



# Afrah Bazalani

Milwaukee Parkside School for the Arts

I'm from Iraq. I'm new in the United States. I was first in Jordan for one year and it was not a good year but I don't want to talk about it. I was with my sister, dad and brother.

I got in the U.S. through the International Organization for Migration. They listened to our story and helped us get here. We got here ten days before last Christmas. We have a cousin here, she's so beautiful. She has given us a home and everything. She has helped my family a lot. Her name is Haura. She's a sister of my mom's. She's so nice.

I didn't speak English when I arrived. Everybody at school kept telling me: "you will not be able to learn English fast. It's hard for you." I said: "I will learn English fast." I practice every day at home...and I don't sleep much. I write a lot, I tell my mom: "All I want to do is practice." My spelling is not good yet!

I have a book about learning English. I write a lot and have read thirteen books in English so far. I watch a lot of YouTube videos about how you learn English. From a, b, c, d, e, f, g.

When I was in Iraq I didn't like English. It was hard to learn it. Now I'm here and everybody speaks English and I love it.

I want to speak English because I want people to understand me. I don't just sit around doing nothing or watching YouTube videos. I'm always practicing. I go to school, go home, do my homework, and after homework I practice for three hours. I also like playing basketball, it's my favorite sport. Sometimes I cook. I love cooking. My grandma taught me how to cook food from Iraq. I love making falafels with a lot of vegetables, white and green onions, and garbanzo beans.

I've liked engineering since I was five years old. I loved seeing the work of people who were genius. Math is my favorite class. I want to build bridges, buildings, use technology to create and build. I love legos but my brother doesn't let me play with his legos.

My story hasn't always been good. I've had sad moments, especially one that I don't want to talk about or remember. I want to be cool and cute.

I have a passion for life. Some people don't see this but it's ok. I didn't go to school when I was in Jordan. We didn't have money there. Now I'm here. Sometimes it's hard to live here but I go to a good school and I love my family and my friends here.



## Chew Khat Nwe

### Milwaukee Parkside School for the Arts

I was born in Burma. I came to the U.S. when I was six and I'm now thirteen years old. We came here because there were some money issues going on in my family and a lot of violence going around in the country, so it was a good idea to get out.

We came directly to the U.S. When I first came, my experience was both happy and scary. I felt safe...but had no friends. I had nothing. I didn't speak English. Only my brother did because he had an opportunity to learn a little bit in school.

When I first came, I met this boy. His name was Jamari. He was my only friend. He was African American. He was the first one who helped me to learn English. The more you talk with people, the more you learn. I learned really quickly. I made another friend, Lexis. She and I didn't get along at first. We were enemies. We were always fighting until we said "sorry". We became really good friends and we've been friends since third grade. Now we're very good friends: she trusts me, I trust her.

Last year I met Amani when she came to this school. She used to fight with people and get into trouble. She and I started talking and I changed all her life. She is now very different. When she met me, everything changed. I told her not to get into trouble, to learn to ignore people, to let it go and live her own life.

I helped her because I don't want people to have a bad future, like ending up on the streets, and things like that. This year Amani sent me a letter and said that without my help she would be fighting in the streets. I feel so happy that I was able to help her!

I really want to be a doctor. There are so many kids who have cancer. I want to find a cure so that they don't have to fight for their lives.

I love science and math. I would like to go Reagan, or Rufus King, or High School of the Arts. I love the visual arts and theater. I love acting but I can't keep a straight face. I always laugh.

I still think about Burma because some of my family is still there. I've never visited. Not having been born in the U.S. and having to learn a different language has taught me to work harder than everybody else. If I had been born here it would have been easier. Learning and Education are very important to me.

It's still very hard for me to make friends. Until last year, people made fun of my name but in my country it means something else. It means kindness and passion. People have made fun of me since third grade, and even now, but I ignore them. I also tell them that my name has other meanings. I'm quiet and don't need a lot of friends. My friend Amani says that if anyone gets in my way, she'll stand up for me and help me. Like my other friends.



## Gamontay Hill

Milwaukee Parkside School for the Arts

My name is Gamontay, also known as Youngboss14271. I do YouTube videos. I have a YouTube channel with 23 subscribers. I have done 110 videos, two of them are funny, the rest are about gaming. I want to become famous on YouTube doing gaming and doing something funny and sometimes rapping.

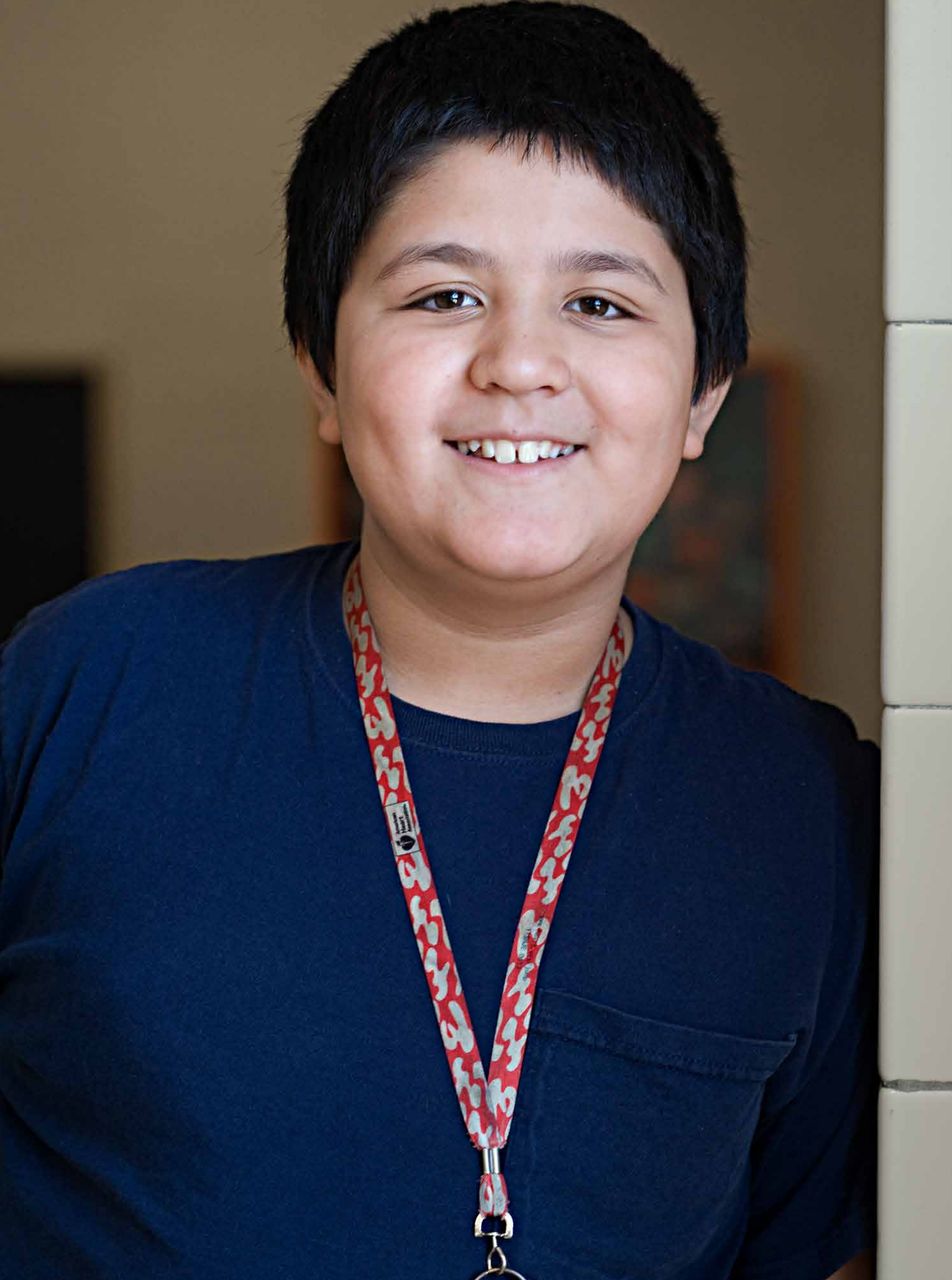
I like being funny because I like to make people laugh because I want more people to interact with me and them to know more about me. I want to connect with people because I like people. I feel happy when I connect with people. I like to make people laugh because when someone goes through hard situations, they can watch some of my videos and laugh, and that will make them less stressed.

I have siblings. I want to start a family channel for my brothers and my sisters. Half of them live in Chicago and I haven't seen them in years. They're grown up.

I like being nice. If you're nice to other people, they stay connected with you and they are going to like you and their parents are going to like you. If you're not nice and kind, people will not like you. I'm the nicest kid at my school... well, sometimes. Sometimes I overreact. When people show madness, it's probably something that's going on in their lives. I understand that. Sometimes I take it personally but now I get it because we had a big classroom talk with my teacher about people. The teacher said: "What if you don't know what's going on in people's lives and their lives are really tough?"

I like staying positive by not being like other people. I like to be me. If you try to be somebody else, that won't look right on you. I stay positive by not getting mad.

Thank you for listening!



## José Quintero

### Milwaukee Parkside School for the Arts

I'm twelve years old. I did four years of theater at Longfellow Elementary. My director was Ricardo Galvis. We did *A Jungle Book*. I was Kaa. The second one was *Wizard of Oz*, and I was the crow and one of the flying monkeys. The third one was *Alice At Wonderland*, which is not the same as Alice In Wonderland. I was the Dormouse. The fourth play was *Without Strings*, a play that reimagines the Pinocchio story. I was the Shark. I like acting because I get to be out of my comfort zone and pretend to be someone else. I like pretending. I'm like a normal boy, so there's nothing really interesting about me except for, you know, acting...and chess. I want to seem really cool to some people and also inspire people to be who they want to be. Make people imagine what they think they would want to be, to inspire people to imagine different things.

What I like about chess is strategy. I like thinking, strategy, puzzles. I also like those types of video games. My mom got me a chess board for Christmas when I was eleven years old. We were playing and I liked it and she said: "Hey, maybe you should go and find if there's anything cool to do with chess." And she introduced me to a scholarship for chess. So I got the honor to get into a chess club and we went to a tournament and I got third place. I got a trophy with a gold leaf, a rook and a knight at the top, and plastic at the bottom. It's really cool — it's in my mom's room. I'd like to get back into chess.

I'm not doing theater at the moment because I'm more leaning toward video game design now and I didn't have other opportunities to get back into acting, anyway. I really want to get into computer programming or at least video game design. Not a programmer...because I don't like math. I want to be a designer, not a programmer. I like coming up with the ideas that could be in the game, all the cool stuff. I like to express myself and my ideas in video game design. Instead of working with other people's brains I can use my own brain and give my ideas to programmers who can turn them into life digitally. It's awesome. I'm the idea guy.

For video game design I think I need to have at least a high school degree and get college training, like advanced computer programming. I probably also have to study music and art because I'd have to learn how sound works. I have to be very good because other people will be critiquing my games. I've learned from a YouTube channel that critique has different steps. Video game designers post a sandbox version of their games first, and people decide if it has potential to be a cool game. People can critique you harshly! I'd rather not rush into making something not good enough. I want people to say: "Wow. This is amazing!"

I'm getting kind of artsy. I just made a comic book about cockatoos that were going extinct in the Amazon. I know that I need to be creative to get where I want to go.



## Maya Van Hemert

Milwaukee Parkside School for the Arts

These are the experiences that have changed my life and have made me who I am today:

1. Meeting amazing people, inside and outside of school, who have changed me very much in an incredibly positive way.
2. My parents passing away caused me to be able to push myself to tremendous levels. Of course, I wish this traumatic experience had never occurred, but it did make me a stronger person by having to push through.
3. My school has changed me as well, not only from the people, but overall I quite enjoy learning and doing homework.
4. Being able to travel to Santa Monica, CA or Orlando, FL has helped me to look at the positives in life.



## Mohamed N Mohamed Dulhaq

Milwaukee Parkside School for the Arts

I came to the United States from Malaysia. I was nine years old. I had never had a plane ride so I was so excited that I got to ride it to come to the U.S.

When I was in Malaysia I had friends and it was a group of friends that we called soccer friends. We all loved to play soccer.

One thing that is bad in my country is schooling. Our parents had to pay every month and the teachers would only teach for half of the day. After noon, my friends and I would go home. After I got home I did what I needed to do, for example homework. After homework, I would go out to play soccer with my friends. We played all afternoon until it was time to go home.

Because of the bad schooling, my family decided to come here. My family is my mom, my dad and my two brothers. They're younger.

We didn't speak English at all. I was in third grade and didn't know what I was doing. In fourth grade I started speaking English. I felt very nervous when I didn't speak English.

It was hard to learn but I speak well now, and I love to write. I write about my religion. I'm a Muslim. I talk about all the celebrations, like Ramadan. It's my favorite celebration. We fast the whole month and we break the fast every night. We don't eat in Ramadan to feel like the poor people feel. We try that for one month and we learn to relate to people who are struggling. The prayers during Ramadan are about following the good deeds that God wants you to do, like you treat people in a respectful and well-mannered way. During Ramadan you also learn to be patient.

We also don't do things like smoke or drink because that's not good.

When a neighbor or someone comes to your home, you have to offer them food or coffee or tea. If you ask them, they will say no, but you still have to give them something. You have to help people when they need it.

You work hard. The most important thing in my religion is my own responsibility. You don't do bad things, you pray five times a day, you work hard for your family but you still have to pray. I don't pray at school but when I get home I pray.



## Roy Lee Morris, Jr.

Milwaukee Parkside School for the Arts

My dad is the person who has influenced me the most because he has been there all my life. He taught me everything I know, like to do good and do what I have to do. If I don't, my life won't go right.

So basically, he's the most important person in my life because he always loves me very much, he takes care of me, he's always there, goes to work, makes money to pay the bills and everything...and he always spends time with us. I have eight siblings. I'm the oldest and I was named after him. I'm very lucky. We are very similar. Everything he likes, I like. When my other brothers and sisters are playing around, I don't play around with them because I'm too old to play around. I sit down by my dad and watch him do work instead of play. I'm responsible, and I'm glad that I am. This is going to take me far in life.

My dad taught me how to dance and how to play basketball. We practiced three times a week. And then I just got good at it so I started playing and then I went on the team and I'm always point guard. My dad played basketball in college and then he quit because he decided he would spend more time with his kids. So he threw all that money and fame to spend time with us. That takes guts because people like money. People choose money over family all the time. My dad taught me that family is the most important thing in life. When I grow up I want to be a person who doesn't give up on their kids.

My grandma died of cancer at the age of 62 and it made me really sad and I have a hard time talking about her. My mom's mom. She was very important in our lives because she used to take care of us, cook for us, buy everything for us, and she was always there when we needed her. She didn't work but she was always there and she made sure everything was under control, for instance when my dad went out of town she would take care of all of us.

I want to go to Hollywood to be a dancer. I'm very good at dancing. I practice on my own. I like all types of rhythms and my favorite music to play is blues or hip hop. But I don't listen to rap because it's too loud. I'm the type of guy who likes soft blues and hip hop.

I'm in seventh grade. When I'm in eighth grade, I'm going to get a job because I flunked a year and I was fighting a lot and I regret it now. Now I don't do that and I'm doing well in school. I already talked at my dad's job and they said I can work there now because I'm fourteen. I'll be making over \$15 an hour. I'll make money and I won't spend it. My dad will put it in the college fund. As soon as I graduate from high school I'm going straight to college. I'm real proud of myself!



## Rylie Waldoch

### Milwaukee Parkside School for the Arts

I was eight years old when I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. That was a struggle at the beginning because it totally changed my life and the life of everyone in my family. I had to grow up faster. I had to learn to be more responsible. I have to calculate my carbs and take care of my insulin doses. I do the shots myself. It was a big change. My family is more prepared for everything than before. We know how to take care of emergencies.

My disease hasn't stopped me from pursuing dance. I've been dancing since I was three years old. My mom signed me up for classes at a small studio just for fun. Soon, my mom found out about a dance academy in Oak Creek. They have a competition team and one of my mom's students went there. My mom is a Spanish teacher. I had two years of the recreational program, then I decided to try out for the dance team and I made it. If I hadn't tried out, I wouldn't be in the place I am now with my dance and my level of ability, or I wouldn't have met the people I've met.

Dancing and living with diabetes at the same time has been a struggle but I've learned to manage it very well. I dance tap, jazz, ballet, lyrical, point, hip hop, contemporary, basically everything. My dad is from Puerto Rico and sometimes we sneak a little bit of Latin dance into some dances. My favorite rhythms are contemporary and jazz. Dance is like a second home to me. It's an amazing experience. I love it! I compete. We go to Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Florida, N.Y., and we're going to L.A. this year. I'll be doing dance in the future, either at a company or professionally on Broadway. That's what I hope.

I'm hoping to go to St. Thomas More for high school next year. They have a very good biomedical program. I'm hoping to get more into biomedical science. It's interesting to learn about how everything works. When I shadowed at the school, they were learning about the ear and they got a patient and they had to diagnose him according to his symptoms and to prescribe medication. That was very interesting to me.

Having Type 1 Diabetes is part of the reason why I'm interested in biomedical science. I want to learn how this came to be for me and how to cure it or even prevent it for others. You can't really prevent Type 1 Diabetes, though. We don't know exactly if it was genetic because my mom or dad or sister don't have it, but my dad was adopted so we don't know about his family. It's a mystery and I'd like to solve it. I want to help people.





## Shazia Lightfoot

Milwaukee Parkside School for the Arts

I don't know what my name means but I want it to mean the most unique person in the world.

I value responsibility. My mom has given me a lot of responsibilities: to clean up, watch my little brother, and babysit. I'm used to babysitting because I babysit my baby cousins. My mom wants me to be a leader instead of a follower. She says: "if you lead people, you can have more success in life."

I feel better when I'm responsible. Instead of doing nothing, I can always do something to better myself, like when I turn fourteen I'm going to get a job so I can earn some money and help my mom and my family.

My brothers inspired me to play basketball. Our godmom has a basketball court near her house and they always played there and I would watch them. One day I said: "Can I play?" They said no because I'm a girl and I would probably get hurt, but that didn't mean anything to me. So one day, I started shooting hoops and I did that a lot. I got better. My brothers helped me. Now I'm on a basketball team and I feel much better because I'm the point guard. I got two scholarships to play high school basketball.

What I like about basketball besides that I'm good at it, is that it motivates people, it makes people feel very important and confident. For instance, how to stand in front of a crowd. It makes me feel more confident. When I'm playing I can look around at the crowd and I can see my mom, my dad, my grandma, my aunties, and my mom's friends, and it makes me feel much better. When I'm playing I don't feel as shy or scared.

Another reason why I like basketball is that now I inspired my little cousin to play and now she's on a team. I can come to her games and watch her play, and I also teach her. I feel great because I feel like a hero now, a role model for my little cousin. She told me I inspired her to play basketball.

I want to be a professional basketball player when I'm older. I want to be in the WNBA. If I have a good basketball career and I got money coming in, I don't know what I would do after that. All I know is that I would help my family, help the homeless shelters, homeless people and people who have difficulties, like disabled people. I would help my family first because family comes first, especially I would help my mom because she's the person I love the most.



## Janiah Smith

Maryland Avenue Montessori School

A program called Pearls for Teen Girls has shaped a part of me. Starting at Pearls in fifth grade I didn't know what to expect. I went every Tuesday after school. We did a lot of activities together but it was so hard for me to speak up because I was very shy and the only girl there who didn't know everyone else. But then a new teacher in sixth and seventh grade at Pearls said, "Janiah, how about you do this?" or "How about you try this?" And then more people started to pay attention to me, to tell me that I had good ideas, and to encourage me. What I said seemed to work out for a lot of our activities. I started feeling more and more comfortable.

At some point I realized I was still the same shy person but I could challenge myself to be a leader and to take the initiative. I was excited and happy to be in the mix with everyone else. It felt better knowing that I wasn't just standing in the background, that I have a voice I want to share with other people, to tell them my story and help them open up more.

This will help me in the future because I want to be a fashion designer and I want to have my own business so if I'm not a leader and take the initiative and tell people that I need things done, I won't be able to succeed.

My passion for fashion design started at Pearls for Teen Girls. Every year we do a career week. For instance, one time we went to the courthouse to see a trial. Another time we went to a clothing business where they had different designers and they showed us how they did things. Ever since then, I've been wanting to learn more and I even started sewing. Every clothes designer amazes me and inspires me. They tell their stories through clothes and colors.

I come from a very creative family. My grandma on my mom's side has a craft corner where she does a lot of different things.

I'd like people to know that I have ideas in my mind that I don't share with everyone because I'm still a little afraid, I feel that they would just break me down and make me sad. I have to always be myself and don't let anyone make me feel bad for what I like.



## Jocelyn Reed

Maryland Avenue Montessori School

A few years ago my mom was in a bicycle accident and she had a brain injury. She was in the hospital for many days. This changed everything. She's great and picks me up from school, for instance, but she still needs help. I help take care of her. Things are very different than they used to be. I realized how quickly you can lose something, how quickly things can change.

This experience and the way people treated us, how nice they were, made me realize the importance of generosity. Nowadays I think about generosity, how kind people can be, and I know that I can treat other people with generosity and help them out. The people who helped us had the opportunity to help and they did. They had things we didn't have. This showed me that if I have something that other people don't have, I can give it to them. I can help them.

I want to be a nurse and work with newborn babies. I've always wanted to work with babies. My aunt was a nurse and I talked to her about her job. Thinking about helping babies makes me very happy! I know I will need to study a lot to become a nurse...and I work very hard at school. I'm very good at math - it's not necessarily my favorite. I get good grades in science, too.

When people look at me, they don't see that something really traumatic happened to me. I'm quiet about my problems. Sometimes I'd like people to know what's going on but first I need to get to know them well and trust them before I share my story.



# Magdalyn Rowley-Lange

## Maryland Avenue Montessori School

My family and I go camping at Peninsula State Park in Door County in the summer. When we're there we bike, swim, and see local theater!

One night, my mom's grandparents' friend and I went to see a play at Northern Sky Theater. The show ran late into the night so when we got out the sky had fallen to a deep, inky black. We got back to our campsite and I walked to the beach. All the lights were off and no cars drove by. Perfect stargazing moment! I looked up in wonder. The stars splayed across the sky in wonderful twinkling patterns and constellations. At that moment I felt like I could see anything and do anything. I felt like the world was so big and the stars so far away but somehow reachable. My dreams also seemed so far away but, just like the stars, somehow reachable.

There's something about being in the really still night and looking up at the stars and seeing all the different constellations and how different people and cultures have interpreted the stars. I like thinking that I can interpret life however I want and make my own constellation out of my life. I can achieve any goal that I have.

Looking at the stars also showed me that because the stars are so far away, we don't know much about them but we still appreciate them, we still love them. They're still a wonder.

I hold that night with me and remember the power I held.

I always wanted to do something with science, in NASA or something like that. But I'm also really interested in psychology, why we do what we do, what motivates us, how our brain works. Neuroscience is fascinating, too. All this is generated through a sense of wonder.

I love asking questions and learning the answers to those questions. I also love theater. I always wanted to be an actor. Sometimes I feel I'm not brave enough to be an actor. It's really hard to go to an audition, especially for me singing in front of crowds is difficult. I'm in a choir and I know how to sing but I'm not brave enough. Theater is not a career I want to pursue but I love theater, I love how theater transports people to different places and how it can express ideas. I had a teacher at First Stage who told me once "acting is showing people the truth, different versions of the truth, different opinions of the truth."

I'm not just defined by stereotype. I put myself forward, especially around other children, as the really smart person who always gets everything done, who is a perfectionist, who is the teacher's pet. I'm always defined by those stereotypes so people will say "Oh, Magdalyn, you can answer this question, you're the smart one" and that just puts too much pressure on me to always meet those expectations even if I don't necessarily feel like it. But on the other hand I love being that person who always knows stuff...it doesn't mean that I always want to be that person. Sometimes I want to be somebody else and try new stuff... People put me in a box without really thinking that I'm just the first thing that they see. Sometimes I just like doing random acts of strangeness.

I don't want to be a perfectionist. I'm working on that. Perfectionism was a big thing for me last year, I would stay up late doing homework and try to be the best I could possibly be. My parents were getting worried and talked to my teachers. I was talked to about doing too much homework! I still like doing more than is expected just because it's fun, it's a challenge. But I also feel that I need to relax and realize that not doing super extravagant stuff is ok.



## Nathaniel Treadway

Maryland Avenue Montessori School

My mother is my Wonder Woman. She helps me with anything I basically need help with. She's there for me. When I'm sad and depressed, I go to her room and I just lay there with her and she will talk and hug me and we watch a movie together. We're the closest ones in my family.

My dad is Batman/Flashman to me. Flashman is really fast. When I need anything he'll go above and beyond to get it.

From what my parents have taught me, I know I will be a parent who will raise his kids the right way, a parent who will give his kids discipline. Nowadays some parents don't do that and kids may act out of control. I want to raise my kids right and make sure they get an education, that they make it through school and college, that they grow up to have a nice life. I don't want them to be homeless or anything, or get killed out in the streets or anything. I want to raise them right.

I'm going to high school next year. I was a little bit afraid but now I'm just ready. I will just be myself. I'm not afraid to be myself. I'm either going to High School of the Arts or McDowell. Then I want to go to college and then get a nice job and a nice house. I still don't know what I want to study in college.

What people don't see in me is that I'm a good and smart young black male. I'm actually good. Most people when they meet a young black male sometimes they only see a rude black male who just likes to fight all the time. And I just want them to see the smart part in me, the goodness in me. It makes me feel really uncomfortable to go to places and find people like that.

Something I always get from my mother all the time is: "you're a smart black man, you're going to make it through school and college, get your education, then you're going to grow up and be an engineer." I like cars very much and I want to make my own car designs. My parents see me doing my designs and they tell me that I will be an engineer, a car designer, and get a nice job.

I will get an education and grow up and get through college. It's hard work but I'm ready. I have hope.



## Raven Johnson

Maryland Avenue Montessori School

My hero is someone who's there for me. My best friend is my hero because she understands me like no other person, even though we're like apples and oranges. We argue sometimes but we get over it.

The world we live in, everyone is always judging someone by how they look or the color of their skin or how they are in general. When I talk to my best friend I don't have to be grounded by any rules or justify what I want to say. I feel free. I don't have to hide behind a picture that isn't who I am. We can be who we are around each other.

I want people to see that I'm more than just an African American female who is always going to get into some kind of trouble or talk about someone behind their back. It upsets me when people see me like that.

I would like people to see that I'm loving and I'm funny and I like to be around people who make me laugh and make me want to be a better person.

I will be going to high school next year. People are going to judge me on the first day but I'm not afraid. I like to be myself because then I don't have to live every day as others view me. I also want to evaluate myself and work to be the person I would like to be. I'm not someone who judges a lot but I want to be someone who judges less, I want to be someone who everyone feels comfortable to talk to.

Besides my best friend, my role model is my grandma on my dad's side. She has a really spontaneous attitude. It's just fun to be around her because she makes everyone laugh, she makes everyone feel happy. I see her almost every week and always enjoy my time with her.

I play the cello at the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra. My favorite piece to play is The Swan from The Carnival of the Animals. I might want to be a cellist when I grow up. I don't know for sure. What I do know is that I want to be recognized and appreciated for who I really am and for the good work I do to make the world a better place.



## Audrey Engman

University School of Milwaukee

I feel as though I have recited it so many times, the medical story. When they ask, I find it more numbing each time I tell. Sometimes they don't even care, they just stare with what they think is compassion, but with what really is distant pity.

The sound of the word cancer would make a pit in my stomach, bring me to my knees, and instigate rivers of tears... Watching my mother, the woman who I have looked up to and loved all of my life, slowly deteriorate, has almost wrecked me. There would be days when I would come home to her throwing up the poison that the chemotherapy had inflicted upon her: Shivering and crying. I would walk into her bathroom to see her sullen face and her shaky hands holding clumps of the hair that she once had. I was sitting next to my dad in mass and heard his muffled cries with tears rolling down his cheeks, the first time I had ever seen him cry. And to think, how did this all happen?

On July 15, 2016, my whole family was together, so happy. We were on vacation and had decided to go out to dinner for happy hour. We even had a tickle fight, laughing so hard that my stomach hurt. My grandparents took a picture of my whole family, and I cannot believe our smiles. Only to wake up the next morning to my mom's seizure and the discovery of her stage IV cancerous brain tumor. In 24 hours, my life had changed.

Day by day, week by week, her suffering still the same. And day by day, week by week, my view of the world and my life changed. I matured quicker than any of my peers, making it easy to feel alone. In one year as a fifteen year-old girl, I gained more understanding and wisdom than I had in my whole life. Now I have grown. I still cry, but this has changed me and made me stronger.

Knowing that death could be as close as tomorrow for someone you love, changes you. How can it not? Despite the suffering this disease brings to me and my family, that is its only gift. A constant reminder of how short and seemingly unfinished life can be, pushes you to live with as much joy as you can in your everyday life, for it could be the last.



# Gabriella Avila

## University School of Milwaukee

The first (and only) time I've ever seen my father cry was when his mother died. Abuelita Amparo had been sick for as long as I could remember. And while my father let go of his pain in a way that took me by surprise, I couldn't relate to what he was enduring. In fact, I felt more horrible about seeing my father in pain than the news of her departure. The truth is, I had no relationship with my Abuelita Amparo while she was alive, and actually became closer to her after her passing, through learning about her every chance I get.

I only met her twice in my life. Once when I was born and she came to visit, which I obviously have no recollection of. The second time was the summer before she died. My family and I only went to visit my dad's side of the family once or twice a year, even though we all live in the same city. And we only ever saw my father's four other brothers a couple at a time.

However, when Abuelita came, there was not one person missing from the occasion, aside from his three sisters who still live in México. Around thirty people who rarely got together, all gathered at my tío Mike's apartment. With only two rooms to reside in, space was out of the question and bonding flourished among one another. I was around twelve by this time, and able to talk to my abuelita. However, I was so excited to see so many cousins that I had never seen more than two or three at a time that I spent the days playing with them instead. I wouldn't realize until much later that those few days would have been my last and only opportunity to speak to her in person.

Often times, I did get the chance to talk to her on the phone. Each time was an occasion, planned in advance, as my father would have to make a trip to the gas station or El Rey supermarket, to purchase a calling card for México. He'd sit in the kitchen and then eventually call me and my brother in to take turns saying hello, in which I'd have to mentally prepare for.

I'd practice my go-to phrases over and over, which were: *Hola, Abuela, ¿cómo estás?, Sí,* and *Te amo también.* Whenever I had no idea what she was saying to me, I'd giggle in agreement as my response. I dreaded these phone calls and thought of them as a complete hassle, a bother, extra work for me.

I didn't have a relationship with my grandmother for reasons within my control. Being that age however, did impact my behavior and I would've never thought about how important those little moments were, as I do now. Many things separated me from her, including the language barrier and the border. My unwillingness to learn the language of my family and culture, my blindness to once-in-a-lifetime moments, allowed me to let these rare opportunities quickly slip out of my hands. That morning when my father received the news that his sisters had decided to take abuelita out of all her misery, pain and suffering by pulling the plug, I realized how unaffected I was. How I missed perfect opportunities to learn stories that will now be forever unknown, left untouched. How I lost a chance to further connect myself with my roots.

Now, I try to remember that every day might be my last, or someone else's. That the stories of our elderly should forever be praised and deeply appreciated, because it's all we have. And never again will I let language be my reason to not love and know someone.





## Hannah Hakami

University School of Milwaukee

I like to be pretty open about what I like and what I don't like. I'm not one to hide my preferences or hobbies or the things that I enjoy. The concept of a "guilty pleasure" baffles me, if I truly enjoy something, then why hide it? Because of this, most people know the several different "versions" of myself based on what I like: the artist, the athlete, the music-enthusiast, the traveler, the student, the daughter, etc. I don't usually keep my opinions to myself nor do I say things I don't mean. This has earned me the description as "blunt" or "real", which I'm proud of. People can count on me for the truth. Don't get me wrong, I am appropriate and respectful when it's necessary; though in general, I let people know where I stand. What I'm trying to say is, I don't really have a secret double life. Contrary to popular belief, I'm not Hannah Montana.

However, I guess there is the version of myself that I see versus the version of myself that I want others to see. I want others to see me as light-hearted and funny. I should make self-deprecating jokes that are broad enough that anyone can relate and find amusing, showing that I know how to laugh at myself. Though I don't want them to be so dark that they come up to me afterwards and ask me "Hey, are you doing okay?" I want others to see me as smart and achieving but not too serious. I should study and get good grades but it should show that I'm able to move on if I get a less-than desirable grade. I want others to see me as strong and athletic. I want them to see that I am physically able to do everything anyone else can do and do it well, that I'm fit and I am good at the sports I do. I want people to see me as artistic and talented but critical enough that I'm not obnoxious. That art is difficult and challenging but I've practiced enough at my craft that I can make it look relatively easy most of the time. I want people to think I'm put together and have everything under control, but not so much that I'm mocking them with it. I should have a majority of my life organized but just enough that's not to show that I'm "normal".

I don't know if these efforts are successful or not, I don't know what anyone really thinks of me besides what some tell me. And even then that could be false. For all I know, everyone I know could see right through my act and see me how I see myself. I'm going to be honest, my inner thoughts and opinions on myself aren't the kindest or most joyful. How I want people to see me is very different from how I see myself. Without going too far into it, I want people to think that I'm the opposite of what I think I am. I want them to see me as friendly, strong, funny, talented, smart, normal, and everything else anyone else is.

I realize I'm not special, everyone has these kinds of thoughts at times. Everyone has the way they see themselves and the way they want others to see them. But no one really knows the way others *actually* see them and that's pretty damn scary.



## Sophia Banaszak

University School of Milwaukee

Three years ago, my grandmother was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, ALS. For the first year of her diagnoses she was still as fully functioning as she had been before. She was able to walk to and from the bathroom, she could make her own meals, she could take care of her pets. But as time crawled on, and her life partner grew very ill, her sickness began to control her life. Now she needed assistance getting to the bathroom, making meals which were no longer fresh, only frozen. She was forced to give away her pets as she could no longer take care of them. She struggled to even leave the living room. Small cuts turned into large infections, her body temperature was never constant, always threatening to drop or spike.

As her granddaughter, I was set with the task of giving her assistance constantly. Walking arm in arm to her commode (she could no longer reach the bathroom), helping her sit back, covering her up with a heated blanket and putting on her gloves. Setting out her constant stream of pills she was too weak to swallow so it took over an hour.

This experience opened my eyes to the struggle of living through illness and depression. Realizing my grandmother's will to live through the physical and emotional hardship she was going through near the end of life was a hard experience but it was one I had to accept if I wanted her to be truly happy.



## Zoe Wright

University School of Milwaukee

lost

can you get lost in a place you know well?  
when nothing changes, but you.  
or did you even change at all-  
has time just passed?  
what have you learned since the last time i found you?  
or have you learned anything at all-

because i have.

getting stuck in time is like falling  
down a rabbit hole.  
nothing is real even though you truly believe  
your perception is.  
the only way out,  
is to want to be out.



## Brian Huynh

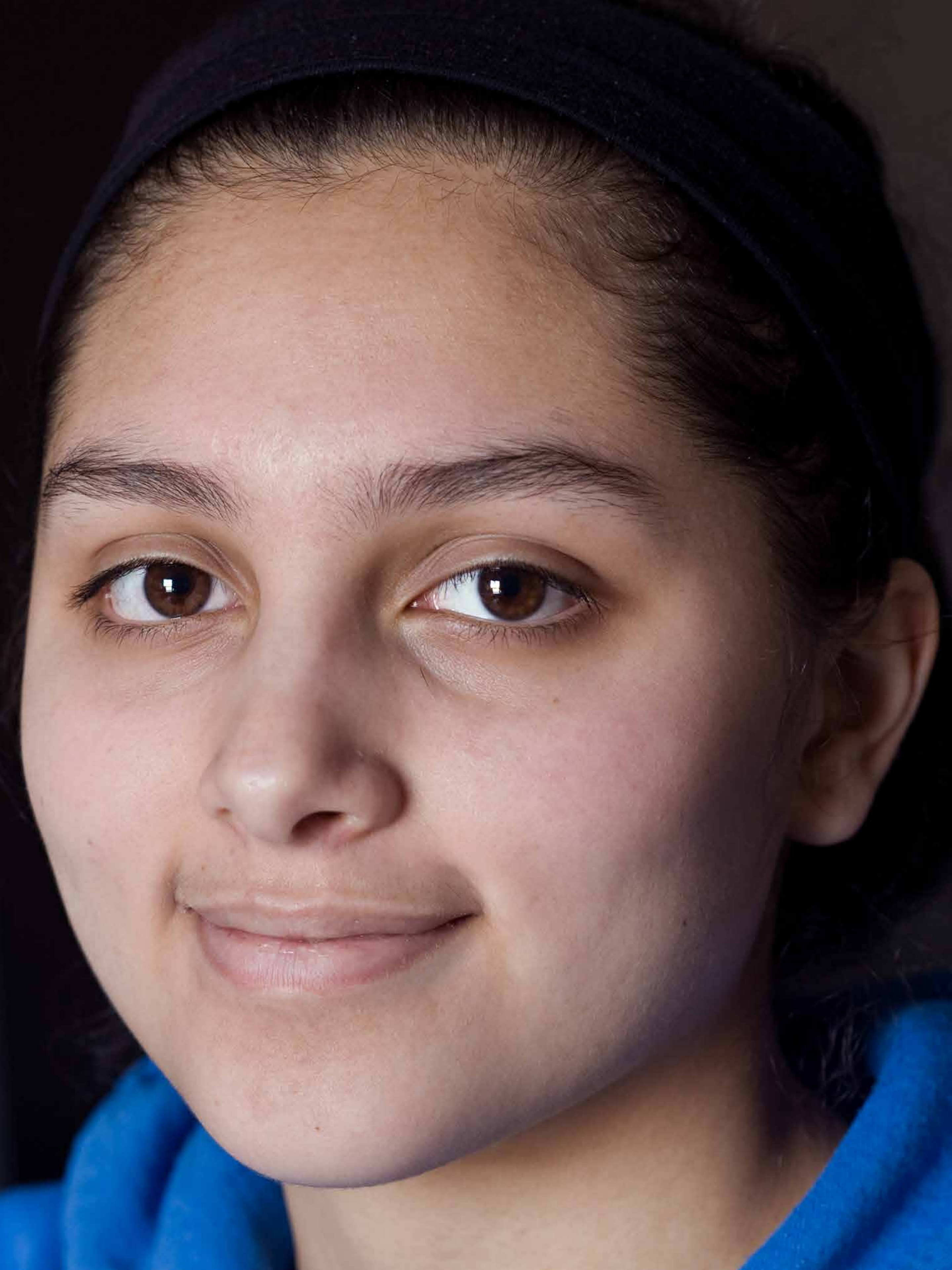
Ronald Reagan IB High School

I am Vietnamese, Cambodian, and perhaps have some Chinese in my background. My father was the first in my family to come to the United States after living in a series of refugee camps in Southeast Asia. He had been forced to leave Cambodia during the rule of the Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, who from 1975 to 1979 killed approximately two million Cambodians. He later returned to Cambodia to marry my mother, who returned with him to the United States. Currently my father works as a forklift driver, and my mother as a nail technician.

My older sister is currently a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin, and hopes to someday become a psychiatrist. Growing up, my sister and I were very close, and she has influenced me in many ways, including introducing me to the poetry of Shane Koyczan, who among other things writes about bullying. I had experienced that in grade school, was introverted and quiet, and turned to poetry to express my feelings of isolation, and to find my own voice.

I love and continue to write poetry, participate in poetry slams around the city, and even self-published my own volume of poetry two years ago. Originally I wrote poems hoping to change the world, but now I simply want to share my experiences and tell my stories.

It would be my dream to write poetry full time, but I also realize the difficulty of supporting myself and my family writing poems. I have expanded my work into writing prose, and hope now to someday work as a writer or journalist. I will follow my sister to Madison in the fall, where I will continue to pursue my dreams of sharing my experiences, telling my stories, and telling the stories of others as well.



## Cecilia Cabrera

Ronald Reagan IB High School

I am Mexican American. My father was the first in his family to leave Mexico. He met my mother when she was studying Spanish in Mexico. She lived across the street from him, and when my father came to the United States to study English, he came to Wisconsin, and stayed close to my mother so they were able to meet again. They have been together since that time. My father is now an accountant, and my mother is now a secretary after having been an interpreter for several years.

I have an older sister who is currently a sophomore at UW-Stevens Point. She's studying clinical lab science and is in the chamber orchestra. She has plans to become a Physician's Assistant. Growing up, we were not close. She was mean to me, and in return I was mean and aggressive towards her. Over the years as often happens, we have become much closer. We joke now about all the horrible things we used to do to each other. She and I are now best friends. She was the person who sparked my fascination with musicals, and classical music. Her dedication to everything she does, and the grace with which she does it, is an inspiration to me.

Because of my sister, I am involved in the school musical, and frequently go see professional productions. I could never get to three instruments, but I now play two, which is more than enough for me. Whenever my family asks where I plan to go to college, and I say Stevens Point, their response is always "Oh, to be with your sister". I also chose Stevens Point because they offer the classes that I want to take, and it's not a large school. But after hearing my family's response to my decision so many times, I realized that it's true. I aspire to have my sister's dedication, and if I am near her, she can continue teaching me, so that I can achieve my goals just like I know she will. My goal after I graduate from college is to find work in a fine art museum, and eventually open my own gallery to display fine art, and play my part to preserve beauty in the world.



## Don Mai

### Ronald Reagan IB High School

I was born in Vietnam and my family immigrated to America when I was eleven years old. The experience was difficult culturally, socially, and financially. For the first few months, we experienced a cultural shock; however, we learned to adapt pretty quickly and sought out to the Vietnamese community in Milwaukee to stay connected with our culture.

My parents are Buddhists, and they love to go to the temple, therefore being a part of the Buddhist community is an important aspect of my family. My family arrived in America with only eight hundred dollars in cash, and it was difficult to afford anything until my mother found a job at a nail salon. Thanks to my parents' sacrifices, who had to give up their motherland and social life in Vietnam to come to America, my sister and I have a better future. The immigrant experience brought my family closer as a unit, and my family identity to our heritage. While my mother works, my father is a stay-at-home dad. He helps to prepare food and take care of us while my mother is away.

My older sister is currently a third-year student at the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee. With a degree in business, Kim hopes to open her own cosmetic shop because she loves to manage and introduce American products to the consumers in Vietnam.

In my free time, I love to study topics in biology and mathematics that I'm interested in that are not covered in the classrooms. After my summer internship in the environmental service department at a hospital, I am drawn to medicine because I was able to witness the impact that medicine has on society. During my internship in the housekeeping department, I observed the dedication that the staff put into creating a pleasant environment for patient's recovery. From this, I learned to appreciate the work of those who are not often recognized for their efforts in patient treatment. I was blessed with that opportunity and believe it will help to make me into a better family member, an active community member, and a dedicated employee.

In the fall I will attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison to major in biology. My ultimate profession is unclear because I want to explore the possibilities that my passion and talent will be best put to use. I'm considering a career as a physician assistant or as a physician, and I am sure that my life will be dedicated to medicine. Due to my father's chronic illnesses, I can empathize with others in similar situations. This sparks a desire within me to ease the pain of others, so that they can live a healthier and happier life.



## Gabrielle Matiszik

Ronald Reagan IB High School

My name is Gabrielle Matiszik. I am eighteen years old and I am a second-generation immigrant from Germany. My father's parents both spent time in concentration camps after World War II and came here upon their release. My dad is a fire captain for the city of Milwaukee, and the head of the Hazmat Team. My mother is a registered ER nurse as well as assists patients with the straining financial concerns of health-care.

I attend Ronald Reagan High school, am an IB Full Diploma candidate and will be attending the State University of New York at Stony Brook in New York. I plan on majoring in pharmacology or chemical engineering. My passions include fine art, science, books, and indie music.

My parents have been my biggest inspiration. They constantly give me advice that I hope I will be able to incorporate into my own life and choices. There is a fine line between utilizing your inspirations and role models and attempting to become them. I feel that role models are people who help you find out who you want to be, not who you are trying to be. The key to success is individuality and being able to express yourself as you see best. The only way to be accepted is when you accept yourself completely. This is an idea that I strongly believe in and that I hope to carry through with me in my last year of high school, college, and through my adult life.

Studying Art at Reagan has helped me be able to express myself and understand myself more as an individual. With art, there is an ability to express your deepest self without having to be directly connected to what you produce. Art is up to interpretation, and that is the beautiful thing about it. There is no need for direct expression or thorough explanation as to what you want to convey, because art is for the self. What we do as individuals in our free time is what creates us, and what builds up our foundations as individuals.



## Juliana Gessner

Ronald Reagan IB High School

My name is Juliana Gessner and I am seventeen years old. I was born in Chicago, Illinois, and moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin with my mom, dad, sister, and our three cats when I was five years old. My family is German and Swedish. Growing up, I was a quiet kid who preferred fantasy worlds to the real world. I would spend hours reading books like *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling, or comics like *Bone* by Jeff Smith, and then transfer my own imaginings to paper as I learned how to draw. I began to draw in elementary school and have since cultivated art into a passion that permeates my everyday life.

To a kid, life is all school and cartoons. You don't have much autonomy, and fantasy ends up being an escape. You read about these fantastic heroes who do impossible things and feel like you can do those things yourself. I've been lucky to have a family as well as teachers that have supported me in pursuing a life of art and continue to support me through my college decisions.

Besides being a full IB student, I've been a member of my school's stage crew for four years and am now a Senior Crew Leader. I've worked on school musicals such as *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Hello Dolly*, and *The Addams Family*, and even helped to design and paint the set for this year's musical *Cinderella*. I'm going to school for technical theatre in stage management and set design, and plan to pursue a career in technical theatre and the arts. Art allows me to be more analytical of the designs around me. I can easily apply the elements of art and principles of design to my surroundings and other subjects in school. I can also find inspiration in almost anything, which helps me improve my creative design skills.

I love theatre because it's an amalgamation of different art styles. Lighting, scenic design, music, and literature come to life on stage through hard work and collaboration.

While I am currently undecided on which university I will attend this fall, I'm applying to schools with strong art and theatre programs rather than an art school because I'm still interested in exploring other academic fields of study, as well as exploring the fantasy worlds I've loved since I was a child.





## Abdirahman Mgoya

Milwaukee High School of the Arts

When people see me, they think I'm a terrorist, because of my religion. They think I am going to attack people and treat them with violence. Sometimes people are afraid of me when I wear my religious clothes. They assume that I'm one of the people who bomb places. I don't feel good about this and it makes feel like I'm not welcome in this place. I think I have the right to practice my religion and be free, but this is not how it turns out. Sometimes I feel afraid to tell people who I am and what my background is like.

I'm a strong and faithful person, who always dreams for the better. I'm quiet but clever. I respect everybody surrounding me and people who are older than me. I'm always active and focused on my future. I don't often have conflicts with people, and when I do, I solve them immediately. I enjoy my happy life even though I don't have what I like. I belong to a happy and lovely family, and was raised with strong traditional behavior. I want people to see me as a human being instead of viewing me as a terrorist. I want them to know that I'm a person who is willing to help others. I think everybody deserves respect, and I want people to do the same for me.

My message to people who have misconceptions about me is that, don't just look at me and start assuming that I'm a bad person. Don't judge my Identity, I think I'm perfect enough. I want people to see me as a good person, not a bad person. Don't let misconception give you wrong information.

We should all be equal and treat each other the same way. We need to unite together and make the world a better place to live instead of hating one another.



## Azeb Weldemariam

Milwaukee High School of the Arts

When people see me, they see a person who is very shy, has a different accent and looks Indian. As far as I know, the people around me never know that I am African. I want people to know me for who I am, to not assume who I am because of my looks. I want them to know that behind my looks there is a story of someone that is worth knowing, someone that people can be depend on!

What people don't see is a person who has struggled in life to become who I am today, a refugee, and a person who is not afraid to achieve when I have the opportunity. My life has been full of challenges so far, but I have learned to be strong in the face of difficulties. I like my struggles because I experienced and learned from them. It is so hard when you see others going through so many obstacles, but at some point in life, we all will face our struggles.

When I first came to the U.S., I didn't know a single word of English or speak and understand what the people around me were saying. I came from Eritrea, East Africa, as a refugee. My first language is Tigrinya and I do not speak English perfectly. The reason we moved to the United States is for me to pursue my goals of obtaining a higher education, because that would have been impossible to accomplish for my family and I to reach our goals in my country.

I had a hard time getting here as a refugee at only twelve years old. My family first had to immigrate to Ethiopia before we were able to migrate to the United States. I moved here in 2013 when I was thirteen years old. I have been in the United States for almost five years. We left Eritrea because of a government that ruled by fears not laws, and because at least 3,000 people died every month in the Red Sea trying to escape to Libya. No one helped them, and the people were left to die, because they had nowhere else to go.

There was no way that I could have achieved my goals in Eritrea because I would have been forced to become a soldier when I finished eleventh grade. I now try to serve as a role model for others by sharing the challenging experiences that I have gone through, and by showing others how hard work and determination can lead you to have a great future. I want others to know that my past doesn't represent who I intend to become in the future.



## Desire Mukucha

Milwaukee High School of the Arts

My name is Desire T.E.P. Mukucha. I was born in Tanzania but the rest of my family is from Congo. They moved to Tanzania because of the war between the Congo and Rwanda in 1994. I grew up in Kigoma, Tanzania, in a refugee camp called Nyarugusu. Most people don't realize that I'm from Africa or a refugee. Everyone tends to think I am a very happy, joyful, spiffy, determined, dedicated and precocious person because of the smile that I always have on my face. Most of the time people I don't know why I'm smiling, or why I like to be happy and charming at all times.

Here's why. I was born in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in the western province of Kigoma in Tanzania. My family had fled the conflict in the Congo which threatened their lives. While I was able to attend school in the camp, we also faced many hardships there, including hunger due to the massive number of refugees also fleeing conflicts, who sought asylum in the camp. Most people don't know where I've been or what I've been through, and that's because I use the experiences from my past to help me shape my character in a more evocative way, above all giving me grace and appreciation for every moment that I have to live. Some people call me "the happy prince". On the surface and at first glance, people often perceive me as an African American young man, and would never guess what I have faced in the past as a refugee.



## Kaw Kaw Paw

Milwaukee High School of the Arts

Everyone in the world has a different personality. I see myself very differently from what other people may see me. I see myself as a quiet person when I am surrounded by the people that are not friendly with me. Whenever I am around strange people, I feel uncomfortable because everything around me feels strange. However, the people who know the truth are my cousin, my best friend, and my family. They are the people that see me for who I am.

Some people think that my appearances, actions and attitude show who I am. But the truth is that only a few people will see me just the way I am and what goes inside of me. For example, my little sister sees the truth of me because she is my friend and knows personal things about me that go beyond appearances. But others judge me because of my appearance or my age. I am eighteen, almost ninety years old, but I look like a child who just began the eighth grade. That is not how I want to be seen. I want everyone to see me as a person with kindness, and a person who like anyone gets angry, upset, or experiences happiness, because just like them I am a human being.



## Keyona Richardson

Milwaukee High School of the Arts

My life... It's pretty complicated to put seventeen years into 500 words, but I'll just explain to the best of my ability.

My life is important to me because I don't care what others have to say or think. I believe my life is important because I bring something to this planet that no one else brings and that's my identity. I am humorous and bright, my wit is incomparable. My scent is carefully picked out to match the emotion I am feeling that day. Whatever I decide to do with my valuable life after high school will be something that will impact this planet positively, and I can guarantee that. Everything I contribute to any environment is a fingerprint of me that lingers on and on. There is absolutely no one like me, and I am glad that I was blessed with the gift of life in the first place, and you best believe I will live it to the fullest.

My life is special because the positivity I spread can help uplift others. There are just so many negative people and negative vibes floating around that can crush one's spirit. That is always something heartbreaking to see. I try to help others feel better because I know that life gets hard sometimes, and the obstacles may seem like they are impossible to overcome. Sometimes it may be impossible to overcome on your own, and there is nothing wrong with having a little bit of help, and I am always glad to be that helping hand.

I get to choose what I do with this life, I could choose to waste away and be that name that everybody forgets, or I could choose to make my name known. Even if the whole world doesn't know my name, that is fine. To me "letting your name be known" means that the people around you know about your accomplishments and know your worth. I feel like only a few beside myself are aware of my worth, but soon a few hundred will know as well.

All lives matter, it just comes down to what you do with it. Everybody has the power to impact another individual or an entire society, but it's up to you if you prefer to bring positive energy or negative energy. There is no such thing as purity, with dark there's always a little bit of light and vice versa. Humans are prone to mistakes, but you can't let your life fall apart due to a few negatives. We have an entire lifetime to mend any broken relationships. We just need to put forth a little effort.

I declare that my life is important because I know what path I am following. My life is something valuable that I refuse to have taken away, not literally, not materialistically.



## Maetha Luangphaxayachack

Milwaukee High School of the Arts

Chinese is what I'm labeled as. Many people never ask. I was born here, but my family is originally from Laos. And just like my ethnicity, many people also assume my personality before they know me. Some even fear speaking to me perhaps because they think I'm mean, but I wouldn't hurt a fly.

In my eyes, I look at myself like a flower, bright, vibrant and creative. I smile because I dislike seeing others unhappy, and try my best to stay positive around others so they won't be down. I may look quiet, but I love to talk, and have many thoughts that I can't help but express to my friends. I have opinions, but am open to what others say. My eyes and ears are open to what you have to say. It saddens me when others don't see those qualities because of my skin color. However, no matter how badly someone has treated me, I forgive. I try to never hurt anyone or wish them to be hurt. Friend or foe I am a shoulder to cry on, and I try my best to approach life with intelligence and determination.

I won't be attending college after high school. Instead, I'll be in fire cadet training focusing and studying to be a firefighter. After I become a fire cadet, as a citizen of the United States I will be heading to the Marines. I want to go to the Marines because the world needs brave people that are willing to sacrifice anything for anyone, and as a young person I feel worthy to make that sacrifice for my country.



## May Tha Zin Oo

Milwaukee High School of the Arts

When people see me, they see a terrorist or someone who will hurt others, a person they can't trust with anything or who works with bad people. They look at me weird because of my headscarf, or because of my religion.

Everywhere I go, people don't talk to me because they are afraid of me. Most people also see me as a person who is weak because of my height - they see me as someone who cannot do anything.

When people see me, they talk to me and about me in mean way, and they think I don't understand because they think I don't speak English. Because I always stay quiet around people, they think I'm mean, disloyal, heartless, not smart, or boring. I don't talk to strangers very often.

What they don't see is a person who is willing to help others, a person who is kind, respectful, smart, brave, and honest. I want others to see me as a normal person. I want people to talk to me like how they talk to others, to treat me as an equal, without judging me based on how I look, or what I wear, or what my religion is.

My family decided to come to America because my parents wanted to change their lives, and they wanted to make our dreams come true. My dad told us that in America we would have the freedom to make our dreams come true. My parents want to change everything for the better, and for their children to speak English and have a better life.



## Saung Hnin

Milwaukee High School of the Arts

My mother claims that people like to listen to what they want to hear, but they reject the voices that are truthful. As I get older, I started to realize what my mother was trying to convey. My childhood started with an education. My mom always reminded me to get good grades and be ahead of other students in school. It is not a surprise that parents want their children to be successful.

As a good daughter, I always make my mom proud and make her happy. My mom gave me strength, she is the reason why I am going to be successful in the future. As a single mother, it is hard to raise a child but my mom raised me to become a young lady who will bring happiness to people. She gave up so much for me so in return I want to be someone who my mom wanted me to be. Long story short, as a teenager, I am so used to making people happy I have a hard time saying no to people.

When people see me, they see an Asian girl who is short and funny. It seems like happy and friendly is my talent. A cold heart and strange attitude would make me look different. Smiling is part of my personality which makes people want to hang out with me. People sometimes think I don't care when bad things happen and seem jealous when I go out with friends and live a free life.

People think I am someone who has a strong heart and dares to face any problem. What they don't see is a person who is full of terrible memories. A person who can cry at commercial shows. Being alone is one of my habits. I am a type of person who trusts people easily and always gets hurt. I am a dreamer who is trying to catch her own dreams. Making everyone happy is my skill. I care about people a lot, and also willing to give up my own life for another.

I never tell the truth because the truth hurts people the most. I try not to bring my past into my future because it can kill me slowly. I want people to understand what I have been going through, and accept who I really am. Now I understand that following my heart is more important than making others happy. Now I know what my mom meant when she said that people like to listen to what they want to hear, but they reject the voices that are truthful.





## Yerusha Perez

Milwaukee High School of the Arts

I am no object; I'm strong, independent, and intelligent, but not for me, for my ethnicity. Me as a Puerto Rican, Hispanic, or afro-latina, However you wanna refer to me. I am here to prove that us Latinos are more than just entertainment. There is so much more to us than what society is led to believe. We have passion like no other. My passion just happens to be with writing.

My interest as a writer started at a young age. In third grade, I thought writing was just a format you have to follow to get your message across. Soon after, I was exposed to creativity, which is what taught me my writing has no limitation. It has no boundaries to keep me restricted from showing and preaching what I want to say. What my people have no way of showing because society has taught us that we cannot exceed more than what they set for us.

I'm here to break our chains because we are wild horses that cannot and will not be tamed any longer.