By Alexandra Wise, Kindergarten, Charles Barrett Elementary

Children's & Teens' Gazette Packet 2018
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Welcome

Dear Readers:

This week, the Gazette Packet turns over its pages to the youth and students. We asked principals and teachers from area schools to encourage students to contribute their words, pictures, and photos for our annual Children's Issue. The response, as always, was enormous. While we were unable to publish every piece we received, we did our best to put together a paper with a fair sampling of the submitted stories, poems, drawings, paintings, photographs, and other works of art. Because of the response, we will continue to publish more artwork and writings in January.

We appreciate the extra effort made by school staff to gather the materials during their busy time leading up to the holidays. We'd also like to encourage both schools and parents to mark their 2019 calendars for early December, the deadline for submissions for next year's Children's Gazette Packet. Please keep us in mind as your children continue to create spectacular works of art and inspiring pieces of writing in the coming year.

The children's issue is only a part of our year-round commitment to cover education and our local schools. As always, the Gazette Packet welcomes letters to the editor, story ideas, calendar listings and notices of local events from our readers. Photos and other submissions about special events at schools are especially welcome for our schools pages.

Our preferred method for material is e-mail, which should be sent to gazette@connectionnewspapers.com, but you can reach us by mail at 1606 King St., Alexandria, VA 22314 or call 703-778-9415 with any questions.

— Editor Steven Mauren
T.C. WILLIAMS - MINNIE HOWARD CAMPUS

Glazed Clay Mask by Shelby Bavin

Glazed Clay Mask by Itzel Hernandez-Wilson

Glazed Clay Mask by Daviana Robles-Mongue

Glazed Clay Mask by Jeinny Guzman Bautista

Glazed Clay Mask by Daniel Garvin

Glazed Clay Mask by Corrine Miranda

Glazed Clay Mask by Nansira Doumbouya

Glazed Clay Mask by Rachael Lamparty

Glazed Clay Mask by Brandon Siyarath

Glazed Clay Mask by Kenner Lovo Marquez

Glazed Clay Mask by Gwendolyn Peace

Glazed Clay Mask by Kevin Zheng

Glazed Clay Mask by Rai Hill

Glazed Clay Mask by Jonathan Vaile

By Khalese Hendricks

Glazed Clay Mask by Itzel Hernandez-Wilson

Glazed Clay Mask by Nansira Doumbouya
Valedictorians and Their Discontents
Merit, diversity, and a modest proposal for graduation.

By Griffin Harris
T.C. Williams High School

For most high school seniors, graduation cannot come quickly enough. But once inside that crowded, hot auditorium, it does not pass quickly enough. The sheer length of graduation is inevitable — almost 850 students must cross the stage — but there is one problem that is in the school’s power to address.

The student speakers at graduation — the valedictorian and the salutatorian — are not the best ones for the job. To finish at the top of their class is an impressive achievement, and it requires a lot of hard work and intellect. But the two who finish there are not representative of the graduating class they address. Instead, they represent a perverse system that claims to reward behavior over good fortune while actually ensuring that society’s richest and most educated remain at the top.

Before I go further, I should say this: I have had the privilege of knowing well the valedictorians and salutatorians of the last few years, and they are wonderful people. A couple of them gave good speeches at graduation, too. I know well the prospective valedictorians and salutatorians of my class, and I like them all. I am not out to bash the nerds here or to attack anyone in particular.

What I am saying is that there are many admirable qualities in the T.C. student body, and the valedictorian and salutatorian tend to display only a few. (For concision, let’s call the duo V/S.) No one person could possibly embody all of these values, which is precisely why variation in the speakers is needed.

Meet Your V/S
The V/S can almost always be described as follows. They are white students, from a small handful of elementary schools — usually George Mason. They have not taken, or even considered taking, fewer than five AP courses in junior or senior year. They are very narrowly separated from the others in the top ten of the class; the difference is often as small as getting an A- for the year in a course instead of a full A, or taking that one non-AP class junior year, or getting a B in a freshman year class.

Finally, the V/S, for all the discipline and intelligence and admirable work ethic, owe their high rank more than anything to sheer luck. What is in place now is a meritocracy — a term coined satirically, and for good reason. The meritocracy claims to reward merit, diversity, and a modest proposal for graduation.

See Valedictorians, Page 24

Jug Value Drawing in Pencil
by Diane Perez-Orellana

Still Life Contour Line Drawing in Oil Pastel
by Robert Holibar

Still Life Contour Line Drawing in Oil Pastel
by Alexis Colton

Pencil and watercolor painting by Brianna Meyers

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LYLES-CROUCH TRADITIONAL ACADEMY

Submitted by Marisa St. Louis.

By Gustav Hunnius in Mrs. Yeager's Grade 2 class.

By Kaitlyn Cabralis in Ms. Wang's Grade 1 class.

By Kyla Almand in Mr. Orndorff's Grade 4 class.

By Sophia Duka in Ms. Allen's Kindergarten class.

By Noah David in Ms. Vega's Grade 4 class.

By Shanaya Kamal in Mr. Albert's Grade 5 class.

By Evelyn Pollard in Mr. Wise's Grade 3 class.

By Lucia Fernandez in Ms. Kelly's Grade 1 class.

By Madeleine Doss in Ms. Owen's Kindergarten class.

By Rakaeb Solomon in Ms. Riedinger's Grade 3 class.

By Reika Aida in Ms. Maslyn's Grade 2 class.

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George Washington Middle School

By Alberto V., Grade 7
By Amare W., Grade 8
By Anabel R., Grade 7
By Ingrid J., Grade 6
By Bethel H., Grade 6
By Bryan R., Grade 6
By Christian T., Grade 8
By Azarya A., Grade 6
By Logan E., Grade 8
By Nora M., Grade 8
By Trudy H., Grade 6

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WINTER IS COMING! ASK ABOUT OUR 2018-19 INTERIOR DISCOUNT!
Samuel W. Tucker Elementary

Submitted by teacher Sean Murphy.

1pt Perspective Landscape in tempera paint by Sophia Han, 8, Grade 2.

1pt Perspective Landscape in tempera paint by Kenza Naji, 8, Grade 2.

1pt Perspective Landscape in tempera paint by Mahi Bhanot, 8, Grade 2.

Mirror Tessellation Playing Card in markers and crayons by Talya Samake, 10, Grade 4.

2pt Perspective Store in pencil and color pencil by Angelica Wannakul, 10, Grade 4.

2pt Perspective Store in pencil and color pencil by Brielle Bittner, 10, Grade 4.

Mirror Tessellation Playing Card in markers and crayons by Khadija Kamara, 10, Grade 4.

Fall Tree in crayon and tempera paint by Arezu Amirir, 6, Grade 1.

Mirror Tessellation Playing Card in markers and crayons by Justin Han, 10, Grade 4.

Fall leaf rubbing in crayons, markers, and watercolors by Cecelia McCormick, 6, Grade 1.

Fall leaf rubbing in crayons, markers, and watercolors by Daniel Agama-Perez, 6, Grade 1.

Fall leaf rubbing in crayons, markers, and watercolors by Soha Tuladhar, 6, Grade 1.

Fall leaf rubbing in crayons, markers, and watercolors by Banyamin Qaderi, 6, Grade 1.
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ALEXANDRIA GAZETTE PACKET  ❖ CHILDREN'S & TEENS' CONNECTION 2018-2019  ❖ 15
BISHOP IRETON HIGH SCHOOL

Alexandria Country Day School

By Annie Mildrew, Class of '19

By Catherine Hiyama, Class of '19

By Reyna Osborne, Class of '19

By Reeves Versaggi, Grade 7

By Amirah Jackson, Grade 4

By Brooke Dunton, Grade 7

By Caleb Banks, Grade 2

By Charlotte Curzon Hill, Kindergarten

By Andrew Talay, Grade 4

By Astrid Ellehuus, Grade 5

By Marshall Rhodes, Grade 1

By Christopher Duffield, Grade 4

By Payton Rizzieri, Grade 2

By Sarah Friedrichs, Grade 8

By Steven Peguero, Grade 7

By Josie Jones, Grade 6

By Lauren Oehler, Grade 8

By Marshall Rhodes, Grade 1

By Andrew Talay, Grade 4

By Astrid Ellehuus, Grade 5

By Marshall Rhodes, Grade 1

By Lauren Oehler, Grade 8
When I Came to America

We were on a flight to America. I was so nervous because it was my first time going in an airplane. When the plane start moving, I told my Mom in a trembling voice, “I am scared.”

“Nothing to be scared of,” my Mom said. I nodded, but I was still nervous.

Finally, we arrived in New York, and I was so hungry. When I told my Mom, she said, “Ok, I’ll get you something.”

When we got in another smaller plane, I told my Mom “Now, where are we going?”

“We’re going to Virginia,” Mom said.

Tired and hungry, I groaned. “How long is it?”

She said, “It’s about two hours to get there.”

When we arrived in Virginia, we went to a hotel for two days. After two days, we finally got to our home. I was so tired that I didn’t want to do anything else. I looked at the endless boxes of things that needed to be unpacked and dropped onto the dusty floor.

My mom said, “Help me and remember never be afraid of something, everything will be fine.”

I said, “Ok mom,” and I got up to help my mom with more energy.

We only had three bedrooms, so me and my brothers had to sleep in one bedroom. I didn’t like the home, I thought it would be a big house with five or six bedrooms. It turned out to be a small house, smaller than the house we had in Afghanistan.

My Dad and I went out to go to the market close our new home to buy food but we couldn’t find any. We called my Dad’s friend to get some food for us. After eating, my mom was feeling sick because she needed to take medicine every eight hours and we didn’t know where was the CVS. When we searched our bags, we found her medicine. After she took her medicine, we all wanted to sleep because we were so tired.

The next day, my brother and I went out to look for a market to buy food. We found the same place I went to yesterday with my Dad, but I didn’t know where we were. It all still looked so strange to me.

When we were walking back home, I found a bike that was little bit old and my brother stopped to teach me how to ride the bike. I thought about doing this in Afghanistan, but I knew that it wouldn’t have ever happened. As I continued my walk home, I smiled. America was the coolest place I’ve went to because there was no danger like there was in my country.

— Kalimullah Shirzai, 11th Grade

Francis C. Hammond Middle

Submitted by Francis M. Chase.
**St. Stephen’s and St. Agnes School**

- Alex Galdamez, Grade 9
- Charlie Woodruff, Grade 5
- Ella Barker, Grade 7
- Emmy Pascal, Grade 9
- "The Potomac River Sunrise" (2018) by Kiland Hatcher, 6, Kindergarten
- Hayden Wilkinson, Grade 5
- Lila Doyle, Grade 9
- Nyla Zindler, Grade 5
- Rebecca Giardina, Grade 7
- William Merluzzi-Hitler, Grade 5
- Makin Blalock, Grade 8
- Aakash Chadive, Grade 11
- AJ Degler, Grade 7
- Madison Sandy, Grade 7

By McCrae Swank, 9, Grade 3, Alexandria

Emerson DuFault, Grade 6

Mount Vernon Community School

Submitted by students of art teachers Sara Bukoski Lovelace and Sergio Sierra.

By Kevin Ochoa Fuentes, 7, Grade 1

By Adelaide Carland, 6, Grade 1

By Mara Weingart, 8, Grade 3

By James Abbott, 8, Grade 3

By Lilia Hernandez Vasquez, 9, Grade 4

By Alicia Randall, 10, Grade 5, teacher Robert Gunby

By June Gunter, 8, Grade 3, teacher Corey Toliver

By Katie Farrell, 10, Grade 5, teacher Sandi Slaven

By Ben Riley, 7, Grade 2, teacher Marci El-Baba

“Nature’s Beauty”

The sunlight shines down on me and gives me its warmth.
The flowers bloom and stand tall and brave in the grass.
The sun hides behind the clouds as they move.
And at night we play with the stars.
— Tess Sidley, 10, from Alexandria Grade 5 at Mount Vernon Community School in Ms. English’s class.

GEORGE MASON ELEMENTARY

Submitted by art teacher Amanda C. Williams

By Alicia Randall, 10, Grade 5, teacher Robert Gunby

By June Gunter, 8, Grade 3, teacher Corey Toliver

By Katie Farrell, 10, Grade 5, teacher Sandi Slaven

By Ben Riley, 7, Grade 2, teacher Marci El-Baba

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“Nature’s Beauty”

The sunlight shines down on me and gives me its warmth.
The flowers bloom and stand tall and brave in the grass.
The sun hides behind the clouds as they move.
And at night we play with the stars.
— Tess Sidley, 10, from Alexandria Grade 5 at Mount Vernon Community School in Ms. English’s class.
Charles Barrett Elementary

Submitted by art teacher Ellen Pattisall.

By Marcos Perez Canas, Grade 2
By Alexis Bittner, Grade 2
By Reese Waterhouse, Grade 4
By Josie Dickerson, Grade 4
By Katherine Newill, Grade 4

By Ellie Elle, Grade 4
By Evelyn Booth, Grade 4
By Sloane Davis, Grade 2

By Max Kessler-Gowell, Kindergarten
By Joseph Daly, Kindergarten
By June Babin, Grade 1

By Maggie McCommons, Grade 5
By Sydney Zvonkovich, Grade 5
By Karima Cruz Ortiz, Grade 5
By Kevin Corcio Garciaguirre, Grade 4

By Grace Major, Grade 4

20 ❖ Alexandria Gazette Packet ❖ Children’s & Teens’ Connection 2018-2019

www.ConnectionNewspapers.com
By Gunnar T Shackleford, Grade 5
By Arden Taylor, Grade 5
By Megan Baisley, Grade 5
By Lucas Turner, Grade 5

By Phoebe Nunes, Grade 3
By Scarlett Liddell, Grade 2

By Evan Elkins, Kindergarten
By Jenine Arriaza, Kindergarten

By Finn McNabb, Grade 5
By Ruben Von Schukkmann De Zwarte, Grade 4

By Millie Snipe, Grade 3
By Lara Colon, Grade 3
By Kaia Brown, Grade 3

By Nathan Schenectady, Grade 1
By Taylor Theoharis, Grade 1
Fall falls and winter snows in winter is here and it will begin
Snowball fights happen all around
And sledding is racing down

— Addison Gutherie, Grade 4

Infinite Room, inspired by Yayoi Kusama, by Ms. Pittman’s Class, Grade 2

Nike Shoes, inspired by Leo Chang (work in progress), by Elena Sokolove, Grade 5

Fall Leaves by Oriana Magdaleno Sanchez, Kindergarten

Fall Leaves by Valerie Benitez Sanchez, Kindergarten

La Catrina, inspired by Jose Posada, by Naomi Temprosa, Grade 4

Calavera, inspired by Jose Posada, by Victoria Perman, Grade 4

POW, inspired by Roy Lichtenstein by Leyla Budak, Grade 4

By Naomi Temprosa, Grade 4

Winter

“Get into the holiday feeling” by Parker Lee, Grade 4

Makena Kaiman, 13, took this photo at Windmill Hill Park on Sunday Nov. 4.
**John Adams Elementary**

Leaf collage by Arafat Latifi, 6
Submitted by art teacher Lauren Dykhuis.

Oil pastel and watercolor leaf by Samantha Hermano, 9

Moon collage by Nora Rhnim, 7

Moon collage by Shayla Uddin, 7

Mondrian by Aiden Cunningham, 6

*Children’s & Teens’ Connection 2018-2019*

**Patrick Henry Elementary**

Submitted by art teacher Jordana Rochkind.

Romy Vaca Mendez, Grade 5

Kidus Gebresillassie, Grade 3

Shenaya Lokko, Grade 5

By Anna McMahon

**Douglas MacArthur Elementary**

By Adriana Orellana-Saravia

By Arjen Lopez

By Genesis Ortez

By Ariya Harrington

By Lily Eckel

By Rena Cooper

By Rena Cooper

Art work by students in Grade 5, submitted by art teacher Julie Donaldson.
hard work, dedication, smartness, and ambition, and in a way it does this. More than values, though, meritocracy loves one thing: achievement. Oftentimes, achievement is the result of the right values; adhere to them strictly enough, meritocrats say, and you can stand at the graduation podium.

It sounds good, and that is why is most Americans support the idea. The reality, though, is not as neat. If one has watched meritocracy become the calling cry of anti-affirmative action politicians and Chief Executive Officers all over America for the last half-century, then one knows that “merit” is a sort of code word to protect the already powerful and successful. This principle applies at T.C., too. Why are nearly all the valedictorian and salutatorian speakers from affluent, white families? Could it be some grand coincidence?

**How to Win the Race**

It is because achievement is not just the result of having and implementing good values. Achievement owes a lot more to certain characteristics that are either innate or given to someone at a very early age. These sorts of characteristics are the exact opposite of meritocratic — they are uncontrollable. It has been proven again and again that: (i) children from families with high levels of education are more likely to succeed in school, (ii) that children from families with high incomes are more likely to succeed in school, and (iii) that because of centuries of direct and indirect racial discrimination in America, white people tend to have higher levels of education and income than most other ethnic or racial groups. A 2016 study from the Pew Research Center found that among U.S. adults 25 and older, whites were 13 percent more likely than their black and Hispanic American counterparts to have a college diploma than their white counterparts and 21 percent more likely than Hispanics. The same study found that the median income was $28,000 higher for white people than black or Hispanic, and that black and Hispanic Americans were more than twice as likely to have a college diploma than their black counterparts and 21 percent more likely than Hispanics. The same study found that the median income was $28,000 higher for white people than black or Hispanic, and that black and Hispanic Americans were more than twice as likely than their black counterparts to be poor. Other studies and information from the Census Bureau confirm these trends. (There are of course exceptions. There are many children from poor or relatively uneducated parents who do well and vice versa, and there are many people from black, Hispanic, or other minority backgrounds who are well-educated and financially successful. What I’m talking about are statistical averages. Et cetera.)

Those students from wealthy, educated backgrounds will likely live in better neighborhoods and attend better elementary schools. They will probably have their parents at home more often and will hear more words in their first few years, a hugely important factor in intellectual development.

The children of college-educated, six-digit earning parents will have greater access to resources like tutors, college counselors, computers, books, and all the other things that are very helpful for doing well in school. And yet, none of these gifts came from hard work; students were given this competitive edge because of the arbitrary fact that they were born into better financial circumstances.

So, when a white, wealthy student approaches the microphone in EagleBank arena this summer, it should be recognized that the winner of the meritocratic race had a massive advantage. To continue this already overused analogy: imagine there are about 900 students, the 2019 graduating class size, in a 100 meter race. Those who come from well-educated parents are given a 10-meter head start. Those from parents without a college degree are given ankle weights. And so forth with income and neighborhoods and elementary schools, until the poorest students with the lowest levels of family education are weighed down to a slow jog, and the richest students with the most educated parents are only 20 meters from the finish line. The winner of this race really only had to compete with those 50 or so students who had the same innate advantages as he or she did, among which probably at least half were not very serious competition. You may have heard this all before, but it remains worth asking: What are we clapping for?

**The Right Speaker**

I submit again, though, that the valedictorian and the salutatorian are not the right people to deliver speeches, but merely not the best. Americans love merit, it is clear, because it is the foundation of their namesake dream. Work hard and get ahead, no matter what your skin color, country of origin, sex, etc. And while the love for merit may be misplaced, the ideals that are reflected in the American dream are honorable ones. The best examples of those ideals and that American dream, though, are the people who have actually been disadvantaged and who have actually had to climb society’s ladder by their merit.

A couple years ago in this newspaper, now-seniors Evan Paez and Luke Remy wrote an article about a 19-year-old junior in T.C.’s International Academy who came to the United States at 15 from El Salvador. Hugo Chavez, a pseudonym, escaped the gang violence of his home country to study here. He was caught by border police swimming into the country, but managed to stay by collecting nearly $4,000 in legal fees. Chavez worked nine hours after school most days in a restaurant — the only way he could manage to pay for his one bedroom apartment — and earned about $20,000 a year, a figure barely above Virginia’s poverty line.

Chavez managed to keep himself on track to graduation. He did not take seven AP classes and earn straight As — his English was weak — but his story is interesting and compelling. It is emblematic of what is best in both T.C. and America: our diversity and our commitment to equal opportunity. His story is much more meritocratic than any valedictorian’s. Surely, Chavez worked as hard, if not harder, than the V/S, even if Chavez’s academic achievements are not as impressive at face value. So, why should he not be rewarded with meritocratic prizes like the chance to speak at graduation? There are hundreds of students at T.C with stories similar to Chavez’s. There are people who have immigrated to the U.S. in their lifetime, people who have faced severe poverty or systemic racism, people who are hoping to become the first in their family to attend college, and people who have persisted in classes despite not fully understanding the language of instruction. These people are the ones that could break the streak of boring, nearly identical, cliché graduation speakers and speeches.

**A Constitutional Proposal**

This might work better in theory than in practice. Speakers with these sorts of inspiring stories do not just appear. So how, then, to decide them? One idea is to mimic the Constitution’s plan for the legislative branch. For each house of Congress, there will be a graduation speaker. One will be, for the purposes of this metaphor, the House of Representatives — that is, elected directly by the people. The other will be the Senate — chosen by a select group (assuming a pre-17th Amendment Constitution). Instead of state legislatures picking the Senator, though, there will be a committee of teachers — spread evenly across all subjects and levels of courses — who will pick a student to speak.

I can hear the counter-arguments now. In fact, I’ve been hearing them for the past two weeks as I’ve been informally polling people about their opinions on such a plan. The objections come down to two main ones:

(1) The popular election of a speaker will be a messy and chaotic plurality in which only a small portion of the student body will vote.

(2) The students selected by the teacher committee will have the same diversity problems that the speakers now have.

These are reasonable concerns, to be sure, but there are some steps that can be taken to limit these problems from reaching their extremes. For (1), the requirement for being on the ballot of potential speakers should be submitting a petition with, say, 50 signatures from classmates endorsing a
Jefferson-Houston School

By Saha Irwin, 8, in Ms. Carter’s Grade 3 at Jefferson-Houston PreK-8.

Burgundy Farm Country Day School

By Rosie Beggs, Kindergarten

By Evah Albarelli, Kindergarten

By Tabitha Richey-Allen, Kindergarten

By Ash Uttam, Kindergarten

By Elsa Murchison, Kindergarten

By Pippa Ashton, Kindergarten

By Thomas O’Neil, Kindergarten

Jefferson-Houston School

By Saha Irwin, Kindergarten

by Sam Hole, Kindergarten

by Ash Uttam, Kindergarten

by Evah Albarelli, Kindergarten

by Tabitha Richey-Allen, Kindergarten

by Elsa Murchison, Kindergarten

by Pippa Ashton, Kindergarten

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Obituary

Betty Jean (Alexander) Giddens, age 85 of Alexandria, Virginia, passed away peacefully on Tuesday, December 11, 2018. She was born to the late Oscar C. Alexander and Nellie Khiman Alexander on May 8, 1933 in Huntersville, North Carolina.

Betty Jean moved to Alexandria, Virginia when she was a small child. She graduated George Washington High School in 1950 where her athleticism won her awards. Continuing to be in contact with her close high school friends, the events was a highlight for many years.

She was left a young widow when her beloved husband, Charles E. Giddens passed away in 1984, always showing great strength and resilience she pursued a career with the federal government while raising two young children. She served for over 40 years as a Clerical Officer with the General Services Administration until her retirement in 1994 when she was recognized for her dedication and leadership by then Governor George Allen and President Bill Clinton.

Betty Jean enjoyed traveling and art. She crafted many ceramic and hand embroidered pieces which won her local awards.

Obituary

Betty Jean’s most joy came from watching her grandsons play baseball and granddaughter sing in choir.

Preceded in death by her son, Charles E. Giddens, Jr. Survived by her daughter, Holly Holdup, Grandchildren William Holdup and his wife Kara, Matthew Holdup and Kathryn Holdup. Two great-grandchildren, Addison and Payton. She is also survived by a sister (Francis Hall), nephew (David Roat) and niece (Stacy Stuckey) and other special family members and friends.

The family gives their warmest gratitude for her wonderful caregivers, Mimi, Danial and Doris.

A viewing will be on Wednesday, December 19th at 1:00 p.m., with a service celebrating her life at 2:00 p.m. at First Baptist Church of Alexandria where she was a 51 year member, 2902 King Street, Alexandria, Virginia. Interment at a later date at Arlington National Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the First Baptist Church of Alexandria Foundation, Inc. 2902 King Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314.

Obituary

By Rosie Beggs, Kindergarten

by Sam Hole, Kindergarten

by Ash Uttam, Kindergarten

by Evah Albarelli, Kindergarten

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An expert is someone who knows some of the worst mistakes that can be made in his subject and how to avoid them.

-Werner Heisenberg
By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Now that the drama of the last five weeks — and the last three columns — is mostly over, life can return to its previous/usual ebb and flow of cancer highs and lows.

For the moment, what I don’t know: the effect on my “Adam’s Apple” tumor (as I will call it) of the aggressive, every-three-week infusion schedule I’ve been on since early October, is definitely not hurting. Though I am under no delusions about what my next CT scan might show, I also have no confusion as to the road ahead: stay positive and remain engaged and live life with the least amount of focus on my conversation on the dominating fact that I was diagnosed with an incurable form of cancer: non-small cell lung cancer. I must remain positive about the negative, which came with a 13-month to two-year prognosis.

By all accounts, I shouldn’t be writing this column — or doing anything else for that matter. I should be somewhere else — doing absolutely nothing, so far as we know, anyway. And I don’t mean lying on a chaise lounge somewhere soaking in the local culture as I try not to succumb in the middle of it. I mean... well, I presume you know what I mean.

But here I am, alive and reasonably well; not hoasting, just living.

Because, as amazingly fortunate as I am to still be anywhere nearby 10 years post diagnosis, there’s a part of me that believes not so much in what I’ve done to support my chemotherapy/ conventional treatment (non-Western alternatives) as in thinking I’ve fallen through some crack somewhere and have been forgotten by whatever reason is saving these things.

Granted, he/she’s had a lot of work to do and an incredibly long list to get through, still: as the centuries have confirmed, eventually, everyone’s die is cast.

Having survived so long when so few of the thousands of similarly diagnosed cancer patients have not, certainly gives this one pause. But the pause passes quickly and is taken over by positivity: as in I must remain positive about the negative and not allow any semblance of “wishing” about me or meaning and meaning about what I’m able to do or disabled and unable to do. Never!

I have been given the gift of life and I see no point in looking that gift-hone in its mouth. It is my job, if I could ever been characterized as such, to keep my head down and keep moving forward, figuratively speaking. There is no point in thinking backwards or wondering who, what, where, when and how. The point is the future, not the past.

Unlike the country musical song by Tim McGraw, “Live Like You Were Dying,” I don’t want to live like I’m dying. I want to live like I’m living. A living which takes into account the good, bad and the indifferent.

If I stay from what I perceive to be my usual path, I will know that I’m doing so for a reason: cancer.

And since I never want to reinforce a negative, let alone give it room to roam, I will continue to try and take it all in stride and be grateful along the way for the life I’ve been granted and try not to weaken in my resolve to not let others be adversely affected or diminished by my situation.

I pretty much do whatever I want to do anyway. Though there are many things I can’t do (particularly, bending), there are still many activities I am able to enjoy.

To quote Spock from Star Trek: “The good of the many outweigh the good of the few.” A bit of stretch I know, but I hope you get the association.

For me to survive the ordeal of cancer requires taking the emotion out of it. The highs and lows must become even. And the levels and test results which occasionally have become off-beat, merely moments in time and subject to change.

If I am to finish this race, time cannot be out of the essence, time must be what I make of it. 

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Patuxotan Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.
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