Children’s & Teens’ Connection 2018

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Poetry Corner

Think
Inhale, Exhale
Breathe in, Breathe Out
Think

Close Your Eyes
Remember Your Past
See your Future
Think

Think About your Decisions
Learn From Your Mistakes
Think

Remember Your Hopes
Live Your Dreams
Love What is Around You
Think

Fear The Rage
Hear The Thunder
Just remember to
Think

Be Calm
Stay Focused
Think

Everyone Is Different
Everyone Has Their Own Path
Be You
Think

Be Positive
Be Unique
Shine, be a star
Think

Believe In Yourself
You Will Try
You Will Succeed
Open Your Eyes
Look Around You
No one is the Same
Inhale, Exhale
Breathe In
Breathe Out
Think

— Sophia Beeland, 13, of Great Falls
Cooper Middle School, Grade 8

Pantry

The toxic seduction
You continue to lure me
Drooling the heaven behind
I am hypnotized
Destined to regret
I go again
Only to meet with beans and grains
Confused, I turn
To the victory claim of Mom
“Help yourself”

— Chaiwoon Yoo, 16, McLean
Grade 11, The Madeira School
Dear Readers:

This week, the Great Falls Connection 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 & Teens' 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.

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 & Teens’ Issue. 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 Connection 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 weekly schools pages.

Our preferred method for material is email, which should be sent to greatfalls@connectionnewspapers.com, but you can reach us by mail at 1606 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 or call 703-778-9414 with any questions.

— Editor Kemal Kurspahic

Welcome

Holiday Inspiration, Pastel by Sara Dethero, 12, Great Falls, Grade 7 at Cooper Middle School.

“Art within Art” by homeschoolers Elizabeth Symanski, 8, Grade 3 and Katherine Symanski, 6, Grade 1, of Great Falls.

By Amalya Sharma, Grade 1, Great Falls Elementary.

By Charles Kwaw, from Great Falls, Kindergarten, Colvin Run Elementary.

By Jenny Wang, 10, Forestville Elementary.
Children's & Teens'

Great Falls Elementary

Submissions from art teacher Caitlin Giroux’s students

By Jake Coblentz, Grade 3

By Dylan Macleod, Grade 2

By Zara Mufti, Grade 3

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Children's & Teens' Connection 2018-2019

Colvin Run Elementary
Artwork submitted by Art Teachers Lauren Grimm and Rachel Wiseman.

By Ella DeGraaf, Great Falls, Grade 4 - square

By Amy Key, Great Falls, Grade 6

By Rowan Marashlian, Great Falls, Grade 1

By Benjamin Moser, Kindergarten, from Vienna

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Children's & Teens' Connection 2018-2019
What is the greatest gift you can give this holiday season?

Some people make lists for presents they want to receive during the holidays. Others buy gifts themselves, and a few might ask ahead of time for a certain present. What really is the greatest gift someone could receive though? The best gift I could ever receive, is someone's friendship and love.

If I find someone who is willing and ready to be by my side no matter what, someone who finds time for me and who I can be myself with. A person's time and energy are limited, and to be given an important part to play in someone's life would be amazing. We all take from society. It is more fair, and it's whether we give back that counts. The best gift I've ever received in someone's time, patience, and true friendship, and I hope someday I will be able to give that to someone else as well.

— Rebecca Wexler, 13, of Great Falls, Grade 8

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Find out about plans to restrict right turns during weekday peak morning traffic hours from southbound Algonkian Parkway to westbound Thomas Avenue to reduce congestion and improve safety and operations.

Stop by between 6:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. to view displays and learn more about the project. A presentation will begin at 7 p.m. Project staff will be available to answer your questions.

Review project information at the VDOT project website (www.virginiadot.org/projects), at the information meeting, or during business hours at VDOT’s Northern Virginia District Office at 4975 Alliance Drive in Fairfax. Please call ahead at 703-259-2388 or TTY/TDD 711 to ensure appropriate personnel are available to answer your questions.

Give your written comments at the meeting, or submit them by January 28, 2019 to Mr. Thomas Folse, P.E., Virginia Department of Transportation, 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030 or email meetingcomments@VDOT.virginia.gov. Please reference “Thomas Avenue Cut-Through Analysis” in the subject line.

Technology: Our Biggest Blessing, or Our Biggest Curse? Why the Technology that Drives Generation Z is Our Greatest Challenge

As Generation Z, we are the first generation to grow up in a technology-driven world, with technology becoming both our greatest strength and our greatest challenge. Among the benefits of this in today's world is that Generation Z's all-encompassing exposure to technology allows us to judge whether a source is real or "fake" better than any other generation so far.

However, our reliance on technology for everything from homework to friendship leaves us vulnerable to online predators assaulting us through the keyboards on our computers and the apps on our phones. We need to be aware not only of faulty sites, but also of social media, apps, and unknown players seeking you out in your favorite games.

Adding to the technological drama for Generation Z is that many of the popular web browsers sell your personal data to advertisers looking to target you with appealing ads. Sound harmless? It may not be as innocent as it seems. Search engines sell your name, favorite sites, and can even geolocate you when you access the web, something most middle schoolers have never even considered.

This escalates as hackers intercept your data, and ad companies reconstruct where you like to go and when you will be there. Faced these challenges head-on is the next step in solving our problem. It is up to us, Generation Z, to make the Internet a safer place for everyone who uses it, and we will need to do this through further developing our greatest strength, technology.

— Peyton Walcott, 12, of Great Falls in Sara Kahrs’ class.
The Challenges of Riding

“Come on Catie! It’s your turn on Lola!”

I mounted the graceful brown-and-white mare, adjusting the reins in my hands. The three instructors at my camp switched their gaze between me and the other kid on Peabody, a larger male horse. I didn’t know what his name was, but that didn’t matter. I was focused on trying a canter for the first time today. But I didn’t know I was being reckless.

I had seen the girl before me, a girl named Chloe, trot Lola. Lola wasn’t like the other horses I had ridden at this camp. Lola wasn’t like Curly-Whirly, she wasn’t like Tumble, or Cookie or Howie. Not even like Watson, who honestly could be a pain in the butt sometimes. Lola was fast, and a pain (especially to groom and tack up.) She raised her hooves high when she trotted. She strided around the ring with grace. But what I didn’t know is that she was jumpy. Really jumpy.

I clicked Lola on, and I steered her around a corner, heard my instructor telling me to trot her, I felt a wrenching feeling in my gut. I pushed it down and squeezed Lola on the sides slightly. She trotted and bucked slightly. I let out a yelp of surprise, and that’s when everything went wrong.

Lola jumped at the noise I made, then started galloping. Fast. I couldn’t hear myself screaming, I didn’t know I was only making it worse.

Eventually, I was bucked into the fence, landing on the sandy ground on my back with a thud. The instructors caught Lola. The sky swirled above, and I heard the pounding of boots on the ground as the instructors ran towards me. But then I did something I never thought I would that day. I cried. I cried from fear and from embarrassment. Sobs so deep it shook my whole chest. And I couldn’t stop.

Eventually, the wounds on my side from hitting the fence disappeared. But I have a mental scar that will never fade. But a lesson I learned is that if you’ve never fallen off of a horse, you’ve never actually ridden.

To the people who say horseback riding isn’t a real sport, that it takes no talent at all: let me ask you, have you ever had a teammate that was ten times your size? Have you ever done a synchronized dance with something that could crush you in an instant? A mistake in volleyball could cost you a point, but a mistake in horseback riding could cost you a life.

But there are definitely rewards. For me, the ability to ride is a blessing. I love to do it! I go to the summer camp in the summer, but the horse I ride here in Virginia is my best friend. I’m not embarrassed to say that my best friend is a horse named Bob! He’s a much better friend than most of the humans I know.

So, if you want to do horseback riding, you’ve got to be strong. Not just physically, mentally too. You’ve got to have the courage to get back in the saddle, and be prepared to make a new best friend.

— Catherine (Catie) Arden Morton, 12, McLean Grade 7, Cooper Middle School, Lindsay Bovenzi’s class
Children’s & Teens’

Bald Lettuce Head

Hello! Someone asked me “would you rather become completely bald or grow lettuce on your head?” My answer is I would grow lettuce on my head. Why?

First, when you’re lazy to cook, you can eat your own head-grown lettuce. Step # 1 – pull some fresh lettuce off your head. Step # 2 – wash and place the lettuce in a bowl. Step #3 – drizzle some ranch on it. YUM! There you have it – your delicious and refreshing salad!

Did you know that Romans, Egyptians and Greeks were among the first civilizations to grow and eat lettuce? Also, the name lettuce in English and Latin come from the word lacticus, the Latin word for milk, because the juice of the lettuce plant looks like milk. The white milky thing inside the lettuce helps people with insomnia. Rock-a-bye baby in the lettuce top, when the wind blows the lettuce will fall. “No more slavers!,” said Abraham Lin-coln. Yep, my favorite president is Abe Lincoln. He used to wear a foot-long hat in which he stored all his important documents. Between the layers of your lettuce head, you can store your money and, maybe, your cell phone just like Abe did.

Lastly, if you are lost in a desert, your lettuce head will be a cap to protect you from the UV from the sun.

— Sidd Jaddu, 9, Forestville Elementary

The Clock

It tells me to wait.
It tells me to rest.
It tells me to wake up.
It tells me to think.
It tells me to sleep.
It tells me to hurry.
It tells me to be patient.
It tells me to eat.
It tells me to sleep.
It tells me to eat.

Answers many questions.

— Esha Banerjee, 12, McLean, Grade 7

The Greatest Challenge?

What are the issues of today? What about tomorrow? I think that the problems of the future are going to be much more serious, but there are some challenges that we can tackle today. One of these challenges is climate change.

Climate change is causing the Earth to warm up. This is causing glaciers and ice caps to melt. It is causing sea levels to rise. It is causing hurricanes and droughts to become more frequent. It is causing polar bears and other animals to disappear. It is causing people to lose their homes.

What can we do to help?

We can reduce our carbon footprint. We can use energy-efficient appliances. We can recycle. We can plant trees. We can use public transportation. We can save water. We can support organizations that are working to fight climate change.

— Olivia Liu, 12, McLean, Grade 7

Cooper Middle School

What to be Thankful For

Now that Thanksgiving is rolling around the corner, it’s time to start in-tensely thinking about what I am thankful for. There’s such a long list of yearly no-brainers: my family, friends, home, education, laughter, love. This 2018, though, I am taking my thoughts in a different direction.

In October, my dog, Nina, passed away. Nina had been part of the family for as long as I’d been alive. She was more of the shy type, sometimes making her appear unfriendly. But I know that underneath the shell of growling and hiding in her closet, Nina was sweet and always wanted to be loved.

Nina’s death impacted my family deeply. On the night she died, we were all tears and ruffly red eyes, but something that really propelled my sad-ness was the thought that she would never be around to go to the park again, to be petted again, to take baths again.

The experience itself – that is some-thing that I should be thankful for. Many times when we’re thankful, we jump to the conclusion that what we’re thankful for has to be for something that we cur-rently have.

Having that experience taken away was not fun, but now I can see things from a different way. It taught me a lesson – to always make the most of your time here with your pets, loved ones, friends, and even enemies.

Nina was the pet I could’ve asked for and the best way to symbolize what to be thankful for.

— Olivia Liu, 12, McLean, Grade 7

The Holy Month

Ramadan. That is one special tradi- tion that my family celebrates, and the whole Muslim community. I really enjoy this month. It is a month that is full of love and care between people, even if they are strangers. In this month, Mus-liams must fast, pray, and give our food or water to the less fortunate who don’t have these things. We are expected to spread out kindness. That is why Ramadan is also known for many fam-ily gatherings.

In Ramadan, we fast from dawn till sunset. When the Maghrib prayer, the sunner prayer, is called upon, then we know we could eat. During the day, my mom cooks our iftar, or breakfast, which is the meal we break our fast to. I always feel so hungry. When the Maghrib prayer is called upon, I run to the table and eat instantly, before anyone even breaks their fast. I look really funny, though.

When we are done eating, I run to the desserts’ table. Eastern sweets are very popular in Ramadan for many families. The thing I eat the most is Basbousa, which is very delicious. When I finish eating Basbousa, I don’t even eat, but I go watch Arabic TV series. Mostly every Ramadan, especially in Egypt, actors make a lot of TV series for families to watch together. There are usually many options and genres to choose from.

Ramadan is annual and comes only for one month. I always wait for it to come around to enjoy the festivities it brings.

— Jasmine Ahmed Amin, 13, McLean, Grade 8

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Volcano

Dark sky
Steaming earth
Shaking ground
The fury of nature
Earth went mad
Spitting lava
Throwing rocks
Burning everything

It feels like
The end
But also
The start

From ash grows hope
From loss buds life
But one thing never changes:
We are forever friends

— Olivia Park, 11, McLean, Grade 6, Churchill Road Elementary

Forever Friends

Sometimes we have bad days
And bite and scratch and cry
And sometimes we have good days
Where we hug and laugh together
And sometimes we don’t talk
For days and weeks and months,

But one thing never changes:
We are forever friends

— Olivia Park, 11, McLean, Grade 6, Churchill Road Elementary

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Back to Abnormal

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-inflation 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 and conversation on the dominating fact that I was diagnosed with an incurable form of cancer: non-small cell lung cancer. So stage IV, a stage IV, a stage IV, the one that has come with me through my first 13 months of this adventure.

For my 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 sundown in the middle of the night. I mean... well, I presume you know what I mean.

But here I am, alive and reasonably well, not boating, just saying.

Because, as amazingly fortunate as I am to be still anywhere nearly 10 years post diagnosis, there’s a part or two 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 rubber is sewing these things.

Granted, he/she has 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 one this pause. But the pause passes quickly and is taken over by positivit y, as I must remain positive about the negative and not allow any semblance of “woeing” about me or meaning and growing 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 horse in the mouth. It is my job, if I could even been characterized as such, to keep my head down and keep moving forward, figuratively speaking. There is no point in thinking backward or wondering who, what, where, when and how. The point is the future, not the past.

Unlike the country music song by Tim McGraw, “I 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.

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 roost, 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 engage in.

To quote Spock from Star Trek: “The good of the many outweigh the good of the few.” A lot of a 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 evers. And the levels and test results which occasionally have become odds, merely moments in time and subject to change.

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

Kenny Locurio is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.