN) in order to work in that specialty.

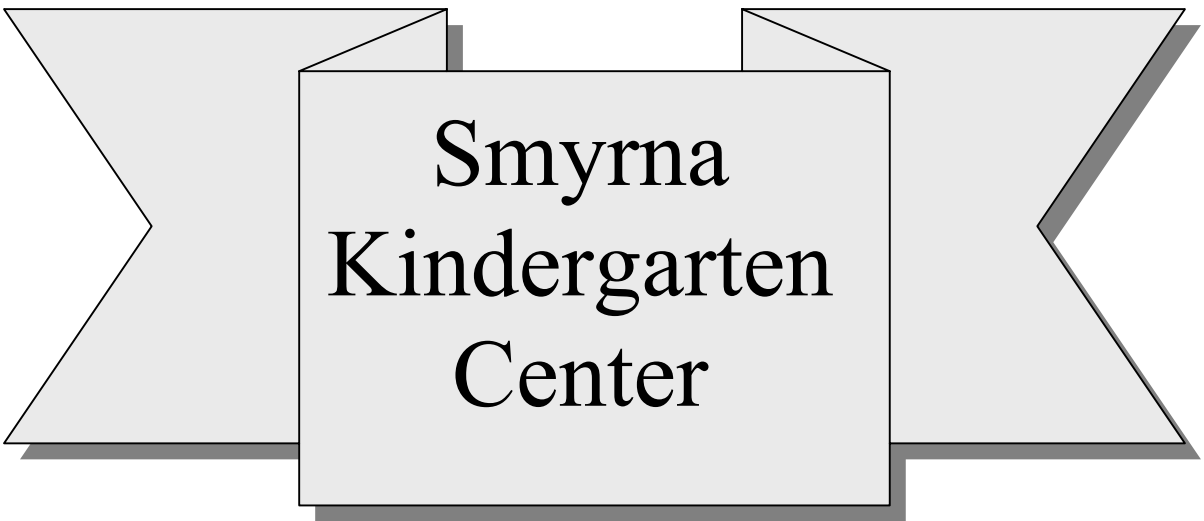
In 1996 I graduated from college as an LPN and worked for a few years. I really liked my job but desperately wanted to return to college. Then the time finally came. In 2003 I returned to college to work towards my goal. It was not easy because I was driving an hour both ways to classes, working and studying, doing homework, and taking care of my family. Everything was going well until one day I felt a mass on the side of my neck. This really worried me because I had previously fought cancer in 1997. I was referred to a surgeon to have a biopsy. I was in a lot of pain afterwards but continued to attend classes. I just knew it was going to be bad news, but I was not going to let a little thing like cancer slow me down! I finally received the call and it was confirmed—I had cancer again. I finished my course and made the decision to start chemotherapy. My goal of becoming an RN was always on my mind. I could not wait to finish chemo and return to school.

In 2004, after a year of chemotherapy, radiation, and two surgeries, I was finished with treatment. I immediately returned to school; I was so excited to be working towards my goal again. I finished school on February 14—what a great Valentine gift! I was nominated by my instructors to represent the school as student of the year at the annual Nurses Ball. I was awarded a certificate and \$500. I was also very surprised when I was awarded the Essence of Nursing Award for my dedication to continuing education—what a beautiful trophy!

I went on to work where I had always wanted to be—Christiana Care Hospital. I was accepted into the Perioperative Internship Program where I was trained to work in the OR. Without continually focusing on my goal, and persevering through all the obstacles and many difficulties I encountered, I would not be here today and would have never reached my goal.

Now I find myself needing perseverance once again. I have been attending the University of Delaware to continue my nursing education and have also just been diagnosed once again with cancer. I am not worried though because I know I will persevere through this obstacle to beat cancer and to reach my new goal of graduating from the University.

Janie Wallace
First Place, Adult



I tried to do a split. I can do it now.

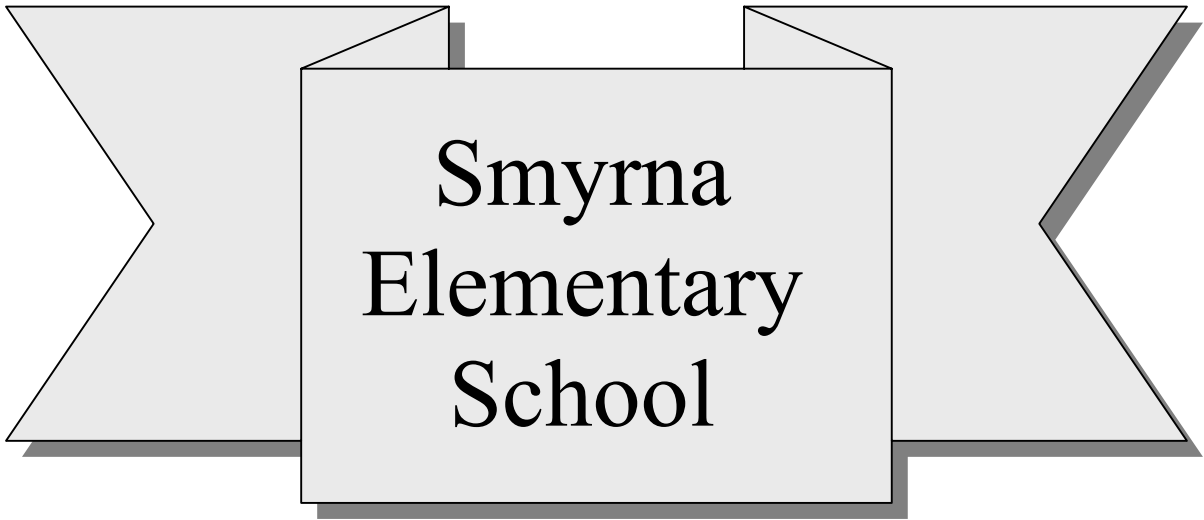
Morgan Wilson
First Place, Kindergarten

I did six sit-ups. I did not stop.

Austin Leone
Second Place, Kindergarten

I washed the dishes. I was tired but I kept on washing.

Lillian Cherriman
Third Place, Kindergarten



Smyrna
Elementary
School

Grades Kindergarten, 1, 2, 3, and 4

I was afraid that the school didn't know me.

Mya Montejo
First Place, Kindergarten

I tried to learn how to play the piano.

Autum Wilson
Second Place, Kindergarten

Perseverance means I need to work hard to ride my scooter.

Shelia Gisiora
Third Place, Kindergarten

I was trying to hit a home run. It was hard to do it because I wasn't fast enough. I felt like giving up but I kept trying and trying and I got faster. When the big game came I had to do a home run. I went as fast as I could go to 1st base, 2nd base, 3rd base and to home base. I made it and I felt proud of myself.

Andrew Ridenour
First Place, Grade 1

Have you ever tried to do something that was very hard to do? I have! I showed perseverance when I learned how to pass a hard level in Star Wars. It was very hard because my opponent kept winning. I did not want to give up so I kept trying very hard. When I finally completed that hard level I felt very, very happy!

Jacob Bedekovich
Second Place, Grade 1

Riding my bike was difficult. Riding my bike was hard, because my bike was a two-wheeler. Yes, I felt like giving up when my sister's bike fell on my leg. If I kept practicing I would get better riding my bike. I felt proud of myself when I learned how to ride my bike, because I could ride my bike around the block with my sister.

Olivia Southward

Third Place, Grade 1

I am going to talk about persevering. Persevering means to try and try over again. I'm going to write about persevering through roller skating. So here is my story. Once I fell because I went over a rock. Bump! That really hurt my knee when I fell. It took weeks and weeks to roller skate. Whew!! You really need balance. Trust me, if you don't want to fall, balance yourself.

When I fell it was so hard to get up. Now that's something. Do you know the hardest part? Then I will tell you. It's gliding on the road. That is hard because it is bumpy and there are hills. I felt sad when I couldn't glide smoothly and stay up. It was so weird to be the only one outside trying to roller skate. I was mad when I fell and scraped myself. Ouch! I felt so happy when I could roller skate. Wow! I felt really cool skating with all these people. I felt grownup when I played with big kids. It was great not to fall down and stuff. I'm really glad I kept trying to roller skate because now I know how to. Now you know what it's like to roller skate.

Jasmine Balderson

First Place, Grade 2

Wow! It really takes a long time to achieve something that you really want. I wanted to ride my bike really bad, but I have to tell you a few other things. I persevered on my bike but couldn't do it. Still I tried and I tried but nothing happened.

It just wasn't fair because I wanted to ride my bike so bad. Then something happened—my dad held me. I finally got it. I really didn't want to give up so I didn't but accomplished that challenge. I'm so-o-o-o-o happy. I'm amazed. I finally did it. I achieved it all because I persevered.

That's how I learned how to ride my bike. Now my brother needs to take this challenge. See you next time.

Justin Sinclair

Second Place, Grade 2

Oh, my gosh! I almost did not know how to tie my shoes! But I persevered and did not give up! This is my story. My story is about how to tie my shoes. This task was so hard because I had to try to get the string through the hole; but it was so difficult! I was so upset, I felt like I was never going to ever wear sneakers again! My uncle helped me for a while, and then I persevered and got it! I was so happy and proud that I learned how to tie my shoes! This is how I persevered and learned how to tie my shoes.

Sara Fields
Third Place, Grade 2

Hello fellow classmates! Come take a seat in this nice, red chair along with this hot coffee. You know, I bet at least once in your long life you achieved an important task you deserve to be proud of. Is there a time you've ever kept trying and trying and finally you very quickly conquered your goal? That's what I, Bryndan Tompkins, did that's special to me. I conquered a fear and from that day on I've still been proud of myself. I climbed a high gymnastics rope and I'm afraid of heights. So you can call me a very brave little girl.

This heart-warming story starts in the summer of 2004 on a Sunday. I was at gymnastics with a lot of six and seven year olds when all of a sudden the coach cried, "ROPE TIME!" Everyone came running over except me. I told the coach I never can climb the rope all the way because I'm puny. "Never say 'never'," said the coach. My friend came over and said, "It's just a dumb rope;" but it's more than the rope. When it was my turn I started to climb and the coach's mouth dropped open. I was really high! I looked down and noticed I was almost there—four more feet till I'm at the top. I almost screamed, but before I could I dropped. I kept doing the same thing three more times and just about gave up. Not too long later I heard my conscience. It said, "Don't give up now!" So next practice I marched to that rope, climbed hand by hand, and you know what—I rang the bell! So you know if you try, try again you can conquer a fear and make a goal.

Next, I want to explain why I'm so very small. I can hardly make a hoop in basketball or get into big clothes, but I keep trying. I know I can get bigger by getting strength and growing! You know I was five in this story and very miniature, but with a touch of magic all your goals will succeed! Even if you're small, even if you're huge, all your dreams will come true. All you have to do is try, try again (perseverance). The story is sounding kind of impossible because how did I become strong so quick? How did I make muscles? I am wimpy and weak. Well, I was but I'm only a normal human, right?

I know you ask from the hole in your heart—what did I do to achieve my goal? Well, first I worked out. I worked out when I woke up and when I "hit the hay" with fifty push-ups. Now I look like a strong wrestler. My next important reason for becoming big and strong is I never gave up strolling and strolling on the rope. I kept falling on my head and got up and did it again and again. My last reason is because if things didn't succeed I tried a new idea and a new one until I climbed. I'm glad I didn't get injured!

Lastly, I felt proud when I really succeeded, and I loved the ring of the bell. I mean I cried when I rang it happily. It was scary when I couldn't climb—it was madness. Now I dream of flowers and sing in the morning. I feel like I am so active and can do anything like superman! I feel powerful inside and love the world! I could have more goals, too. In conclusion, you've learned how you could achieve dreams and do a lot. Anything is possible, just persevere. But it doesn't really matter, because it's what's on the inside that counts and believe me, I know.

Bryndan Tompkins

First Place, Grade 3

Whew! Riding a bike sure is something to persevere for! It was like I was a pack mule because I worked my rear end off trying to get the routine down for a whole MONTH and still couldn't get it down. It's like I'm one of those amateurs that try out for American Idol. So, I'll bet you've got a little tip because nothing comes easy while riding a bike.

First, it's going to be hard and I mean hard work to learn how to ride a bike! I am bruised everywhere from falling off that bike! You know, even though I kept getting bruised and needed lots of ice packs, well I still didn't lose faith in myself. I just can't keep balancing on this thing. I'm wiggling and wobbling like I'm one of those men off of that TV program Wiggles. It's really hard not to wobble when you're not going fast. My dad was probably really hurt after that because my bike kept hurting him. It's like my dad was on a nature hunt and there's a lion hurting him. But, instead of a lion, it's my bike and my bike kept running over his toes. I didn't even know it. All I heard was this huge OUCH and I just said this little "sorry" like a mouse. The seat even pinched his finger because the rubber scrunched and I heard another loud OUCH! But, I had to keep trying.

Man, I've got to do a lot of work if I want to achieve my goal. Now, if I wanted to ride a bike so badly, I'd call my Aunt Gretchen. Fellow students, if there's anyone out there who could teach a kid to ride a bike in a day that's my Aunt Gretchen. Truth is that she could teach my mom and dad's friend Dawn's son how to ride a bike in 15 minutes. That's a record timing! Even though I kept falling, students, I still believed. I was still getting bruised up but that didn't stop me from believing that some day I'd be able to feel the wind through the holes in my helmet. I knew I had to do something so I told my Aunt Gretchen to let go. I had this sudden urge that I could achieve my goal so she let go, and I was riding. See what can happen if you believe in yourself?

Yes! I did it—I finally learned how to ride a bike. I felt extremely enthusiastic that day. I felt like I was juggling jelly beans because I could ride a bike. I felt that I could ride with the big kids. I really felt that I could ride with the big kids because they showed off with their bike skills and now I could too. Now that I can ride a bike, I can fit in with my friend Jessica. I am so excited that I can fit in and hang out with her and her sister Julia. I'm now very excited because I can ride a two wheeler.

In conclusion, next time you want to do something and you just can't do it just persevere. I really learned two valuable lessons. Take these two valuable lessons that I learned and make them like a gift to you. #1 "never give up" and #2 "try your hardest." Just remember these two tips to persevering.

Alison Sayers
Second Place, Grade 3

Fellow third graders, do you want to hear a time I persevered. Okay, once we had a dog named Pheona; but she died two years ago. Then we got another dog at the end of July. She was a feisty little dog. But I challenged myself to potty train her, teach her to sit, stay, come, and teach her to be a circus dog.

Would you believe that I trained a miniature puppy that has a small bladder!! It was a very hard task for me. I had to take her out every hour. If I didn't she would pee on every carpet!! And then I would have to clean it all up, and I didn't like to do that. Additionally, I had to overcome my fears. For example, I was scared of the dark, and also I had to be rough because she had really sharp needle teeth. They almost go into your skin. Also, she was only a month old puppy so she didn't listen to me very well. For instance, I would say come on Bella I have to walk you, and she wouldn't listen. I was still proud of Bella because she was potty trained.

Typically, when I am training her to do what I want her to do she rocks the boat a little. She would rock the boat by running to the door to bark at stuff or just wanting to play. She would bark at stuff like cars, the cat, and people walking by. By the way, she learned it in three months and by then she would sit, stay, or come for me anytime. I think she'll know the tricks for a long time. In addition, training her to do a lot of stuff will help her develop to be a wonderful dog. She is already a wonderful dog but I bet she'll be better. She's probably proud of herself.

Are you aware that Bella is no ordinary puppy or trick dog? Bella is more than that; she is a circus dog. Why? Well let me tell you. She is a circus dog because she walks 25 to 30 feet on her hind legs. Actually, after I taught Bella to do that I could walk her around the house. She started when she was four months old. Finally, she loved to do it. I put my nose to the grindstone and got to the finish line. It took me at least one month to get her to do it all. You wouldn't imagine her walking on her hind legs.

It was a hard challenge but I love her. She is learning a lot of tricks everyday because I push myself and try over and over again to train her. She is a well-behaved dog! But the challenges to potty train her; teach her to sit, stay, come; and teach her to be a circus dog was fun too!

Hannah Griffiths
Third Place, Grade 3

Hello fellow classmates! As you know my name is Keira Newkirk. I know that you know that school is hard work especially if you want enjoyable grades. That's when you have to keep

trying, and start to persevere a little bit. So let me tell you a story about when I had to persevere in school.

You see I had a goal to get an enjoyable grade on my math test. We were doing time in math. It was confusing and very difficult to understand when the minute hand was just past the o'clock hour. It was also difficult to get the minute just right. I realized that I needed to work hard if I wanted that 100!

I had to get to work immediately. There was no time to waste. So I studied in most of my free time learning as much as I could. I listened carefully in class and tried my best to get the worksheets right. I didn't usually get them right, and I always felt like giving up. Of course I didn't. I learned from my mistakes and kept trying. Keeping up with my homework and never taking the easy way out also helped me work to the 100!

I took the test with butterflies in my stomach. When Mrs. Casterline passed out the test grades—100!!! I felt like I could fly. When I got home I jumped around for two hours straight! My little sister didn't know what all the noise was about, but she jumped around too. I was overjoyed with my test scores and so were my parents!

So the persevering and trying again and again really paid off. I didn't know that persevering was so helpful until then. I mean look at that score. It's no miracle—it's persevering!

Keira Newkirk

First Place, Grade 4

Have you ever had to persevere at something? I bet a lot of you have. Well I have too. Yes, I, Madison Spadafino. I know—shocker! Well I will give you a sneak peek of what is coming up next, what was difficult for me, what I did to achieve the goal, and how I felt when I accomplished my goal. You are probably saying well what is the goal—it is to dive into the pool. Keep listening.

Now the thing that was difficult for me was diving!!! One thing I did wrong was that I kept doing a belly-flop into the pool when I was trying to do a dive into the pool. I remember jumping in and feeling a really bad pain. It felt like needles went in me. Also I never put my feet in the right spot—you know where one foot pushes you in. It was like every single time people had to push me into the water, and I was never ready to get pushed in. I would always do something wrong. Like one time I pushed myself and I ended up with a bruised toe, my big toe. Did you know there are a shallow end and a deep end. Yes, well I had to dive into the deep end, and I never even swam in the deep end. Also I am afraid of the deep end so diving into the deep end was really scary and hard for me. That is the thing that made it difficult for me.

Get ready to get knocked out of your seats because now I'm talking about how I achieved my goal (crowd goes wild!). Now don't laugh at me when I say one way to practice is to dive off the bed. This is what I did. First I put pillows around my bed. Then push yourself and dive. But I

do remember my head hurting. I also go to my neighbor's pool to practice. Everyone would watch, and I remember saying I'm a big brave dog. Also I would get my trampoline out and act like I was diving into the pool. Well stay tuned for what I'm going to tell next.

Well guess what. I finally accomplished my goal and I felt a lot of things. I first felt good. It was like a door opening and I could do anything. It also made me feel proud about myself. Just the ability to dive into the water made me feel proud. Also it made me feel like a show off. I felt like that because everyone was watching, people were taking pictures, and I was better than my cousin, boo-ha! That is how I felt when I dove into the pool perfectly.

In conclusion, diving was something at which I had to persevere. Also I learned a lot: never give up and keep trying. I also faced my fears and found out practice makes perfect.

Madison Spadafino
Second Place, Grade 4

Hello my fellow students. I am here today because I just feel that I have to blurt out what I had to persevere on. Well, you seem like the right audience, so here it is: achieving my Girl Scout cookie selling goal. It took a whole bunch of effort. Some more things I want to tell you about achieving my goal are more about what my goal was, what I did to achieve my goal, and what I felt like when I accomplished my goal.

Now, let me explain to you more specifically what my goal was. I had exactly four days to sell the most Girl Scout cookies I could. I had to sell at least 125 boxes of Girl Scout cookies. Yes, I know, that's a lot. The reason I was even selling was because we are going to use the money to take camping basic training and to actually go camping. Yup, that's one more detail of what my goal was.

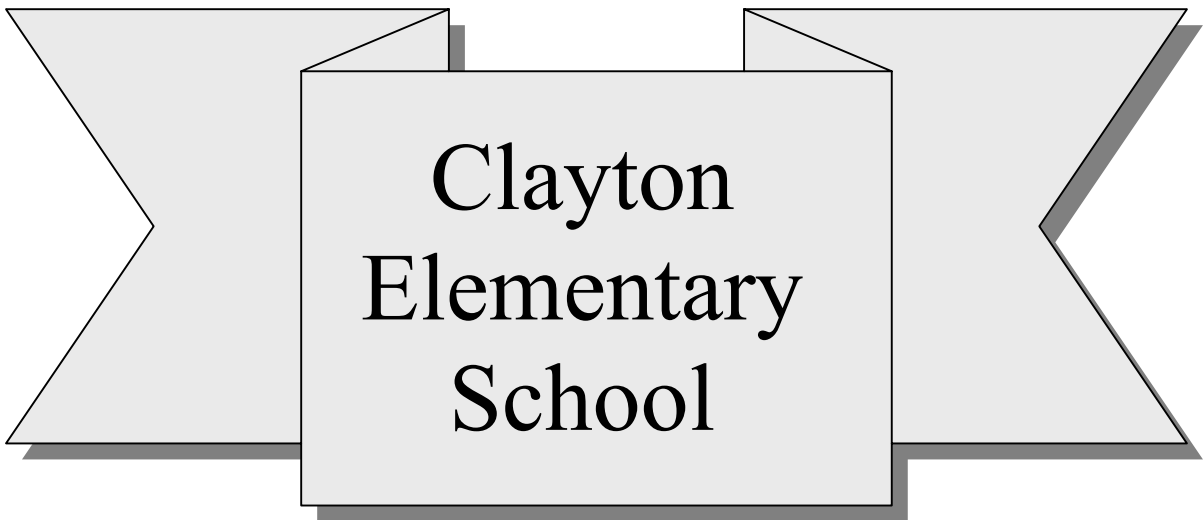
Now, the most important part I wanted to tell you guys is what exactly I did to achieve my goal. I had to go to two whole neighborhoods and still split the boxes with a friend of mine named Ami. So say I sold two boxes, I would get one and so would Ami. Every night after school Ami and I would sell until 8 pm. Each night we would sell about 25 boxes of cookies, and for all of my customers I was nice and patient. As you can see I did a lot to achieve my goal.

Now, I went totally bizarre when I had met my goal and let me tell you why. First of all, (this should get you jumping out of your seats) I sold 191 boxes of cookies. Everyone counting on me was so proud. And this is what you won't believe; I was the top seller out of my whole troop. So yeah, I over met my goal.

So as you can see, I persevered a lot through Girl Scout cookie selling. I had to put more effort into this year than any other year. Oh yeah and just in case you forgot, I just told you what my

goal was, how I achieved it, and how I felt when I accomplished it. Have a nice day. Oh yeah—would you like to buy some Girl Scout cookies?

Haley Lloyd
Third Place, Grade 4



Clayton
Elementary
School

Grades Kindergarten, 1, 2, 3, and 4

I try hard to swim across the pool under water.

Julie Snow

First Place, Kindergarten

I try hard to ride my bike without training wheels.

Jenna Malone

Second Place, Kindergarten

I try hard to read.

Lauren Iglío

Third Place, Kindergarten

Perseverance is something you never give up on. I showed perseverance when I was trying to walk my puppy. At first me, my Dad and my brother took my puppy for a walk. I was going straight and Gunner was going to the right. Next I kept on trying. Last I took Gunner for a walk again and I got it right. Then I was very good at it! When I finally got it I felt very proud of myself!

Jenna Anderson

First Place, Grade 1

Perseverance is to keep on trying. I showed perseverance when I ride my dirt bike. At first I was wobbly a lot. Then my dad got on with me and showed me how to keep it balanced. Last, I was very, very, very good at it! When I ride my dirt bike I feel very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, excited. I can do really cool tricks!

William "Billy" Evans

Second Place, Grade 1

I show perseverance when I do a flip on the trampoline. I tried ten times to do it. Then I got better at it. But sometimes I get a little bit angry. Now I know how to do it, but I have to show perseverance. I am happy when I can do it.

Autumn Potter

Third Place, Grade 1

Oooow! This is the sound I made the first time I tried to do a back flip on a pedal bike. It was a hot summer day and I had all my friends over. They all were doing tricks. I felt jealous. I wanted to do a back flip. I got my bike lined up and tried it. It did not turn out good. It was very difficult because I could not get the bike to come around. I felt like giving up. But every time I saw them it kept making me want to do it. When I finally did it, I was very, very, very happy and excited.

I learned that you pull back and peddle at the same time. I learned if you can't quite do something, to persevere.

Perseverance always pays off.

Dylan Snow

First Place, Grade 2

Did you ever try riding a motor cycle down a mountain? Let me tell you how hard it was. The first time I tried I got twenty stitches. No can do! I didn't want to give up. Plus I already got a number for the front of it—it is ninety-nine. The only reason I didn't want to give up is because my mommy and daddy gave me a pep talk. They said it's not about winning; it's about how hard you practice. So I believed it and I worked and worked and worked until I accomplished my goal!!! I did a somersault and a cartwheel when I finally did it! I knew quitters never win and winners never quit. So don't be a quitter!!

Jacob Blair

Second Place, Grade 2

Perseverance is when a person tries really hard to do something and they finally get it. I'm going to tell you a time I showed perseverance trying to do a back flip. I was at my friend's house and they started doing back flips. I got jealous and decided I wanted to try. When I tried it over and

over again it got difficult because I had to bend and go in the air. I felt like giving up, but I went to my mom and said I tried and didn't get it. My mom said keep trying you'll get it. Finally I did one. I'm still not perfect at it but I'll never give up persevering.

Elizabeth Smith

Third Place, Grade 2

Hello my fellow students. Would you like to hear my little speech about perseverance? Okay! If you listen to this speech, you will see how you can show perseverance.

Well, I guess it is time for the speech, correct? Yes, let us start. First I will tell you about playing the drums. At first I started by banging all the symbols on the drums at church. BOOM, BANG, TING, CACHING! All those sounds were splendid. After church, I asked my cousin, "How do you get to all the symbols and the drums?" He said, "It is all about perseverance my friend." He taught me one thing on the drums. I learned it so fast that I began to play it well.

Then it got harder. Could you imagine how hard it was to play the drums? To me it was complicated. One day I got my drums from the store. We got it fixed up. After school the drum was set. I tried to remember the beat. Was it Ding Ding Dong or was it Dong Dong Ding? I started screaming, "I can't do it!" It does not matter if you can't do it. Just persevere or ask for help! Still I could not do it. So I stopped. But then I realized that perseverance is the key to not giving up! Then I thought that not giving up was what I was supposed to be doing. So, vroom like a rabbit, I raced back to the drum seat, started playing and remembered it.

Finally this is the part where I tell you how happy I felt when I accomplished my goal. Lastly, when I reached my goal, I felt so excited. I went to church and started playing; afterwards everybody was so surprised that they were like, "Wow I did not know you could drum like that!" Even I was surprised too! We got home to do our chores. My sister got on the drums while I was relaxing. Chang, bang, boom, clank, ting! "Ach!" I screamed. She said, "Can you teach me? I said, "Yes." So I started teaching her.

What things are you preserving on? There are a lot of things, trust me!

Nnennaya Okorie

First Place, Grade 3

As of 2006 I have had to persevere all my life because I got diagnosed with diabetes. I have to live with getting needles for the rest of my life. It's hard to make the best of my life but people along the way help me a lot. My goals are to get the pump and after that a cure. The pump is a phone-sized machine that has a hook and you put it on and instead of four needles a day I get just one every three days.

Before I was diagnosed I felt miserable. If I was not diagnosed I would not have to worry about bringing a purse around and counting the carbs at every meal. But it could always be worse because my mom works with a girl who can't talk, move, eat, or anything else. I'm glad I can control my disease unlike any other disease. It could always be worse. In a certain way I am lucky because I can still do whatever I want.

At first, I was like "Oh no!" but as I was saying it could always be worse. Right now, January 2007, I am working for the pump. I want the pump because I just get tired of needles, needles, needles!!! Wouldn't you? Persevering is trying (not stopping), hard work, and patience. I am working hard and waiting. If I am lucky I will get the pump this year, but I might not. I won't give up. Things are not as bad as they seem though. I can control what I have and still do what I want.

Sometimes I get really mad but not always. I might even feel sad. I have not gotten either of my goals but that doesn't mean I will give up. Truly I can't wait! I want it so much I get jealous when I go to A.I. Dupont (which I hate going to), and see all the other diabetics with pumps!! Every day I have to prick myself in order to reach these goals. When I prick myself I just get a mini needle on my finger and put my blood in a little machine and the machine gives me my reading. My reading is the number it says on the machine. Usually my reading is called my "blood sugar." My blood sugar has to be between 20-180 at the least and 80-150 at the most.

I am counting on myself and won't stop because if I do I will feel miserable. It is sort of like life or death. I hope someday there is a cure. I would like it to come out soon. There is a cure but it's surgery! If there is a cure other than surgery I will take it! Scientists have been working on a cure for years so I hope they find it soon, but until then I will work for the pump. I have patience. I am working hard. I won't give up until I reach my goals.

Mary Lemma
Second Place, Grade 3

When I think about perseverance I think about two years ago when I learned to ride my bike. I practiced all day on Mother's Day. All of the people in my family begged me to try and they finally got me to do it. Plus I had just gotten a brand new bike. It was not so bad although I fell quite a bit. I just kept getting back on and trying again.

Part of what I did to persevere was trying to start peddling and keep peddling the whole time. Speaking of time, it took a long time to learn. My poppy helped a lot, like showing me how to start off. My mom, my three aunts, and my mom-mom helped a lot too. I practiced to start peddling on one of my aunt's driveway. It is a mile long! That is only one way I learned to ride my bike.

Twice the fun was staying on the bike. The first couple of times my mom and my aunt started to push the bike to get a start and they had let go. I looked back there and that almost made me fall off. I just got back on and tried again. That is how I persevered to stay on my new bike.

The third and final thing I did was controlling, so I did not fall off. At first, I had trouble turning on the bend. After a while, I got better. Every time I got to the turn, I slowed down and walked around it. Then I got on and started to ride again. By the end of the day, I had accomplished my task. I felt awesome!

The next day I went to school so excited. I told everyone including my teacher (which at that time was Mrs. Fortney) the good news. That night my family and I celebrated and everyone in my family was proud of me for showing perseverance to succeed at riding my bike the day before.

Allison Wheatley
Third Place, Grade 3

Did you ever persevere? Well, I did. What I did was very hard. I had to do the bad, the evil, the treacherous Delaware State Testing Program!! (DSTP) It was very hard. It is a test that if you don't get a good grade, you will either repeat the grad, go to summer school, or both! Hearing this gave me grief and worry, but I persevered. (Persevering is the act of trying, and never giving up.) I tried and I tried, and I made it through. This is my story.

I was like every other third grade student doing my projects and getting good grades. All of a sudden my teacher said, "DSTP is here! We need to study hard, because if you don't you might have to repeat the grade, go to summer school, or both!"

Anyway, hearing you might have to repeat the grade, go to summer school, or both made my head spin. I thought, "What if I don't do a good job? What is it like being left back or in ~gulp~ summer school?" Anyway, the next day the test comes. I'm like, Oh no. It's here!" So then I opened the book, and it looked easy! Maybe I will do a good job after all. (Mind you I had never done the DSTP before.) Well, that was the easy part, although several times I had to persevere for more difficult questions. After two days, the teacher says, "Hooray! You are done the math and reading part! Now for the writing—which most of you are good at." At the word "writing" my heart stopped. Not literally though. I am terrible at writing! As a matter of fact, I am persevering right now. This is why I had to persevere.

I can't think of anything to write about for certain topics. It's either I have nothing to write about, or I have so much to write about, but I can't pick a topic! Also I daydream. This makes me drift away and always forget what I decided on! But I had to try, so I concentrated really hard.

The first topic was, “Your teacher wants to take you for a field trip to your favorite amusement park. Tell her where you want to go and why.” “This is an easy topic!” I screamed in my head. So I thought about it, and I wrote it down in a short amount of time. I didn’t have time to check it because they only give you one day to do it, so I turned it in. Then there was another one I had to do. That was a harder topic and I thought I did a horrible job. About two months later, Mrs. Daniels said, “You all passed.” She said everyone’s score, and she kept on going until she got to me! My stomach got butterflies, my jaw dropped, I almost started crying as Mrs. Daniels said, “Derian, you got, you got, you got a 4 in writing!” I was so happy and very relieved.

Well, that is my story and how I persevered. I hope you learned something and enjoyed my story about persevering and the DSTP.

Derian Williams

First Place, Grade 4

Perseverance – never giving up on what one has set out to do. I think my dad shows a lot of this core value and that is why he will be the topic of this speech. I will also tell you these three important things about him: what started it all, how my dad persevered, and how he accomplished his goal. By the end of this speech, I also have a goal—I want you to think about someone you know who showed perseverance.

First of all, I will inform you about how it all started. In third grade, he was in a reading program that made him miss recess for one year. He didn’t try to get better and never did anything about it. I know that last sentence might have made you think, “Does this person really show perseverance?” Don’t worry, you will be reassured later. If you are still wondering about my father, Michael Cassel, then read on.

If you like this speech so far, then you should read the next paragraph. It will be about how my dad persevered. During high school, he had teachers who said he wasn’t good at math and should stay away from it when he grew up. After high school Michael Cassel went to community college and flunked out. Now you are more informed about how my father persevered.

I want you to know that at this point many would have given up but my father didn’t and you will understand what I’m talking about in the next paragraph. After community college, my dad went to the Air Force. While there he met a woman, Bebin Kelley, and a year afterward they got married. After he got out of the Air Force, my father went to Delaware State University and studied incredibly hard. With the support of my mom he graduated top of his class. Hard work really does pay off!

Now my father, Michael Cassel, is a finance manager at JPMorgan Chase. He persevered and won. I’d just like to say, “Look who’s laughing now!” to all of the teachers who told him he

couldn't do things. Is there someone in your life who shows perseverance? If so, I'd love to hear about them!

Claire Cassel
Second Place, Grade 4

I was just another ordinary day at my grandparents' house. Or so I thought. As I walked into the forest my shoe got stuck in something. As I looked down, I noticed that my shoe was caught in a hole. When I went inside, I decided to discover what made the hole. But to do this, I needed something. It starts with a P. It is one of my school's core values. Can you guess what it is? It's perseverance. Keep on reading to find out how I persevered to solve "The Hole Mystery."

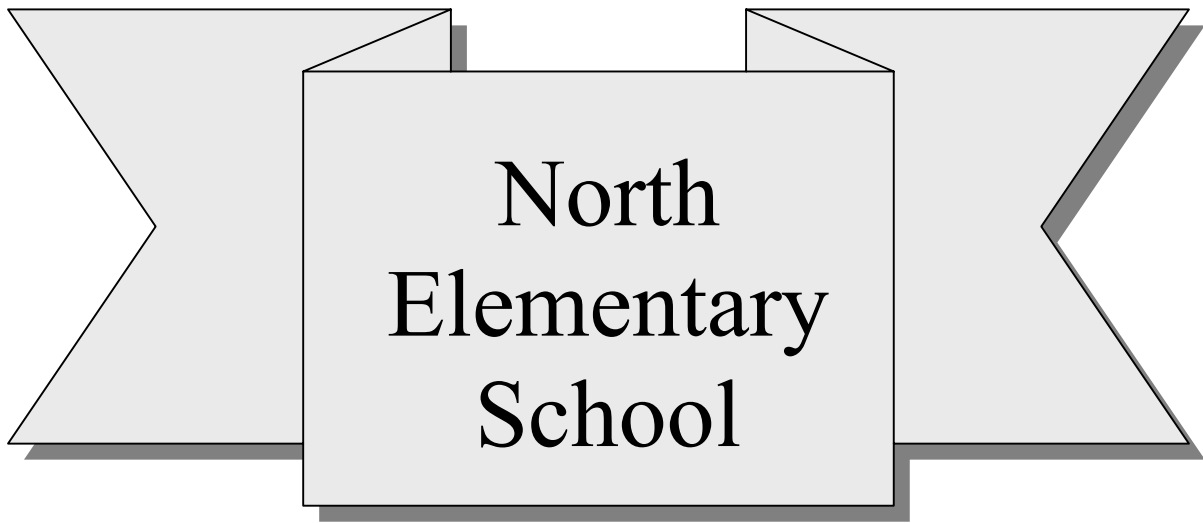
Well, first things first, right? When I went in the house, the first thing the adults noticed was that I was missing a shoe. The other one was still stuck in the hole. Once we pulled the shoe out and once I put it back on, I measured the size of the hole. Then I looked inside my animal encyclopedia (Expanded Edition) to see if any animals about that size lived in the area. Unfortunately, I didn't find any. I got really frustrated but kept trying. I kept on reading to find out what to do next.

What did I do once almost gave up? I can tell you. I looked in all the reference guides and encyclopedias I could. I watched lots of nature TV shows. I went on the internet. Finally, out of the blue I found the answer. The size, description and habits matched. A ground shrew must have made the hole! When I told the adults, though, they didn't believe me. They didn't believe a kid could possibly solve a mystery like that. I had to prove to them that I was right—but how?

For a while, I thought I wouldn't be able to prove to the adults that a ground shrew was making the holes. But eventually I found a solution. I would wait outside until a ground shrew came out. It took about two hours, but my plan worked! The adults couldn't believe their eyes! Perseverance prevailed! I couldn't solve the mystery without it.

Perseverance is needed to complete anything. It's about trying, failing, and trying again until you succeed. You may get frustrated, but eventually you'll get it done if you try. If you want to get something done, just persevere.

Sean Finney
Third Place, Grade 4



Grades Kindergarten, 1, 2, 3, and 4

I tried to talk to say momma and then I could say momma.

Shana Markowitz

First Place, Kindergarten

I tried to swim in the pool and boom I can swim in the pool.

Martie Collier

Second Place, Kindergarten

I tried to ride my bike on two wheels and I did it.

Abigail Mace

Third Place, Kindergarten

I tried to open my eyes in the water. I tried and tried. I know the water is dirty. It had leaves in it. It was brown and blue and black. I was scared. I practiced in the sink. I stuck my face in the sink water and counted to ten. I opened my eyes. Then I opened my eyes when I went swimming. I did it! I felt happy. I can open my eyes now.

Mariah Lowman

First Place, Grade 1

In the middle of the year I started Math Facts in a Flash. You practice adding numbers and have to go really fast. I never talked to other people when I was on the computer. You have to do 40 questions in two minutes. I have to do hard questions like $10 + 5 = 15$ and $6 + 6 = 12$. It was so hard I started jumping up and down but I kept trying. And I finally did it. My teacher was happy and so was I.

Cecilia Carter

Second Place, Grade 1

I tried to move up to Advanced Beginner in Gymnastics. In Advanced Beginner I had to stand up and reach my hands and put my feet on the ground. Then I needed to climb the rope. I

worked very, very, very hard and I did it. I felt happy when I did it. Now I know when I try my best I can do anything.

Naomi Bowser

Third Place, Grade 1

Would you like to know what perseverance is? Well, my story will tell you all about it. My birthday was December 18 and at my party I got “heelies.” My friend Destiny came and tried to teach me because she already has them. So we went outside and she got in front of me to where she was looking at me, held my hand, and pulled me down the driveway. But, when I almost got there, rocks were everywhere so I tripped. But Destiny and I kept on trying. I felt really mad when I kept on tripping. But that’s not the most embarrassing thing yet—every time I tripped I saw cars driving by waving. The next try I finally passed those hard rocks. I got a little bit better and that made me proud of myself. Destiny has happy too because we can ride together on our “heelies.” She said that I was ready. I said, “Wha-a-a-t? Let’s go now!” She said, “Okay.” She is still teaching me. Now that’s what perseverance is.

Jeffrey Thomas

First Place, Grade 2

Let me tell you about the time I had to keep trying—when I tried to do a one-hand cartwheel. I couldn’t do one at first but then I got help. And I kept trying and trying and then I got the hang of it. My sister showed me how to do a cartwheel. First she put one foot in front of the other foot and then she flipped and landed. So then I tried and I did it. Then I did it with my other hand and I did that hand too. And that’s my story. Thank you for listening

Mia Dionisi

Second Place, Grade 2

The first time I skateboarded was when I was four years old. I started on a piece of cardboard. I pretended to do kick-flips and impossibles, but then I moved on to a starter board. Everyday I practiced on balance and it was hard. I went outside for the first time, and my mom watched me. I pushed off and fell. It made me mad because I thought I would be a pro, but it was not easy at all. I did not give up but after preschool I practiced and practiced and I finally got it right. It

took time but I finally got it. Now I can do it. It's easy if you practice, but don't always think it will be easy. It takes time to do something you have never done.

Taylor Smith
Third Place, Grade 2

Good day, my name is R. J. Kerley. I would like to tell you what perseverance means. Perseverance means finishing what you start and never giving up. I've done it before.

Learning how to ride my bike was my destination to finish. Plus my other target was to show perseverance. To do that I had to show how I did it. I can't tell you now but later in the story.

Today I will discuss about how I fulfilled my goal. I accomplished my goal to ride my bike by trying really hard and never giving up. Nothing stopped me except breakfast and dinner. It was really hard to complete that goal. But I showed so much perseverance I finally learned how to ride my bike. Now I ride my bike most of the time.

When I first started to ride my bike I was so happy I nearly screamed. I couldn't believe I did it. It felt like it took forever. I felt so proud of myself that day. That was one of the happiest days of my life. Now I finally know how to ride my bike.

I loved learning how to ride my bike. It was one of my happiest times ever. I never gave up on myself that day, and I kept trying no matter what. I felt really happy and proud about myself.

Thank you for your time and attention.

R. J. Kerley
First Place, Grade 3

Hi, how are you? Well, I'm here to give a speech about a very difficult subject. Have you ever heard of perseverance? I have. Perseverance means to try something and fail and then try and try again. I have a secret to tell you—once I had to persevere. I'll tell you the story.

I bet you are wondering what I am going to tell you. I had a goal that was important to me since I was five years old. That goal was to be able to show a pig at the Delaware State Fair. My brother was showing pigs at the fair, so I wanted to do that too! Showing pigs is not an easy job. Let me tell you about my struggle.

I guess I should begin with what happened first. I have lived on a farm all of my life. One day I decided that I wanted to learn how to show pigs at the fair. I didn't have any idea how difficult that was going to be. I just watched my brother and it looked easy. I was wrong. Pigs like to do what they want to do. I found out I needed help. So I asked my mom, dad, and brother to help me. We worked for many days. First my brother picked out the right pig for me. Then each day

I would work and work with the pig. My brother told me how to treat the pig. He also taught me how to wash my pig and make it look nice for the judges. Next my brother showed me how to hold the stick you use to control the pig in the show ring. After a while we got used to each other. My pop pop told me I needed to wear special clothes for showing the pig. So, I got black boots, black pants, and a white shirt. Finally I was good at controlling the pig. I was ready for the competition at the fair.

Now I will tell you about how I felt when I accomplished my goal. I felt splendid when I got a hold of the pig. I am sorry to say that in the middle of learning how to show a pig I wanted to quit so bad. That was a lot of hard work every day. It was worth it! My pride felt so good. After a year I got reserved champion. Now I am good with pigs.

My perseverance goal was to show a pig at the Delaware State Fair. I needed help to achieve this goal so I asked my parents and my brother. It took a lot of hard work and concentration to achieve this goal. Yes, I did want to quit but I used perseverance. I achieved my hardest goal I think by gaining confidence in myself. Now you know you can try something and find out it is hard. Look at me—I did it!

Kristen Moore
Second Place, Grade 3

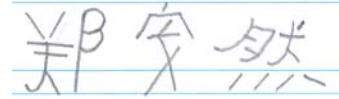
Hi, my name is Andy. When I was in kindergarten I did not know how to speak English. I kept on trying. I had perseverance to try again and again, but I could not pronounce a word in English. Just so you know, when I was in kindergarten all I knew was Chinese because I was Chinese! Read on to find more details.

The only word I could pronounce in English was “Hi.” Every time kindergarten school was over my mom and dad taught me English. They knew some English and how to spell. After a long lesson and training I knew a lot of English. When I was in first grade I had trouble knowing what words meant. My friend Joey said a word and I had no clue what it meant; so I asked my mom and dad what it meant. The word meant an animal that lives of a farm and that gives eggs. I thought the word chicken meant walk. Some exciting detail is coming up.

When I was in first grade again (because I failed first grade), I had a little trouble knowing what words meant and how to do the problems. My teacher, Mrs. Jones, made a word wall. If we did not know how to spell a word we could sound it out or just look at the word wall, and we had definitions too. If we knew the definition but we didn’t know what the word was we could look at the word wall. I kept on trying my best to pronounce words. I never gave up. Days passed and I got better and better. That does not mean I can stop trying to learn more English that I

don't know. Then second grade came—I was ready to go. When I got there I was nervous but I did fine. Thank you for reading my story. This is how you write my Chinese name.

Andy Zheng
Third Place, Grade 3



Have you ever been afraid of something or of trying something new? Maybe you were afraid to ride a bike for the first time. I remember the time when I was afraid to ride a horse for the first time. With perseverance I was able to overcome my fear. That is why I still do it today.

I wanted to ride horses so bad! They were my favorite animal of all the animals. I asked my mom over and over again until she screamed with persistence, “You can take riding lessons!!!!” I was so grateful I almost hugged her until she choked.

It was finally the day I was going to have my first lesson. I got introduced to my teacher, Mrs. Beth. She walked over with me to the pony barn. She introduced me to a pony named Misty. He was fairly old and small. I was so excited. Mrs. Beth led Misty out of his stall. She asked me, “Would you like to lead Misty?” Then, all of the excitement left like a cat fleeing from a vicious dog. I felt like I was going to throw up. Mrs. Beth handed me the lead rope. She walked right next to me. I felt a lot better. Mrs. Beth taught me how to clean, put the tack on, and take care of the horse. She said I was doing great. Then it was time to get on his back.

I put on my helmet and gloves. Mrs. Beth asked me if I was ready. I just stammered. I led Misty to the mounting block. I was horrified! I started to sweat. She told me to put my left foot in the stirrup, swing my leg over and find the other stirrup. So I did it. I was so scared. She told Misty to walk. He did and I was so excited.

Mrs. Beth led Misty into the ring. She told me to keep my heels down, and I did as she said. I was still a little bit nervous. She walked next to me. I felt very safe. I never wanted to get off—it was so cool! Now I kept doing lessons. I am actually training a horse named Tobi. I want to ride for the rest of my life.

Now try and think of a time when you had perseverance. Be proud of yourself. You never know, you might enjoy it!

Katherine Clark
First Place, Grade 4

When I think of perseverance I think of my cousin Adam Rusmisell. Adam was born with no bones from his knees down. He is only eight years old and has already had many surgeries. People call him names because he has prosthetic legs, but he is such a great sport about it. He would never hurt anyone physically or emotionally.

Adam has so much perseverance! When people call him names he feels somewhat bad, but never lets it bring him down. People laugh at him because he can't run as fast, and he gets ignored because some people think he is not normal. I think he is perfect in every way, shape, or form.

You cannot believe how many surgeries Adam has been through! For example just last month he had surgery on his ear. He only has one ear. They took a small segment of his ribs and put it in where his ear should be. Now he kind of has an ear and a quarter. It will be about six long surgeries before he has a full-size ear though. He may not have another surgery until late January or early February since his quarter ear was so sore after the surgery. He is scared, but always decides to have his surgeries done. He has a heart the size of a hippo and a perseverance level even bigger.

Adam is an awesome sport about everything. He ignores people who call him mean names, and doesn't care that he is different from others. Also he loves himself just as he is no matter how different he is. He makes silly jokes up like "I can be taller than my sister with my legs on and shorter with them off." He is such a great sport about it his sister wishes she had prosthetics too!

Now that you know about Adam Rusmisell, the kid with the perseverance level of a million, don't you want to meet him? Even though he has been called names countless times, he is still a good sport. Being an eight-year-old with missing bones is hard but he is doing it. He lives in Florida so I only see him once a year, but he is always on my mind. He is the perseverance capital of the world to me!

Megan Dillard
Second Place, Grade 4

Have you ever tried to do something and you tried to do it but you failed? So you got up and tried again. Well that's exactly what happened to me and it's called perseverance. I'll tell you about it in a minute.

Okay, I'm back and I'm going to talk about perseverance. Perseverance is when you keep trying and when you fail you learn from your mistake and try again. Well, my test of perseverance is tasting sushi. My family and I go to King Buffet every two weeks in Dover. But the harsh part is my family always encourages me to eat something new. You are probably wondering what it is. It's sushi—they encourage me to eat my most hated food in the universe. But that's just another way to explain perseverance.

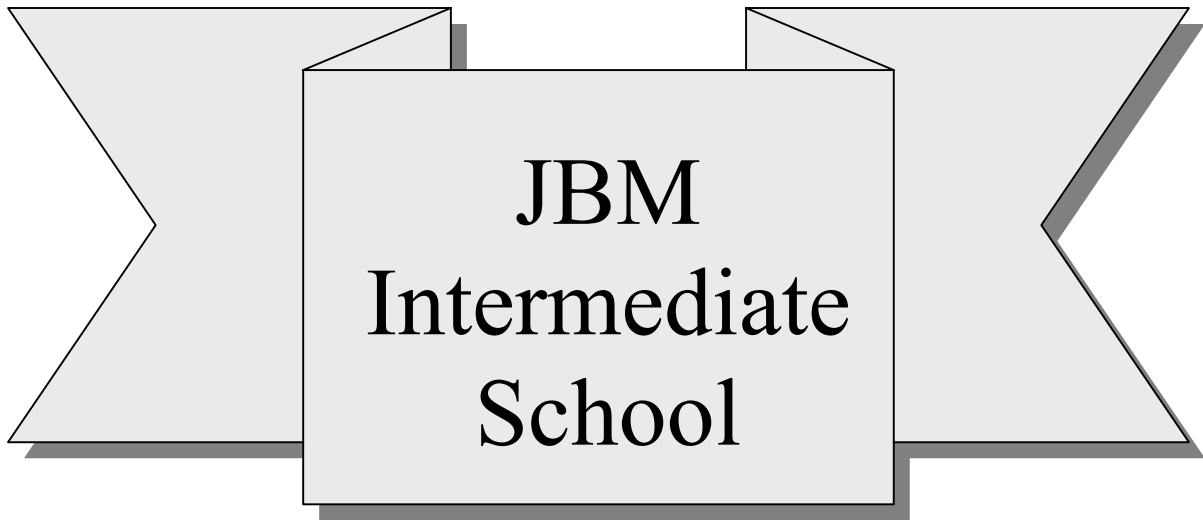
Only three syllables, disgusting! It was the most horrible thing I've ever tasted. What I mean is if you ate raw fish, rice, and seaweed wrapped up in a thing that looks like a tire, would you like it? Every time I tried it I use to close my eyes and wish I wouldn't throw up. Thank goodness that I didn't, but you never know what can happen. Just to let you know, my brothers and sisters always laugh at the face I make when I eat sushi. I'm only telling you this for the heads up.

It's been two years now and I always eat sushi. You are probably wondering why I eat it or how I got use to it. Well, every time I eat a whole sushi my dad pays me one dollar. If I eat two pieces of sushi, he gives me five dollars. The great part is I can play the get rich quick game. But that's not the important thing. It is that I learned perseverance.

Well, I hope you enjoyed my lesson on perseverance. Most of all when you do things like ride a bike and it's a two-wheeler, enter a spelling bee, and all those challenging things to do think about perseverance and how much that will help you.

Joanna McDonald

Third Place, Grade 4



JBM
Intermediate
School

Grades 5 and 6

Perseverance is the act of trying. Everyone has persevered with something. Klarissa persevered when learning to walk. She faced many difficulties learning to walk, but still stuck with it. Klarissa persevered with her goal and now is able to walk with pride.

When Klarissa was born her leg was turned in a little. By the time she was ready to learn how to walk it was better, but not completely well. So we did many things to help her improve her walking. We would stand her up and walk with her. Klarissa thought it was a game. She didn't know we were teaching her. Klarissa's mom bought her a walker; she thought that might help Klarissa. When she jumped in her walker she laughed and laughed. Ms. Sandy, her day care provider, tried to help Klarissa with her walking too. Little Klarissa just didn't understand we were trying to teach her—not play with her.

Everyone kept working with her. Then one day Klarissa stood up and tried to walk, but fell down. Klarissa finally understood we were trying to teach her. Day after day she would attempt to walk, but always fell down. This continued for about a week. People could tell Klarissa was getting frustrated and upset. Everyone kept working with Klarissa more now than ever because she was trying to walk by herself. Klarissa tried and tried, but she just couldn't seem to catch her balance when she stood up by herself. We didn't know what to do.

By this time we had been working with Klarissa for a while. Then one day while we were working with her, Klarissa refused to stand up. Nobody had any idea of what had come over her. We thought she wanted to learn to walk. Her family kept working with her, but nothing worked. Klarissa still wouldn't stand up. Kim, Klarissa's mom, began to grow hopeless that her daughter would never stand by herself again. Then we had the idea that Klarissa might have given up. Everyone was very upset to see little Klarissa give up on her goal. Nobody could think of anything to do.

Finally, Klarissa started to walk. She didn't walk much, but it was better than before. Her walking wasn't great; she still had a few stumbles. Klarissa's leg still turned in a little. No way was she going to let that get in her way. Not just us, but everyone could tell Klarissa felt proud of her accomplishment. We knew she was proud because she wanted to show everyone her walking. All that hard work Klarissa had put into reaching her goal paid off.

As I said before perseverance is the act of trying. Klarissa faced so many difficulties learning to walk, but she didn't let them get in her way of making her goal. Klarissa wanted to give up and quit, but she didn't—she persevered and succeeded. A lot of hard work can go a long way towards making your goal.

Robyn Corso

First Place, Grade 5

Classmates, man oh man, I am tired of getting third place every wrestling tournament I go to. I either get third or second place. I also can't stand looking in the "Sun Times" and seeing my name, Nick Padilla, in the second or third place bracket. I wished I had gotten a first-place

trophy at least once, but I still never gave up and I still persevered. That is what I said before I got a first-place trophy, but I finally learned it takes time and practice. If you are wondering why I am up here talking to you, well, I am up here because I am going to inform you about a time in my life when I had to persevere.

First of all I had to practice a bundle of times so that I could get better. Each time I went to practice it wore me out, but all of that hard work paid off. Every single wrestling tournament I went to I tried to watch other people so I could see how I could improve. At practice I tried to wrestle people who were way more advanced than me so I could learn a few more moves.

To start off with, it took forever to reach my goal but I kept trying and this is how I reached it. For instance every Monday and Wednesday I had practice and every Saturday and Sunday I had a tournament. At every tournament I went to, I either won or lost. I kept my head up and asked my coach what I did wrong. That way I could fix what I did wrong so it doesn't happen at another tournament. I also went to wrestling camps and clinics to learn more moves and how to get points.

When I finally got the first-place trophy at the "Polytech Tournament" I felt so happy in all ways. To begin with I felt so relieved because I was a little worried and stressed. When I won the first match I didn't know I was going to bring home the gold. But when I got up on that first-place stand to let people take pictures, I felt so happy that I could hardly contain my excitement.

If you set a goal and continuously strive toward your goal, in the end you will probably accomplish it. If you work hard at your goal and practice a lot and never give up you will overcome the hardships and eventually grab the gold like I did.

Nick Padilla
Second Place, Grade 5

Hi, my name is Travis Fox and one time in my life that I persevered was when I played baseball. Perseverance to me means the act of trying and trying again without giving up. Even if you fail you must try again until you get your goal.

It was my first time EVER playing baseball, so I had no clue how to play. All I knew was that I was supposed to hit the ball with a bat when they threw it to me. And that was one of the many things that I couldn't do at the start of the season. The only thing that I could do was run because I was the fastest player on the team.

I was made fun of by all the other kids on the team because I couldn't hit the ball, catch the ball, or even throw the ball correctly. I had no friends at all because of this. It kind of made me want to quit at first, but then I thought—no! I've got to prove to them that I can do better, so it made me want to try harder.

I tried much harder to listen to the coach and pretty soon I could catch, hit, and even throw the ball. I then made a lot more friends on the team. But I knew that I could do better than that, so I tried even harder, and by the end of the season I was one of the best players on the team.

I had tons of friends when I hit the ball all the way to the fence, and the ball was stuck in the fence. At the end of the season my team made it to the championship game and lost. The coach said that it was okay because at least we all tried our hardest, and he said that I was the most improved player on the team. My dad said that my smile was from ear to ear, and that he could see my jaw I was smiling so big.

Everyone on the team got a trophy that said division champs and a silver medal. I have never been so proud of myself and I owe it all to the core value perseverance. I did not give up and it taught me to always try my best. My name is Travis Fox and that was a time in my life that I persevered.

Travis Fox

Third Place, Grade 5

Have you ever tried and tried but could not do something? I know I have! This brings me back to when I was having massive trouble in school. I was having problems with math, reading, and spelling. My teacher thought that I couldn't do it. I persevered and never gave up. Then finally I was an A/B student. To do this I had to overcome a learning problem. Trust me it was not a ride in the park.

About six years ago, I started having trouble with my schoolwork. It seemed that I was mixing up my letters and had trouble adding and subtracting math problems. My second-grade teacher was the first to discover my learning disability. She discussed it with my mother, and thought I had learning problems too. When she went to help me it was too late—I had to move to Smyrna with my mom and sister. A few days later I joined school back up. After a few weeks my new teacher realized I had trouble with my work so she told my mom that I was dyslexic. At the end of the year she decided to hold me back. I know why now. It was because I was behind and could not catch up. I know she did it for me, but she made me feel stupid. If only you knew how I felt then you would understand that it was a nightmare.

When I got my report card I could not believe I was failing again. I felt so dumb because I had under a 60 percent in everything. I did not want to go home because I thought I would get yelled at. But all my parents did was sob about it, and hearing that made me feel like the dumbest kid on the planet. I know my mom was thinking about how this happened. That is when I decided that I needed some help and that is what my mom did.

That July, my mom got me into this camp that helps kids with their learning problems. I was so happy. The day I got there I realized that this was it—no more feeling stupid. As days went by, I had been in classes to help me with my problem. The classes really did work; plus the kids got to do fun activities after class like going to the beach, going to parties, and they even took us

sailing. When I got home, I felt smarter and more confident about learning. I just could not wait to go back to school and show them all. Guess what? That is exactly what I did. When that first marking period ended I was so delighted my struggles paid off—I was a straight A student!

This struggle I had and the way I overcame it showed I had perseverance. You can show it too. Just never give up. If I would have given up and not asked my mom for help, I would still be struggling today. But I am not because I took that challenge to change my life and showed I could do anything if I tried. So make the right choice and start persevering today. It will make a big difference.

Alicia Hungerford

First Place, Grade 6

When some people think of a time when they persevered, they think of doing their best on their sports team or reading a big book in a week. However, when I think of perseverance I think of something totally different. To me perseverance means achieving something and not giving up, as I did when I first moved to the United States. I was not able to speak English, but I persevered to overcome all my problems. My main goal was to learn English by working hard and not giving up. The goal tested all the perseverance I had within me. When I first got here the tall buildings and the lights of New York dazzled me. I was a stranger in a new environment.

When I got home to Smyrna, Delaware, it was totally different. There were no buildings at all and there didn't seem to be a lot of people in the city. The city somehow made me feel more comfortable. As we drove to our new home, I saw my relatives waiting for us. When we got out of the van there was a storm of kissing and hugging and I was in it. I had a lot of fun that day, mainly because things seemed to be normal, but that was all about to change.

On the first day of school I was very nervous, more than anybody else because I didn't understand English at all. I could not read, write, nor speak English. My heart was pounding when it was time for everyone to introduce themselves. I knew that in a few moments I would have to stand there and introduce myself to the whole class. I felt sweat dripping down my forehead. My stomach churned as the whole class turned and started to look at me. I gulped and stood up; and then knowing what to say (since I had rehearsed the night before), I murmured my name is Farhad. I sat back down and felt a sigh of relief. I told myself it wasn't going to be that bad, but I was wrong.

Soon after the introduction ended, the teacher started asking and telling me things and I did not understand a word she was saying. I just stared at her, and I could hear some kids laughing and giggling. I was delighted when the class got dismissed, but I knew I would have to face the same thing for a while. That week was the worst week ever. I was picked on and laughed at by some kids. I was embarrassed and ashamed. So from that week I knew that for me to end all this I had to learn English. It wasn't an easy goal, and some days I almost quit because some kids ridiculed me. But at the end of first grade I had the basics down and at the end of second grade I was ready for third grade!

Persevering and reaching my goal was a great success. As a wise man once said, “The greatest oak was once a little nut that held its ground.” And I think I did exactly that because I went from a non-English speaker to an honor roll student. Hey, I might even win this award!

Farhad Baqi

Second Place, Grade 6

Perseverance is the trait that you never give up, no matter the odds, and my grandpa has a lot of perseverance. His name is Charles Ford Coleman. He was just an average 14-year-old boy in school when he found out his dad had been shot and died shortly after. Imagine your own father dies when you are only fourteen years old. I’m going to tell you how my grandpa struggled to overcome poverty and support his family.

I recall a famous quote that my grandpa probably likes: “Don’t let life discourage you, everyone who got there had to begin where they were.” I believe that my grandpa got discouraged many times, but he’s still here today so that proves he never gave up. As I said before, he was just an average boy until his dad got shot. For most of his childhood, if not all, he worked in the fields without even a high school diploma.

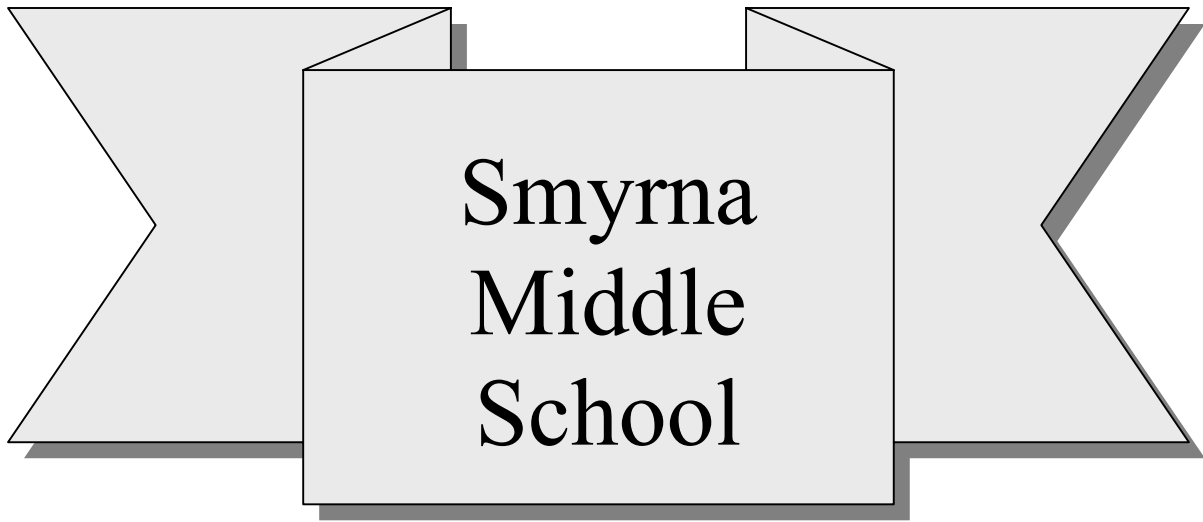
“One is only defeated when one accepts defeat.” That was a famous quote by Marshal Foch, a French general. I can tell you something, my grandpa is no quitter. He persisted for the good of his family. Unfortunately my grandpa started one of the worst habits in the world—smoking. Starting when he was a teenager, and all throughout his adulthood, he smoked cigars. Then he married my grandma and had seven kids. But, my grandma died of a heart attack so I never met her. Sadly, smoking did not improve my grandpa’s health.

When my grandpa got older, his son (AKA my dad) married my mom and had me. Then my grandpa became a grandpa. Now, if my grandpa hadn’t smoked all his life, he would be a lot better off. Today he struggles with emphysema (a disease in the lungs often caused by smoking). Sadly, three years back he had a terrible sickness and his heart stopped. Luckily the doctors revived him. The worst part is that he also had a minor heart attack about four months ago, and he has gallstones. The doctors are reluctant to remove them because he’s not strong enough with his heart trouble.

In conclusion, my grandpa has more tenacity than anyone I know. How can you lose your dad, smoke, eventually develop emphysema, be on tons of meds, and survive. Today I’m not sure how long it’ll be until grandpa winds up in the hospital again, especially with his gallstones still in there. Now that you know everything about my grandpa and how much he persevered, tell me do you know anyone who has persisted and shown as much tenacity or indefatigability as my grandpa?

Patrick Coleman

Third Place, Grade 6



Grades 7 and 8

The name of the person I am writing about is Carrie. The dictionary defines perseverance as a steady persistence in a course of action, a purpose, a state, in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement. In the following story I hope to describe how Carrie persevered to accomplish her goals and become an asset to her community.

At the age of 15 Carrie found out she was pregnant, and became very scared. She was in the ninth grade and attending Polytech. During the beginning of her pregnancy her grades dropped from A to C. At that point things weren't going well. She went to her parents and told them her situation; they did not give any support. They said she should give up her baby; this was an embarrassing time for them. Carrie's parents told her that she would NEVER make anything of her life. She vowed to prove to them that she could raise a child and still make something of herself. In the stress of all this, Carrie's parents threw her out of the house and then told her to move back in. In the months leading up to her delivery her parents became more supportive and understanding.

In the tenth grade Carrie decided to get more serious about school because she was no longer thinking about just herself but also the child inside her. Her grades began to rise and it was then that she chose to take on a career in nursing. In the beginning of her tenth grade year she met Rose Sombar. Mrs. Sombar was not only Carrie's teacher, but she was her friend and she had a big influence on her. Carrie recalls walking down the hallway and hearing the teachers talk and whisper about her. She also remembers the district trying to send her to DAPI (Delaware Adolescent Pregnancy Incorporation), but she refused. Why should she have to go to a school for pregnant teens when she was doing fine where she was?

On December 5, at 4:25 p.m. Carrie gave birth to a 6 lb. 3 oz. baby girl. She returned to school on January 1, only missing three weeks of school. Throughout the next couple of years, Carrie's aunt and grandmother helped her by watching her infant daughter while she attended school. Carrie did not do things that the other kids her age did. She did not attend football games, parties, or dances. She only went to her proms and even then returned home by 11:30 p.m. Carrie graduated high school second in her class (Salutatorian). She was only 1/100 of a point away from Valedictorian. Carrie was offered \$84,000 in scholarship money from Wesley College; Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland; and Delaware State University. She chose to go to Delaware State University because they offered her a full-paid tuition. She received a Bachelors Degree in Nursing in 2000. Carrie was offered a job at Bayhealth in the field of her choice which was maternity. There she not only helped deliver babies but she enjoyed talking to teen moms about how, even though their life has been taken off course a little, they could still do something and this wasn't the end. She worked there for seven years as both a staff nurse and charge nurse. She is currently in a graduate course for her Masters Degree in Nursing with a concentration in Health Care Services Administration at the University of Delaware. There she maintains a 4.0 gpa which earned her an invitation to the Beta Xi chapter of Sigma Theta Tau International Nursing Honor Society. Only the top 3-5%, of the most academically successful nursing students, is asked to join.

Carrie changed her job and became a nursing instructor at Delaware Technical and Community College. There she hopes to influence students the way she had been influenced by Mrs. Sombar. Carrie shares her story with her students, friends, and family. Carrie not only achieved

what everyone thought was impossible, but raised a healthy daughter who is thirteen years old and currently attends Smyrna Middle School. My name is Logan Brannock and I am proud to say Carrie Brannock is my mom. It has been a privilege sharing my mom's story with you, and I hope that her story of determination is as inspirational to you as it has been to me. She stresses the importance of moving forward even when times are hard. I believe my mom is a great example of perseverance.

Logan Brannock
First Place, Grade 7

I have made it my personal goal to persevere in school. Succeeding academically is something I'm dedicated to doing while overcoming the short- and long-term obstacles that I have faced and am facing. Some of the toughest obstacles I have survived are moving constantly, living in a one-parent household, and dealing with sickness. Moving constantly has proven to have some adverse effects.

Moving from one place to another has been a constant factor in my life. I've lived in a total of thirteen places. Sometimes the move doesn't interfere with where I go to school, but usually I change schools. Because of this, no one district has been able to record all of my information. This is problematic but more trouble comes from having only one parent.

I live in a one-parent household and that means only one source of income. That in and of itself is a big problem; it's not easy to stay focused on things like school and studying which seem trivial at times compared to paying rent and eating for next month. However, staying devoted to school is a challenge I accept willingly. While these past two obstacles may seem tough, nothing can compare to the third hurdle.

My mother getting sick was something that caused a chain reaction series of calamities. There are two times in my life when my mother grew dangerously ill and these times threatened to basically destroy my world. When the first illness happened everything collapsed. We lost everything then and once again when we were just about to close on a mortgage my mother fell ill again and lost her job; she was sick for two years. Once again we are recovering but the hardest part of getting through all of this (besides my mom being sick) is to continue to succeed in school. I wanted to be home with my mother and take care of her, but she convinced me that the best thing I could do was to get my education so I would not end up in her situation.

My goal was, has, and always will be to excel academically. To do this I have had to persevere through a lot of things—some tougher than others. I will not give up this goal despite moving, financial instability, and an ailing parent. No matter how high the hurdle to achieve something

you must jump it. I am proud to say that none of these things have come close to making me give up on my goal to persevere in school.

Raven Banks
Second Place, Grade 7

Sometimes, in order to reach a goal of yours, you have to persevere. Do you know what it means to persevere? It means to keep trying. A goal that I had been trying to accomplish about three years ago was to perform a stunt in cheerleading. Of course I did not do it on my first try. It took me about two months to learn how to do it. I failed a few times, but I kept getting right back up. I persevered for my team and myself.

Interboro Golden Hornets (IGH), the team I had been cheering for, is a winning team. For me to help us win, I had to learn things that would make my team better than the rest. One stunt my coach said I had to learn was a liberty twist out. This stunt requires balance and practice. I was to stand on one foot with the other bent up next to it while four of my teammates held me in the air by one of my feet. I would then have to twist down into my base's arms. Seems like a challenge? It sure was. I thought about giving up, but I didn't want to let my team down. So I tried my best.

Learning this stunt was not easy. I fell a few times, but every time I got back up. One of the falls I took injured me pretty badly. When I was twisting out, my bases did not catch me and I hit my back on one of their knees. I could not do cheerleading for a while. But when my back was better, I got right back up in the air and tried again.

It took me two months to do it correctly. When I finally did it, I felt that I could really help my team win and that all my hard work had paid off. When our first competition came up, I was to do my stunt. I did it perfectly and the crowd cheered! I felt really proud of myself and my team was happy for me. When it was time to judge what place we would get, I was hoping my stunt helped. The decision was to be announced and everybody was silent. Then we all heard, "First place goes to . . . Interboro Golden Hornets!" We all yelled and cheered. First place and I was part of it.

As you can now see, perseverance can really help make your goal. When that goal is achieved, your heart seems to float and you think to yourself, "Wow, I really did it!" Perseverance can be used for the smallest goals like learning to ride your bike, or it can be used for the biggest things, for example, keeping a relationship. No matter what size of the goal, the result is always great. So here's a word of advice—do not give up on your dream.

Paige McFadden
Third Place, Grade 7

Sometimes it feels so satisfying to just drop everything and quit. But when you achieve your goal without quitting, it feels so much better than giving up. For me, it had always been real fun to watch the “big kids” dive off the diving board. After seemingly endless hours of persevering, I finally achieved my goal of joining the herd of teenagers and finally diving off the diving board. Persevering has allowed me to dive, which was difficult but felt great to achieve. I worked hard and now I feel more confident at other things as well.

Diving was important to me because it was very hard to do but felt excellent to achieve. I originally wanted to learn how to dive because my dad was really good on the diving board, and I wanted to be just like him. After seeing the other kids diving, I finally asked my dad to teach me. When he taught me, I worked my hardest and took any chance I had to practice. After three days of frustration and painful belly flops, I finally mastered my dad’s famous dive! But, all that time spent on practicing wasn’t all fun and games—it took a lot of work and a lot of pain.

I achieved my goal of diving by working very hard. The hardest part of diving was gaining the courage to try to “dive” again after painfully humiliating myself. But since I was committed and I don’t give up, I ignored my searing pain and kept trying. Finally to my surprise after a few days I mastered the dive! Achieving my goal took a big weight off my shoulders and gave me a lot more confidence.

The result of being able to dive was feeling more confident in other things as well as diving. After achieving my goal, I was determined to learn new things. This included doing front flips, back flips, and backward dives off the diving board. I am very proud of myself for achieving my goal. This has inspired me to try new things and not give up.

In conclusion I realize that I never would have been able to do anything on the diving board had I not persevered. In the end, all the pain and frustration was worth it just to feel the overwhelming satisfaction of achieving a goal. I am glad that I took the pain. Perseverance is now the only thing that I think to do when trying to achieve a goal. Giving up is no longer an option.

Kristi Ginter

First Place, Grade 8

“Mom, I think I want to try field hockey.” I had watched the unique game being played before, but I had no idea it’d be so challenging to learn. Once I set my mind on something, I’ve got to do it! Perseverance kept me striving to accomplish my goal and inspired me to get better at field hockey. Perseverance has allowed me to become a good field hockey player, which gives me opportunities for college. I did this with lots of practice and now I want to play all the time.

I wanted to play field hockey because it appeared to be something that would challenge me. I’ve always loved attempting to tackle new sports. My mom played hockey at the University of North Carolina and my cousin plays for the University of Delaware. Field hockey is in my genes

and the many times I felt like giving up, it just kept me striving to excel at field hockey. However, I knew getting better in field hockey wouldn't occur overnight.

Perseverance was definitely a huge factor in improving my play and my growing love for field hockey. Almost every night after I started playing I was in my front yard or even kitchen practicing. I was determined to rid myself of my awkwardness with the stick and gain a little knowledge of skills necessary for the game. I would watch my cousin's college games, which allowed me to view very experienced and fast-moving games and learn new moves at the same time. I would try these moves and, if I didn't succeed, I'd pick my hockey stick back up and try again until I felt the move was conquered. I knew all this practice and perseverance would pay off in the long run.

Now, I play field hockey every opportunity I get. I play for a travel indoor team, which helps me further develop my skills. Every Tuesday night at practice, I learn something new and don't stop working until I get it down right. Whenever my hands are free, I find myself reaching for my hockey stick to try newly learned tricks and enhance my play. Perseverance is what made all these results happen for me.

Field hockey was important for me to accomplish because it was a challenge and I conquered that challenge through lots of practice and perseverance. Every time I felt like giving up I would practice to get better instead. Perseverance allowed me to strive to improve my play. Now, I love the sport and have high schools recruiting me. Now, I look forward to Tuesday night practice.

Katie Price

Second place, Grade 8

Do you know what it means to persevere! It means to try while failing, learning, and trying again until success is achieved. That's exactly what my mom had when she was trying to get a permanent position at the Division of Corporations. As I watched her go through her frustration, I was pleased to see that no matter how many times she was turned away from a job she kept on applying for other positions and she didn't give up. Perseverance has allowed my mom to receive a promotion, which was a long-term goal for her; but after almost four and a half to five years she got a permanent position.

Getting this job was important to my mom because she wouldn't have to work as much in order to provide for her family. Since she was working for the state she would get paid more money; she would get vacations, sick days, and get off every national and state holiday; and they would be paid holidays. This is great because she does not have to work overtime in order to make up for missed hours. The new job would free her from the stress she would have when her job was closed for a holiday or because of bad weather. In order for that stress to be relieved, she knew she had to keep on trying in order to achieve her goal.

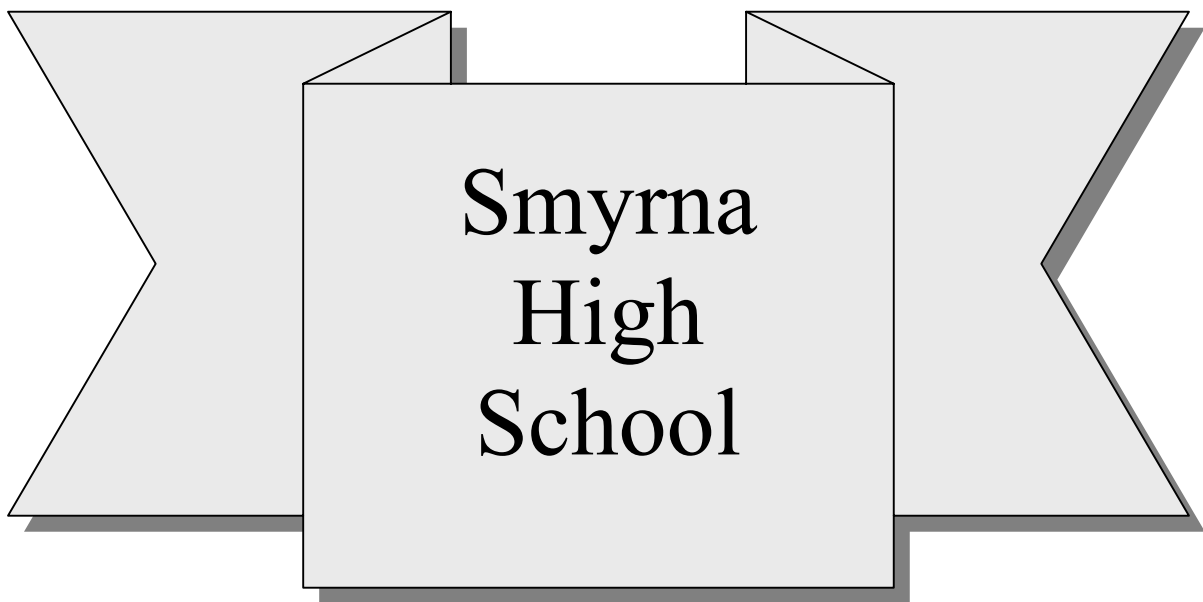
My mom achieved this goal by applying for different positions for about four and a half years. She would apply for a job that was a permanent position unlike the seasonal position she had at the time. She would be turned away from a job and just shake it off and keep going. It seemed like there was no end to being turned away from jobs, but my mom didn't give up hope. She did start to get frustrated at one point because it had been three and a half years of trying to get a permanent position, but she hung in there not knowing that about a year later it would all be over.

The result of my mom's perseverance was that she was given a job in the Franchise Tax Department of the Division of Corporations (which is who she worked for when she had the seasonal job). She applied for the job and the person conducting the interview just happened to understand what my mom was going through. The interviewer was looking for someone who had been working for the Division of Corporations for quite a while, but also looking for good workers. My mom was the perfect person for the job. Somehow my mom's cousin found out that my mom had gotten the job, and she called my mom with the good news because she knew how bad my mom wanted this job. At last it was all over and my mom and my whole family were both happy and relieved that my mom had gotten this job.

In conclusion, if it weren't for her perseverance my mom wouldn't have gotten the job. Now she doesn't have to work real hard, and she doesn't have to work overtime when her job is closed for any reason. The best thing about it is the holidays, because I then get to spend more time with her without her having to worry about the missed hours she would have if she were still seasonal. I know my mom looked forward to having this job for a very, very long time because, after all she went through to get the job, she wouldn't give it up just like that. I'm very proud of my mom and I look forward to following the attitude she has toward what she does and how she does things in life—especially when it comes to perseverance.

Tanesha Dixon

Third Place, Grade 8



Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12

The word failure could not begin to describe the way I felt the day my second grade teacher told me that I would not be moving with the rest of the children. I did not understand English enough to be moved on with the rest of the children. Imagine, seven years old and having to worry if the next day you would understand what the teacher was talking about. Well that was me. I had arrived in the states with hope that I would be alright, that moving an ocean away from the familiar streets of Arecebo would be an adventure. I never imagined failure would surround me. I thought that the teachers would understand me and the kids would love having a new friend. That did not come true. I vowed to myself that I would not wallow in my misery; but I would work hard to persevere and do what I had to despite everyone telling me differently.

During the summer I developed a goal system. My first goal was to learn English properly. Despite all that I had been doing, I still heard kids saying I was stupid because I spoke funny and the teacher still kept saying that I could not do it. All of this further fueled my anger and I channeled it all to more hard work. That summer I spent every waking moment practicing my writing and speech. As I stepped into the doorway to second grade again I knew this was the year that I was going to do excellent. Again I was wrong. So my goal for this year was to keep improving my skill in English. That year I was completely alone so I turned to books. They became my friends and teachers. While reading these books I taught myself English. When I did not understand a word I turned to my friend the dictionary. When I was not sure of a word I looked it up, and I was able to read through the book. My word choice on essays and my fluency greatly improved. By doing this I would be able to meet my goal for third grade which was to pass.

When third grade started I was sure that I would do wonderfully. Thankfully I did. I made more friends; my teachers even said I spoke better English than the American children. When hearing those simple words I knew all of my hard work paid off. I beat the odds and proved to everyone and myself that I could do it. I let everyone know that I would not be put down by words or looks, that I would break through the barriers and come out a champion.

My journey was long and hard but all well worth it. Failure no longer surrounds me. The ride was bumpy but as I always say, nothing that is worth it ever comes easy and anything that comes easy probably is not truly worth that which comes with a great deal of hard work and effort.

Angie Centeno

First Place, Grade 9

The lights pan through the crowd. The jazzy music of “Chicago” blasts across the stereo and on the stage is a costumed figure moving to the groove of the soulful sound. On stage is my sister. Her dancing is the reason I made the choice to write about her. She started late in her dance career and also has had to face other obstacles such as her height and broken toes. All through all the road blocks she never ceases to amaze me when she gets up and keeps going.

Kaitlyn never knew that she wanted to be a dancer until about the sixth grade. By this time the average dancer has eight years of experience and is already looking forward to big time careers

in dance companies, and dream jobs on Broadway. Unfortunately she was often told she was too old to start. She was put into the lower classes but she was always the one out on the stage with the biggest smile on her face and the most energy of all the girls on stage.

Another thing Kaitlyn had to overcome was her height. With a height of 5' 1", there were a lot of people who thought she would never be something nice to look at while dancing as tall girls have more grace and beauty. She showed her critics that at any height you can love to dance and that is what truly makes you a good dancer. One time one of her teachers told her that she would never be able to be on a dance team because she was so short. When she showed up to the audition she brought all the love and attitude to the dance and made the team.

Lastly my sister has had to overcome her fair share of broken bones. One instance that shows a lot of perseverance is when she was auditioning at a college and broke her toes. She was in the middle of the routine and heard a crack. Although she worked through the pain, she realized that this was her one shot to impress the judges. So she danced her way through the pain. She told me that stopping was not even an option for her.

Now Kait is on two dance teams, dancing five nights a week, and has even been offered a job at her studio. I hope that she will always keep that fire in her that allows her to push through even the hardest of circumstances and still come out on top. Most of all never write off someone for being inexperienced. If she can work her way through age discrimination, her height and broken bones she can accomplish anything. I know that one day Kaitlyn will look back at all the people who told her she couldn't dance and show them that love and perseverance can get you anywhere. Dancing through life will always be Kaitlyn's motto!

Emiley Conboy
Second Place, Grade 9

With sweaty palms clasped together, Vicki waited for the Cheerleading Captain to summon her from her bleacher seat onto the gym floor. She was having second thoughts about trying out for the high school cheerleading squad. This happened to be her seventh attempt. All she had wanted to do since she became a freshman at Mt. Pleasant was to become a cheerleader. Every single year the results were the same, as if her life was videotaped being rewound and played over. It seemed she was never "good enough."

Michelle, Vicki's best friend, tried to encourage her, but Vicki was unconvinced of the praise. Being the only one of her friends to not make the team, she felt left out. But in spite of the numerous heartbreaking denials, she was determined to pull it together and practice harder than ever. Vicki's older sister and experienced cheerer went over the many routines and skills of cheering with her. Vicki was prepared, but she just needed to believe in herself.

"Victoria Tank, you're up next," beckoned the captain in a monotone.

With an encouraging smile and thumbs up from Michelle, Vicki confidently strode down the bleachers and stood before the judges who allowed her to begin. Standing tall with her head held high, she counted out the rhythm of the cheer.

“Be aggressive!” Vicki chanted in a firm, booming voice. She recited the cheer with a smile during which she also bent her knees and waved her arms all at the same time—achieving a synchronized cheer. She ended the cheer with a jump and a “Go Green Knights!” to give it a twist. The thunderous applause told her that she had done a magnificent job. Taking her seat Vicki could hardly stand waiting for the roster to be called out at the end.

After much hesitation, Vicki watched the judges huddle up in discussion as she held her breath and crossed her fingers. She desperately wanted to wear that uniform and know that all her pain and hard work paid off. The Captain had already started to read aloud the names of the girls who made the squad.

“Victoria Tank,” announced the Captain.

Vicki thought it was a dream and it wasn’t until she was handed a uniform that she really believed it was all true. Because Vicki wanted the dream to such an extent, she persevered and succeeded. Ironically three weeks later she was cheering at a football game, she slipped into a hole, and she broke her ankle. Although she was out the rest of the season, Vicki wouldn’t let the broken ankle stop her from cheering from the sidelines, on the team she worked so hard to be a part of.

Melissa Hubert

Third Place, Grade 9

Crack! I wiped the dirt off of my face and looked at my arm. It was useless. It hurt like crazy. I knew it was broken. This was the day I really learned what it means to persevere. This was not your typical great day; but for me, it was the best day of my life. It was the day I learned my own strength and my ambition to push forward no matter what the situation. This was the day I realized what I was living for. This was my dream—my goal. I was going to be a professional female motocross racer.

The day began with the smell of gas. It wasn’t too strong, but once I smelled it I knew exactly what was about to take place. There was no way to sleep through the noise of the loud throttle-pumping dirt bikes right outside my motor home. I got up and did the usual thing any rider does on a Sunday morning (race day); I unloaded my bike and put on my gear. Today felt like it was going to be an excellent day. I don’t know why but I had this gut feeling that today was the day I would prove myself to be a real motocross rider to my dad. He believed in me but couldn’t stand watching me race. He doesn’t want his “little girl” getting hurt. I remember that morning he said to me, “I want you just to go out there and have fun, Destiny. No pressure.” What he was really saying was, don’t go out there and try to clear jumps that you are not ready for. I knew

what he was thinking; but being the strong-willed girl I am, I believed I could push myself to the limit.

“All A women riders to the starting gate,” said the announcer. This was my call. As my dad took the bike off the stand, I geared up. We went through all of the normal bike checks: making sure there was enough gas, seeing that the throttle wasn’t sticking, and of course, the most common dumb riding mistake, making sure the gas was actually on. My bike was running great. Nothing could go wrong today. I rode up to the starting gate and waited for them to call out my number. The announcers did a random pick of which bike number got the first gate pick. “Number 69,” they said. That was my number! Today was going to be faultless. I had my bike running ideally for once, and I had the first gate pick. I lined my bike up in the rut behind my gate. It was a perfect starting line. I had first dibs into the inside lane. One of my past motocross boyfriends, who is now my best friend, walked up beside me as my jittery body clenched the handlebars. “Don’t be worried, Destiny. You got this.” Those words assured me everything was going to go smoothly. “Life starts once the gate drops.” He was right. Once the gate dropped and all the bikes were off, life started.

The flag boy held up the 30-second card. My eyes went back and forth from the gate to the whole shot. I was a nervous wreck. BAM! The gate dropped and I shifted to second, then third, then fourth. I was doing great. I didn’t get the whole shot, but I was right up front with the top five girls in my class. Around the first turn we went, then into the whoop section. Over the double I put all my effort and thought into all the other obstacles. I was going to win. I could feel it. I was still in fourth place out of 35. My confidence level shot up far above the ground—maybe just a little too much. I came up to the “Big Table” as we called it and my mind was going crazy. I wasn’t thinking—I was just riding.

Up the jump, hit the kicker, and SMACK! CRACK! I blacked out. When I opened my eyes all I saw was dirt. When I tried to get up I felt a sharp pain in my arm. When I looked down, I didn’t see anything because my jersey hid the marks. I couldn’t give up now. I couldn’t let anyone take my position in the race. I picked up my bike with one hand and tried my best to kick start it again. It took me maybe six seconds, but I hopped back on the bike and was off. This was the most terrible pain I had ever experienced. It was my throttle arm that was hurt, so giving the bike enough gas to get over the jumps was like trying to walk with no legs. Maybe it was not that bad, but you can imagine. I went into the back section trying my best not to inflict any more pain on my arm but it was no use. It hurt so badly that I was ready just to give up, but I didn’t. Coming up to the finish line, I passed one other rider and got my position back. Out came the checkered flag. Holding on the best I could, I actually cleared the finish line double. I was so relieved that I just dropped my bike, took my jersey off, and cried. My bone was sticking out of my arm.

As I was hurried to the medics, I started laughing. All this pain was for one sport. My dad finally believed in me again. He finally saw the determination in my eyes. He knew I wasn’t his little girl any more, but that I was stronger. This was the day my dad finally looked up to me. It was the day he finally realized that I have dreams too, and that I can accomplish them. I felt like a champion with a broken wing. I was my dad’s hero and my own hero. That day was the day I

learned my own willingness to push forward. At that moment, I realized what I was living for. This is my dream, my goal. I am going to become a professional motocross racer.

Destiny Laberge

First Place, Grade 10

“Extending compassion, accepting responsibility, giving respect, learning perseverance, and exhibiting integrity”—all equals Smyrna pride. Learning perseverance? What exactly does that mean? By definition, perseverance is the act of never giving up. I learned perseverance when I was much younger and have tried to portray it in almost every challenge throughout my life thus far. I can remember a few obstacles I have come across where giving up just wasn’t an option. For example, the time I learned to knit.

It all began when I was in the eighth grade. I had gone to a craft show the previous weekend and had bought the most adorable scarf. I decided I had to wear it the following Monday, so I did just that. I walked with confidence into the lunch room when I was stopped by one of my teachers, Mrs. Stanton-Dinger. I looked at her in confusion as to why she had stopped me. The reason was to ask about the scarf I was wearing across my waistline. She asked if I had knitted it, and told me that if I wanted she would teach me how to knit. I gazed at her with excitement and told her how much I would love to!

The following day I received my shopping list from her for my supplies in order to begin knitting. I got the 15” needles, two bundles of passionate purple *Fun Fur*, and a matching color or regular yarn. I was set and ready to learn! The word spread and before I knew it five other girls were set and ready to learn just as I was. Knitting obviously wasn’t only for old ladies anymore! For an hour after school that day we began to learn. Well, everyone else did except me.

I sat there for what felt like a century just learning how to start my first knot in order to begin. Trust me; it wasn’t a good start to my knitting experience. During the second practice I finally got my knot and by the third I was on a roll. It was turning out more amazing than I expected, and I was enjoying it. I was a little behind the other girls, but it didn’t bother me because I had a feeling mine was going to be the best. Finally, it was the fourth practice and I was almost finished. My newly-knitted scarf was perfect until I noticed the loose loop in the middle. I thought I could fix it by pulling it. Two words: BAD IDEA! There went my scarf in two as each stitch quickly came undone until what I tried to make great turned into a pile of yarn on the rug.

I, for one, was devastated. I was an eighth grade girl struggling to be as cool and hip as the others, and then I ruined it in two seconds. The girls giggled in excitement as they did the ending knot to their scarves. What about me? Mrs. Stanton-Dinger tried to calm me but I was so upset. I left knitting class early that day. I had decided before I even walked into the door of my house I was done with knitting.

I didn't attend the next class or the one after that. I just couldn't take what had been so beautiful and duplicate it. My mom questioned me on why I was giving up. Giving up just wasn't my forte. It has never been and it surely wasn't that eighth grade year. As a matter of fact the very next day I attended practice and in a matter of a few more sessions I finished my scarf. I tried it on and decided it was cuter than before. Every stitch was perfectly aligned. I wore it everywhere and Mrs. Stanton-Dinger urged me to enter it into a competition. The greatest thing was, as a first timer I won! My passionately purple scarf had not only won me \$100 but the reward of knowing that persevering can lead to something I never expected.

After all this I still knit! If I hadn't persevered I would have given up and would have never learned what I now love. Never giving up has not only helped me with knitting, but every time I want to give up I just think about this memory. I truly believe that persevering can lead to great things in life and without it I don't know where we would be. I guess we all just wouldn't have scarves.

Jillian Bartsch

Second Place, Grade 10

I stepped into my Nana's warm, comforting house on Christmas morning with the smell of fresh Danish and doughnuts reaching my senses. Suddenly I was welcomed by a small, bubbly eighty-eight year old lady. Our family went through the usual Christmas morning routine; nothing seemed too different . . . the making of drinks, opening of presents, and enjoying each others company. But to put everything all together was no easy task, especially for an eighty-eight year old lady. No one would have realized how much things were actually put together differently, and the amount of effort and time my Nana put into this year's Christmas. She persevered through a few tough tasks this year; she suffered from a severe illness just a few days prior to Christmas and was sent to the hospital. Her age was definitely beginning to catch up with her; and after the many years of keeping her most prized Christmas decorations in her basement, her basement flooded leaving her with barely any decorations. My admiration for her is endless for throughout many hardships my Nana has the ability to persevere through anything and make the best out of any situation.

Several days before the big day while my Nana was wrapping presents furiously in a big rush, she began to notice that she wasn't breathing normally and could not catch her breath. For her, it was quite a big deal being eighty-eight and all. She called my father and asked him to take her to the doctor to get checked out, but he couldn't come to get her until a few hours later. Being the very impatient and determined woman that she is, my Nana drove herself (completely ill) to the hospital and checked herself in. They informed her that she was suffering from severe bronchial problems, ran hundreds of tests on her, and gave her several intense breathing medications. Within the next day she seemed back to normal! Her doctors told her to do NOTHING for at least two days. She was certainly not happy with that. No way could my Nana just sit and do nothing for two days with Christmas on its way! Through her illness during these two days, my Nana did not listen to the doctor and wrapped the rest of her presents at a low pace, tiring herself out a little but completely satisfying herself inside and out.

Secondly, it takes a lot of work to produce the comfortable and pleasant atmosphere that my Nana puts on every year on Christmas morning. It's getting harder for her each year on account of her age. For an eighty-eight year old, she can no longer put her Christmas tree up by herself, lug decorations upstairs, or even put some harder to reach ones up by herself, and must call on us to help with decorating. But no matter how old and brittle my Nana gets, every year she continues putting everything up that she can and still will not let us decorate her tree. She can do anything she wants, can complete any task no matter what she is going through in life.

Each year her Christmas ornaments and balls are heaved up and down the stairs of her basement to be placed on the Christmas tree. This year three weeks before Christmas her basement flooded during a rainstorm and all of her ornaments were ruined. With such a large tree to cover she was completely baffled with ways in which to cover it. The month before Christmas was just completely going wrong for her. So with the little time she had not wrapping presents and decorating her house, she crafted small ornaments made out of creative objects and little things (like dried out fruits and pins). Also she went to a few low cost stores and bought a small collection of ornaments. This year's tree was certainly not as extravagant, but it was perfectly put together with even more thoughtful ornaments. Even through a devastating event just around Christmas, my Nana pulled through and yet again made the best out of her situation.

After coming home from Christmas this year, I had a full, warm, and a cozy feeling inside me. I realized that it was all made possible by my Nana. Even being sick, her elderly age, and the flood couldn't keep her from having the best Christmas yet again. No one I know has the perseverance and termination my Nana has. To be able to have all the odds against her and still pull through with such a wonderful Christmas, better than ever, that describes perseverance and my Nana.

Caryn Deakyne

Third Place, Grade 10

It was a dark, calm October night. Everyone was getting their Halloween costumes and candy ready for the holiday. Children were ready for the treats and Halloween parties were forging ahead. Little children were scared of what lie ahead, just because of their ignorance. But for my family and me on October, 2002, we were in disbelief of the news ahead. It changed out lives that very day.

For a couple of weeks my uncle had suffered through mild to severe migraine headaches repeatedly, so he took Advil and Tylenol for the pain. No one really thought much of it, not even my uncle, Carl. But one night he had gotten to the point that my grandmother grew to extreme concern. My uncle was looking for inanimate objects and saying weird things, so my grandmother called the paramedics.

The next day we went to visit my uncle in the hospital. But he wasn't the Carl that everyone knew and loved. He looked like the same uncle that I had grown up with and looked up to, but it wasn't him. His actions and words were like a five-year-old child. He had had a mild stroke and according to the doctors would never have full vision, a mature mentality, or be able to walk right ever again.

He was in the hospital for a few weeks and was released. He lived with my grandmother when he was released. Things weren't looking good for Carl, but still something in his heart told him to not give up. It's been almost five years and he has amazed everyone.

He has most of his vision back; he built up his muscles by lifting, walking and riding bikes long distances; and he moved out of my grandmother's house and into his own. He's really doing well for himself. And since my brother and I have always looked up to him, kind of like an older brother, I think his experience really influenced us to never give up. Even though the odds were against him, he never quit, never put his head down, and always pushed forward.

David Mehalshick

Third Place, Grade 11

Life is exciting because of all the challenges it brings. Every person has problems with which he has to deal. Some programs can be solved very quickly and simply while others might take more time and effort. My life is full of challenges, but I face one at a time and get through all of them. My biggest challenge in life was when I was struggling in school because of my lack of knowledge of the English language. I struggled and struggled but I never gave up, and now I am actually pretty knowledgeable in the language.

I moved to the United States a little over eight years ago. I was a young boy without any speaking abilities in the English language. School was a complete mystery to me. The teachers didn't know what to do to help me because none of them spoke Polish. All I could do was attend school and continue trying my best. My classes would consist of sitting and listening. I would write down all the words I didn't understand and translate them later on at home from a Polish dictionary. It was a tedious process, but the only way for me to learn.

Days and days went by. My parents saw me struggle and started questioning our move to the United States. They thought about moving back for me. I told them that I liked it here and that I was capable of learning the language. Almost every test I took I did terribly. I was tired of getting bad grades on my papers and tests. I knew that I could never give up. It was a fight I had to win no matter what. I would study my vocabulary more and more every night. I knew that knowing more vocabulary would help me understand the questions on the homework and tests.

Learning another language was tougher than I thought. With lots of effort from my teachers and myself, I started getting better. My tests and homework grades improved significantly. I began to get B's and A's. It was a sign that I could overcome the challenge of learning another language. It definitely involved a lot of hard work, but I am very proud of where I am right now,

and I plan to continue to do my best. I get High Honor Roll now, and I like taking my report cards to my parents. It always puts a big smile on their faces. They realize that the move wasn't bad after all and that I am capable of going far in life.

People will have challenges and problems all their lives. All they can do is try their best and never give up. A person can achieve anything he wants through hard work. By giving up and failing, a person won't know what they are missing. I never gave up and I am a good student now. It was all worth it, and I plan to do my best in the future so I can be successful. I think everyone should just face their problems head on and don't stop fighting until they win.

Marcin Ciolek

First Place, Grade 12

A man who does not always have an available job; a man who lives in an apartment that is too small for his five kids and wife; that wife who did not graduate from high school and is taking care of five kids; the train that passes by their second-floor window in not the best neighborhood; the family who is impoverished, that seems that they will not amount to anything; the father who seems lazy; the mother who seems to have made the greatest mistake of her life—these are the parents who define perseverance.

The news of having a child when they themselves were children was nothing less than paralyzing. Just another statistic, another future ruined, another dropout, another child born out of wedlock, another family that will not amount to much, another this, another that, another The comments that buzzed in their ears, the looks of shame that caused them to cast their heads down, only added to their worries, only caused a sense of despair. Though the future did not seem too bright at the time, they trusted God and pressed through. Together they persevered.

Eight years, four more births, three homes later, the situation did not change but even worsened. After the father's parents' home, a small apartment, and a house with no heat and one mattress, the parents found themselves in a second-floor apartment where the train passed by their bedroom window—a three bedroom, one bath with no door, vermin-infested apartment. Because they had no car, the mother walked eleven blocks to her children's school to pick them up and eleven blocks back in the heat, cold, and snow. This was by no means going to be an obstacle for them in attending church. They rode the train to and fro for a year. The father worked long hours at times in backbreaking construction work for a real estate company, but the job was at times sporadic. It was not enough; the bills piled up; the list of things they needed grew as the apartment became too small. The family suddenly found themselves locked out of their own home. The horror they had struggled against every day had become a reality, one they wished never to repeat again. Though these years and those to come were the greatest tests of their faith in God, their marriage, and their character, they refused to give into their circumstances. The future did not seem too bright at the time, but they trusted God and they pressed through. Together they persevered.

The father and the mother refused any longer to continue to live as such. The father enrolled himself in a computer training school. After ten months of sacrifice and hard work (having no car to get there) he passed the course. Another eight difficult months had passed by before the father found himself a new job. The job proved to be difficult many times, and many days he had to work overtime; but the determined father persevered. Sooner than later the family was moving from an apartment to a house in a better neighborhood. It was not their own, but it was a great improvement. Soon the poorly furnished row home became a fully furnished decorated home. As years went by in that home, the family went from an old, small car where the kids constantly exclaimed that the other was squishing him to two new cars. They were able to take their family on vacation each year. As the littlest one finally entered school, the mother was at last able to finish her education and hold her GED in her hands. Being accepted into a training program, lead to her employment as a bank teller. The determined mother persevered. They would not and refused to give in to their circumstances. They were, without a shadow of a doubt, going to provide a better life for their family; they were going to succeed. Though the future may not have seemed too bright, they trusted God and pressed through. Together they persevered.

Six years the family lived in that row home. As the father was promoted during this time and his salary increased, and as he and his wife worked on their credit, they were able to move from the now small row house to a beautiful big single home in a wonderful neighborhood. After seventeen years dreaming and hoping, they were able to purchase a home of their own. The father and the mother of the five children succeeded and continued to succeed in providing for their family, and in bettering themselves and their family life. It was all because they had refused to continue to be a statistic, they had refused to give into their circumstances, and they had refused to be nothing less than good parents. Together with God they had persevered.

The father who has a stable job; the father who lives in a new single home with his five kids and wife; the wife who earned her GED and is employed; the family who was impoverished; the family who amounted to something and more; the father who worked hard; the parents who raised five great kids—these are the parents who define perseverance.

Perseverance is not just a word; it is an act of those who refuse to be defeated, who refuse to stay in their circumstance. It is a characteristic of those who take their failures as a revelation to success in the future and not as a defeat. Perseverance is what bears the fruit of ultimate success and that which makes it taste that much sweeter. Perseverance is what the new mother at sixteen and the new father at nineteen exhibited even after years of hardship. Anyone can dream, anyone can hope, but it is those who persevere who make those dreams, those hopes into reality.

Marjorie Velez
Second Place, Grade 12

The interrogator shouted, “You fear for your life!” Li answered, “Why, you already have me in bonds, what more can you do? Shoot me? Then that is all you have left.” These are the words of Li De Xian, a Christian pastor, who for the past twelve years has served the underground

church of Communist China. Li has been arrested dozens of times and brutally beaten dozens more. However he is not deterred; for each time he is released from torture he recounts the covenant that he has made with God. “I will preach until I die!” Because of his zealous attitude and fearless determination, my “witness” pales before his *lifestyle*. He knows his purpose—to spread the news of Jesus Christ to all people, *no matter what*. This is why I find Li De Xian to be my model of perseverance.

My primary reason for finding Li to be a model of perseverance is that he has endured countless beatings, tortures, and threats, yet he has not stopped witnessing. The most persecution I ever received was being asked in sixth grade if “I slept with Jesus, because I loved him enough to?” At this point I was discouraged to really talk about my beliefs again until high school. Li has shown the true spirit of a martyr and has fearlessly declared many times that he will die before he recants Jesus Christ. On several occasions while preaching to his congregation at Hua Du Village, the Public Security Bureau (PBS) has raided his church; and he has been mercilessly beaten, even while bleeding and vomiting, until passing out. He has been beaten in the face with his own Bible, had his head repeatedly smashed against walls and floors, and had his hands and feet bound and chained to his prison bed for days on end. Li regularly carries with him a knapsack in which he keeps clothes and a blanket. He keeps it so that when the PBS picks him up he’ll be ready. I admire him because no matter how close he comes to death at the hands of the PBS, he will never stop preaching what he believes in.

My second reason for admiring Li’s perseverance is that he is familiar with God’s word, and that even through the persecution he has never failed to find the proper time to put God’s word into action. On the numerous occasions that Li has been threatened with death he has coolly quoted Matthew 10:28, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell.” I have trouble staying awake long enough after finishing everything else in my day, to sit down and read my Bible for five minutes. Li is able to preach to even his persecutors and has, at times, dumbfounded them with his education responses to their terrorizations. I admire him because he can use his knowledge of the Bible to both comfort himself and challenge his enemies.

My final reason for admiring Li’s perseverance is that, because of his suffering and his knowledge of God’s word, God through Li has been able to save thousands of people. The typical church in the United States averages about eight-five people every Sunday. Li’s church in Hau Du has a faithfully committed and unyielding six hundred people attending his *daily* services. Even while he is imprisoned, he has trained subordinates to carry out the services passing his unwavering torch onto them. While he is imprisoned, he follows the example of Paul preaching to the other inmates. I admire this because even while in his “darkest” moments Li has never forgotten that his purpose is to save the lost and to nurture the found.

Truly, Li De Xian is a man on fire for God. He won’t be quenched by the torrents or gales of life for he has already looked into the eye of that hurricane and proclaimed, *God’s at my side and I’m not afraid; who would dare lay a hand on me?* (Psalms 118:6) Although I may never meet Li, I

will always be amazed and empowered by his life story of perseverance. Through his sufferings and tortures and steadfast devotion to God and his Word, God through Li has saved multitudes throughout China. That is why he holds my highest respect.

Jonathan Barth

Third Place, Grade 12

HONORABLE MENTION

SMYRNA KINDERGARTEN

James (Trae) Porter
Erick Hernandez
Cassidy Anderson

SMYRNA ELEMENTARY

Anna Coppage	Kindergarten
Ryan Fretz	Kindergarten
Joshua Sarkissian	Kindergarten
Jonathan Chillas	Kindergarten
Chloe Castro	Kindergarten

Emily Brittingham	Grade 1
Keshaun Tolbert	Grade 1
David Conlon	Grade 1
Joshua Perez	Grade 1
Elijah Porter	Grade 1

Katlyn Hicks	Grade 2
Zachary Shane	Grade 2
Grace Cornwell	Grade 2
Sean Colbert	Grade 2
Ashley Barbour	Grade 2

Carissa DiCarlantonio	Grade 3
Phillip Nix	Grade 3
Allanna Peck	Grade 3
Gary Deppish	Grade 3
Haille Anderson	Grade 3

Miles Humphries	Grade 4
Zoriya Kemp	Grade 4
Ryan Harris	Grade 4
Diamond Foster	Grade 4
Autumn Birney	Grade 4

CLAYTON ELEMENTARY

Jacob Cain	Kindergarten
Aaron Lewis	Kindergarten
Fred "Wesley" Young	Kindergarten
Isabella Gavidia	Kindergarten
Savanna Pollard	Kindergarten

Gary Cimaglia	Grade 1
Alexis Harmon	Grade 1
Brian Walker	Grade 1
Kallista Girton	Grade 1
Matthew Gordy	Grade 1

Nolan Henderson	Grade 2
Julia Cox	Grade 2
Swan Marie Buckalew	Grade 2
Donald Purdy	Grade 2
Pamala McFarland	Grade 2

Justin Lemmon	Grade 3
Devon Shehan	Grade 3
Kaila Hindt	Grade 3
Jordan Martin	Grade 3
Zoe Punke Pabon	Grade 3

Claire Kamm	Grade 4
Emily Hodgeman	Grade 4
Jeffrey "Raymond" Hennen	Grade 4
Jonathan Quiros	Grade 4
Cicero Lemmon, IV	Grade 4

NORTH SMYRNA ELEMENTARY

Parker Boots	Kindergarten
Dean Poplos	Kindergarten
Emily Marthaler	Kindergarten
Blake Murray	Kindergarten
Camaryn Timblin	Kindergarten

Kayla Townsley	Grade 1
Michelle Coleman	Grade 1
Katrina Zeigler	Grade 1
Angelica Bautista	Grade 1
Madison Halsey	Grade 1

Taylor Howell	Grade 2
Kylie Curry	Grade 2
Cody Sandoz	Grade 2
Braeden Carter	Grade 2
David Demby	Grade 2

Dillon Tome	Grade 3
Nickolas Senne	Grade 3
Andrew Morrison	Grade 3
Mesha Mosely	Grade 3
Karishma Price	Grade 3

Sierra Aaron	Grade 4
Lizzie Birney	Grade 4
JT Hammond	Grade 4
Hunter Pritt	Grade 4
Caitlyn Ramsey	Grade 4

JBM INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL

Kayla Kennedy	Grade 5
Rebecca Cote	Grade 5
Aaron Cooper	Grade 5
Taylor Dixon	Grade 5
Kaitlyn Garrison	Grade 5

Maryann Rasool	Grade 6
Morgan Jewell	Grade 6
Tierra Fenwick	Grade 6
Ameer Watson	Grade 6
Branham Menard	Grade 6

SMYRNA MIDDLE SCHOOL

Jenna Williams	Grade 7
Justin Mullaney	Grade 7
Amanda Jarman	Grade 7
David Maloney	Grade 7
Khalon Sudler	Grade 7

Kierran Scott	Grade 8
Josh Murphy	Grade 8
Ashley August	Grade 8
Justin Lacinski	Grade 8
Morgan Wilson	Grade 8

SMYRNA HIGH SCHOOL

Kasey Spadafino	Grade 9	Alex Avila	Grade 11
Maggie Humphrey	Grade 9	William Matthew Szelestei	Grade 11
Mallory Fisher	Grade 9	Lindsay Rennie	Grade 11
Kaitlyn Asbury	Grade 9	Daniel Reynolds	Grade 11
Matt Dougherty	Grade 9	Alicia McDaniels	Grade 11

Jessica Hughes	Grade 10	Adam Barczewski	Grade 12
Robert Martin	Grade 10	Khaliah Muhammed	Grade 12
Tiffani Justice	Grade 10	Katie Dukes	Grade 12
Samantha Cacoilo	Grade 10	Michael Natrin	Grade 12
Tyler Torres	Grade 10	Josh Hall	Grade 12