



Laws of Life Essay Contest, 2010

Kiwanis Club of Orillia

Kiwanis Club of Orillia

The Kiwanis Club of Orillia is now more than eighty years old, boasting a track record of strong community service with a special focus on children. A few examples over recent years are:

Guitars on Parade—High School Challenge Sponsor
Over \$100 000 to Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital Children's Oncology Unit
\$5 000 to Lion's Oval School for tree planting
Twin Lakes Secondary School “Adopt a School” program sponsor
Terrific Kids Program
Winterfest Event Sponsor
Orillia Waterfront Festival volunteers
Kiwanis Music Festival
T-Ball Organizers
High School Awards/Scholarships
North Simcoe County 4-H Sponsors (more than fifty years)
Kiwanis Fire Safety Trailer
Kiwanis Skate Park
Sponsor for the Children's Drug Safety Awareness Program
Supplied high schools with mannequins necessary to teach
Atherley Road beautification and walking trail
Children's Safety Village

For over forty-five years, we have donated to the Easter Seals Club of Orillia area, assisting many children with badly needed apparatuses and equipment.

Our Auction is a large component of our fundraising efforts to allow us to complete the above work. We are thankful for the many community-minded people who make this all possible.

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Introduction and Background

The Contest

In 1987, Sir John Templeton introduced the Laws of Life Essay Contest to his hometown of Winchester, Tennessee and since then it has spread to many communities across North America. In 1997, I met with Sir John and at that time discussed his philanthropic work and, in particular, the Laws of Life Essay Contest. With the support and encouragement of the Templeton Foundation, I decided to bring the contest to Orillia.

The Laws of Life Essay Contest invites high school age students to express, in writing, their personal ideals and the laws of life they value the most. Laws of Life are the rules, ideals and moral principles by which we, as humans, live. Literally hundreds of laws exist. If practised by everyone, these laws of life would benefit us all and improve the world in which we live.

The essays are judged based upon three criteria: was a law of life identified; how well was the law defined and developed; and, thirdly, what was the overall impact of the essay?

In the first year, a phenomenal 145 essays were submitted with as many as 215 essays received one year.

After a hiatus of several years, the contest has been resurrected for 2010, and the quality of essays has been outstanding. Each participating student receives a certificate of recognition, and the English Department of each participating school receives a \$100 donation. The winners receive small cash prizes: first place (\$300), second place (\$200), third place (\$100), and runner up (\$25). Our young people have a lot to say and they are worth listening to.

I am delighted to see the Laws of Life Essay Contest up and running again and am honoured to once again Chair it on behalf of the Kiwanis Club of Orillia.

Carol Ivey,

Chair,

Laws of Life Essay Contest

Credits

The Laws of Life Essay Contest would not have been the success it was without the support of many people within our community. It has been wonderful to see the enthusiasm and cooperation from teachers, parents and judges.

In particular, credit goes to Fred Larsen, a retired English teacher who was a big supporter of the Contest in its initial years and had many of his students earn top rankings in those years.

Fred has been key to reintroducing the project to the schools and in organising the essays for the judges.

Our judges had the very difficult task of reading and evaluating each of the essays and in reaching a consensus on the final placings.

Dr Jonathan Anuik, a professor with Lakehead University, was not only one of our Judges this year, but he also took on the task of putting together this booklet and for that we thank him.

Jenny Graham of RBC Dominion Securities also deserves special mention for all her work in organizing the essays and taking care of the administrative details.

Thank you to Fred Larsen, our four judges, the teachers and all who contributed to getting this Contest running once again and making it another great success.

The Judges

We had a phenomenal group of people step up to act as judges for this great project, each of them bringing a unique perspective to the process.

Thanks go to each of them for their time, insight and sensitivity.

Dr Jonathan Anuik

Jonathan Anuik is an Assistant Professor of History and Interdisciplinary Studies at Lakehead University's Orillia Campus in Orillia, ON, Canada. At Lakehead University, he teaches courses in Canadian history, specifically Aboriginal and gender history and history of education and Inquiry.

Professor Kevin Willison

PhD University of Toronto, BA Queens, MA Lakehead

Born and raised in Orillia, Ontario, Dr. Willison is currently an Assistant Professor with the Department of Sociology and the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Lakehead University's Orillia Campus. He specializes in social gerontology and the sociology of health and illness. For the past six years, he has taught such Ontario post-secondary courses as: Health Promotion, Introductory Sociology, the Sociology of Law, Research Methods, the Sociology of Work, Inquiry into Interprofessional Education (IPE), and the Sociology of Aging.

His recent research focus is on trans-disciplinary research. Moreover, in January of 2010, through the National Initiative for Care of the Elderly (NICE), Dr. Willison joined a pan-Canadian and International group of investigators to help define and measure elder abuse and neglect. He has actively participated in a number of conferences and has authored, to date, eleven internationally peer-reviewed journal articles.

Sharron Brown

Sharron Brown is a Sergeant with the Ontario Provincial Police and currently works out of the Orillia Detachment. She has been a police officer for over twenty two years.

Sharron started her career with the Waterloo Regional Police Service and spent eleven years there. After focussing on criminal investigations for a number of years, she moved to the Lindsay Police Service where she worked as a front line officer.

In 2000, she was hired by the Ontario Provincial Police and was posted to the Peterborough County Detachment. There she focussed her attention on Marine policing and was also assigned to the Detachment Traffic, Snowmobile and ATV team. In 2004 she was promoted to Sergeant and transferred to the Haliburton Highlands Detachment. In 2007 she completed a secondment to the Professional Standards Bureau at the General Headquarters in Orillia.

In 2008 she was transferred to Orillia Detachment and currently is the Municipal Administration Sergeant.

Sharron is well known in the community for her involvement and commitment and brings great organisational skills and insight to all she undertakes.

Sherry Lawson

Sherry Lawson is the middle daughter of an Algonkian mother and Ojibway father. Having grown up on the Mnjikaning/Rama First Nation community in the 1950s and 1960s, Sherry was deeply influenced by the traditional teachings of her father and paternal grandmother.

Trained in library science, museum studies and anthropology, Sherry has held positions as a Justice of the Peace, guidance counsellor and casino director.

Named Orillia's Citizen of the Year for 2009, Sherry is well known for her three decades of volunteer work, assisting non-profits and charities with board training, fundraising, media management and program development and evaluation.

Sherry is in high demand as a knowledgeable and entertaining speaker.

An author of two biographical books, Sherry is known throughout southern Ontario as simply a storyteller.

President's Message

On behalf of the Orillia Kiwanis Club, I want to thank all the participants of The Kiwanis Laws of Life Essay Writing Contest and to heartily congratulate the winners.

This essay writing contest is all about life lessons. The submissions were not adjudicated for grammar or punctuation, they were assessed on the clarity and content of the message and the life lesson identified. Sometimes, this is very difficult, not only to write from the heart but to allow others to read very private thoughts and feelings.

I would also like to personally thank the judges, who were all volunteers from our community, and Fred Larsen and Carol Ivey. Without their dedication and hard work, this contest would not have come to fruition.

Susan N. Thomas,
President
Orillia Kiwanis Club

Junior Entries



DETERMINATION
Champagne Thomson, Grade 9
Twin Lakes Secondary School

Determination: the ability to strive for something no matter how difficult it may be to achieve.

Determination is among the most important traits a person can have. With determination comes strong will, optimism, and a good set of priorities. When people are determined, they have the drive to work through difficult times reaching for their goals and pushing themselves to do their very best. Determination is a very powerful characteristic, one that truly impacts your life.

Dreams and goals are accomplished when you have the determination to aim for them, working your hardest to do your best. You cannot reach your full potential unless you have the will to do your very best at all times and to work past the many difficulties that will arise along life's path. Being determined gives you the strength to push yourself even when you don't want to. Just knowing that you should push yourself will give that extra bump in the right direction.

All great achievers in life have made it to where they are today due to their hard work, commitment, and determination. You cannot simply wake up in the morning and accomplish life's most rigorous task, but you can wake up and decide to work at it. Everything is a work in progress at some point, and with the strength of determination it becomes an achievement in time.

Priorities are a necessity for a determined person—knowing the rank of importance of everything you are doing. Prioritizing your life helps you keep your goals in check and makes them easier to accomplish. For example, Michael Jordan was told by his high school basketball coach that he wasn't good enough and would never make the team. He didn't take it lightly, and he didn't let it get him down. He worked harder than ever! Every night when he got home from school, he'd go outside and take shots on the net. Not just a few—or even ten or twenty. Only after sinking 1 000 successful shots would Michael be satisfied enough to go back inside. He did this every single night! In 1981 Michael received a basketball scholarship and in 1984 he entered the National Basketball Association Draft. He was selected by the Chicago Bulls as their third pick. His determination drove him to achieve the ultimate success in his life. With the help of a good set of priorities to overcome the rejection he faced when his coach told him he wasn't good enough, he succeeded.

A determined person is generally optimistic, as well—which is a good trait to have. Being able to look past the shadow to see the light so that you can get to where you want to be is an incredible skill. Someone who lacks determination wouldn't have the mind-set to look for the bright side in things and would have to settle for whatever he or she got. Optimism plays a big role in improving, in allowing yourself to know you can do something better and actually doing it. Optimism is the key to being determined.

Determination is something that makes your life successful. Without it you will not have the drive to achieve great things or better yourself. Your life is yours to control, to create whatever your heart desires. Determination will help you in doing so. By being determined, you are opening the door for a better tomorrow, future achievements and overall happiness in your life.



ALWAYS MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

Maddy Blunt, Grade 9

Park Street Collegiate

Time—seconds, minutes, and hours, days, weeks, months, years—is precious because we only have so much of it. More importantly, we have only so much time to be young. This means that what we do with our time is very important.

In life there are people that think only of themselves and do nothing for others. Sad but true. At the same time, there are people that get so caught up in the rush of life that they never have any time for themselves. It seems that life gets so busy, and people have so much on their minds that nobody is ever relaxed.

While life is passing by before their eyes, people don't realize that, in times of trouble and stress, doing more and putting more stress on themselves won't help.

We must find the time to relax, to do something for ourselves. Even if it takes a minute to take a few deep breaths, we must relax and be calm.

We possess the habit of loving another more than ourselves. Sometimes we love so deeply that we forget to save a little love for ourselves.

If we can learn to relax, to take time to do things we love, it's possible we can learn to love ourselves a little more. Maybe this can reduce the number of heart attacks and stress-caused illnesses.

Junior: 2nd Place

So make time for yourself, so you can die a happy person.



LAW OF LIFE
Caroline McMillan, Grade 9
Park Street Collegiate

Every day should be a leap of faith. Every moment should be original and beautiful. My law of life is to experience every moment to its fullest. I believe that you should experience everything as soon as it happens and not let a moment escape. Then you can keep it forever in your memories. Everything that is important to you should be your first priority.

Every wanted to say something but could never find the right moment or failed to get the chance? You should not let that stop you. Instead, control the moment and do what you want. Don't take life for granted! If you never try anything, you won't get anywhere. You need to have fun with your day and a good time—but make wise choices at the same time.

As Reverend Leroy Allison said, “We spend too much time living in the ‘what if’ and need to learn to live in the ‘what is.’” We spend more time thinking about the risks, and what could happen, when all we really need to think about is what is actually happening in that moment. We try to predict what will happen next, but we need only to worry about what is happening in the present moment.



LAWS OF LIFE
Caitlin Tremblay, Grade 9
Park Street Collegiate

Laws of life are rules we choose to live by, rules which we use as guidelines that we follow to help us make decisions and do the right things.

“For every action there is a reaction” (Mann and Gots) which means for every action we do which is based on our opinions and beliefs and what we see as special, we react differently or are biased. We lose vision of what is actually important because we let that special object block our view, put a wall between you, without seeing the effects your actions make.

And the law I bring to you is to “treat everyone the same, or fairly.”

When you really think about it, fights between people in all different relationships start because of these reasons: treating a person wrongly, insultingly, even accidentally. Conflicts result in you treating a person differently, more or less. Or you let something become more special and come between you.

This specialness doesn't count only for people; if you raise or make an object more important it puts them down and builds up a wall.

Wars start because something comes between them. They fight for something special but if we dropped the specialness then wouldn't wars have nothing to be fighting for which would end up in world peace, wouldn't it?

Junior: Runner-up

Then people could relate to people they usually wouldn't want to be around because people wouldn't be enemies; couldn't be jealous of the same thing they have; and wouldn't be left out, if we were all equal.

And speaking of equal, how can all parents call their children special? We aren't all special; we're unique—the same, just in different forms—and if parents could only see that then they would be less defensive; could let that thought from their mind; and be open-minded toward others.

So even though it's not the "Golden Rule," treating people fairly should be mentioned to open some eyes, eyes of people that would turn this over in their heads and may even add it to their list of Laws of Life.

Junior: Runner-up



LIVE, LAUGH, LOVE
Nicki Russell, Grade 9
Park Street Collegiate

I think the most important law of life is: live, laugh and love. This is so important to me because when you get old you will want to look back at your life and be happy, with no regrets.

When you live your life to the fullest, you will be happier going through life. When you go through tough situations, you still have to look forward to what will come next by keeping a positive attitude. Going through your life without worries is impossible, but you have to keep a positive outlook and keep looking forward to things that are exciting in your life.

Loving is the most important thing to do. Living without love is lonely, and no one will enjoy it. Everyone needs to be loved to feel worthy and welcomed in this world—not only by others but by you too. To love and be loved can make your life worth living.

Senior Entries



MANY MASKS OF THE CIRCUS

Mac King, Grade 12

Twin Lakes Secondary School

I have always loved good masks; black dramatic masks or colourful clown masks, I love them all. A good mask can be a form of protection like a goalie's mask or a shroud of deceit such as a Shakespearean actor's mask. All of my friends have seen my vast mask collection over and over again.

I can remember one day a long time ago, I was preparing for Halloween, and I had my costume all picked out, but I needed a mask. I tried on a clown mask, one with bright colours, big eyes, and a permanent smile plastered on to its lips, but it wasn't right for me. I tried a Grim Reaper mask. It had a long, drooping mouth and very sad black eyes; it was a lovely mask, but it still wasn't the right one. I tried on some that covered half my face and some that were nothing more than a pair of glasses with a funny nose. Some had hair, some had funny ears, but none of them was quite right. Then I came across the perfect mask. It had soft, caring blue eyes, a pale complexion, and even came with an adorable head of auburn hair. This mask was exactly what I was looking for; when I moved my mouth, the mask's mouth moved too. When I moved my eyes, so did the mask. I was so completely entranced by this mask that, after I bought it, I wore it everywhere I went.

I was eleven years old. It was a hard time in life. All of my friends were struggling with their own identities but not me: I had my mask; my mask was who I was. My mask was caring. All of its friends felt like they could open up to it. It was a little nerdy, and it had a crush on a very cute young woman that sat in the front row of my class. I fell in love

with my mask so completely, and I didn't take it off; when times got hard, I hid behind my mask, and my mask would protect me from everything.

After a while my life got more complex, so I had to get more masks. They all looked the same, but they were all unique; some were impassive, some were empathetic. I had a mask for everyone I saw. Every mask was like a mirror showing in me what the person I was meeting was; that way, everyone felt comfortable around me. In order to avoid conflict, my masks and I strived to become loved by almost everyone we met, and we succeeded.

After years of me and my mask being together, I was so efficient that I was able to wear many masks at once. I was friends with everyone—or should I say, my masks were, because at this time I was becoming so tired in the evenings that my masks would slip; the elastic holding them to my face would snap and fall. Behind my masks, I saw something, something that scared me more than anything I had come across since I picked up that first mask.

I saw myself. I saw a man. I looked in the mirror, and I saw me for me. My masks lay on the floor around me and I saw who I was. I was a gay man.

I liked men, such a simple statement, but a statement that chilled me to the bone. My masks and I had been told that gay men and women were equal in every way, and they shouldn't be made fun of, but we lived in a small town, and my masks knew many people that would love to pain a gay man such as myself, so many people that would love to beat me and leave me strung upon a fence.

With tears running down my face, I scooped up my masks and ran to my bedroom. I locked the door and sat on my bed struggling with what I had just seen. I was sure of one thing: no one must know what I now knew. If they did, I would be ruined. So I picked up my masks and put them on again.

For six more years I lived, every day scooping up my masks and putting them on. My friends loved my masks. They opened to them, they spoke their hearts. They loved who I was, but I didn't. I was suffering from depression. Even though my masks were always smiling, behind them I wasn't. I didn't want to go on. I had to make a choice. It sounds silly but either I had to take off the masks or cease to be. It was the masks or me. One of us was going to die.

Then came the fateful day I decided to peel off my masks—not all of them but just enough to let me shine through. I came out and told some of my friends that I was gay. I got mixed reactions: some broke my heart, and some made me feel better than I had ever felt before. Some rejected me, claiming I had changed, that I wasn't who I used to be. But some saw the truth and helped me every step along the way.

It was a wonderful time, but I still wasn't true to myself. In order to try to break free of my masks which showed me as a straight man, I donned others. These masks were different. These masks were so stereotypically gay that they, too, were not me. More friends left me because they could see that I wasn't being true to myself. I even lost my first love; he saw that I wasn't being true to myself. Many tried to help me, but my love of masks resisted. I tried to keep my masks, my last line of defense.

That summer I went off to camp for the first time in my life. I was a counsellor, and I met some of the most inspirational children I had ever met. One child, in particular, named Jessi, really touched my heart; he reminded me of whom I was behind all the masks when I was younger. I still talk with Jessi, and he helps me become more myself every day.

After I came back from camp, I was a changed person. I was genuinely happy, and above all I was who I wanted to be. I still wore my mask, but only one, and this mask now acts like a chameleon. My love of masks made me into a great friend. I was able to help others by listening to their problems and sometimes even solving them by putting on a mask that mirrored them and what they were going through. If I helped a friend who was

depressed, I became depressed too. If they were scared to sleep, so was I. My masks kept me imprisoned for a long time but in my cell I learned to use my jailors to help me be a better person. I lay in bed trying to sleep but worried that this single mask I now wore was making me into that which I tried not to become. I realized that being true to you happens in degrees. Being yourself entirely is fantastic but even a little glimpse of who you truly are can be like a feast after years of starvation.

My life was better than it had ever been. By being true to myself, I had a wonderful relationship, and I was able to help my friends be happy with themselves. But this wasn't enough for me. I needed to stand up and let my message be heard. I needed other young gay boys and girls to hear that there is nothing wrong with what they are. So I joined the Gay Straight Alliance at my school, a group dedicated to helping make lesbian and gay students feel they have a place to go. Because of continued dedication and interest, the next year I found myself leading the Gay Straight Alliance. Since I took it over, I have made the group into one where everyone is welcome, and no discrimination or hatred will be heard or tolerated. We are a group with love for everyone; we try to make everyone feel that they can be themselves, no matter who they are. I have always opened my arms and my door to anyone in need of a hug or a place to be. Being true to myself has become my life, making sure I am true to myself and making it so that all those around me can be themselves while being judged in nothing but positive light.

So I have realized that being yourself entirely is fantastic but even a little glimpse of who you truly are can be true salvation. I took time to discover who I was and who I wanted to be. I looked at the form my masks would take—clothes, money, alcohol, even my job. Because of that discovery, I am now someone who is proud to say, “That was me. I did that.”

So look at yourself. What kind of mask are you wearing today?



LIFE IS MADE BY WHAT YOU GIVE

Jenna Reid, Grade 11

Twin Lakes Secondary School

In grade seven, my class took a field trip to Ottawa for a week. We saw many famous sights: the parliament buildings, museums, and the Rideau Canal but for me the most compelling moment occurred when we visited the local flea market. There were vendors of all different types and people everywhere, buying and selling. I noticed some boys from my class laughing and throwing garbage at something out of my sight. As I neared them, the boys ran away, snickering to each other, and I realized the laughs were for a feeble individual crouched on the brick wall. It was a woman—a tarnished, frail young woman. She had a baby on her lap, an empty margarine container on the pavement, and she was holding a wilted cardboard sign with the words, “Give money for my baby” etched with paint on the front of the sign. I walked over to her empty container, took five dollars out of my pocket, and dropped it in. She stopped rocking her baby and glared at me with her fierce brown eyes. Her piercing gaze gave me chills. Suddenly, a smile cracked upon her bitter face, and a tear crawled down her cheek. It wasn’t until that very moment that I understood that giving is far more precious than receiving.

I was only thirteen years old when I encountered the homeless woman, and it had truly affected me. I wish others could have experienced what I had because perhaps they, too, could have learned the crucial moral I live by day-to-day. Perhaps they could have seen the grief and the sorrow on her face and the way a five-dollar bill changed that expression completely. Her expression changed me. Whether it be giving your time to a club or volunteer group; helping out an elderly person; or buying Girl Guide cookies, giving is essential.

Giving is very prominent in some individuals, but the love of receiving is more important for some. The boys in my class that were throwing garbage at the woman had no passion for giving. They are the children on Christmas morning begging for more. They are the people that will leave this world nothing in return since they have not given anything back. I wish they would have put themselves in that woman's shoes, felt her pain and agony; endured her battles; and cried her tears. If only they could realize the merciless lives people live and how they could be helping instead of laughing. Giving is not hard; it takes efficacy and the willpower to give something precious of yourself to another thing or individual. People should take their time and invest it towards those in need and then they can experience the remarkable feeling of giving.

Life can be hollow and vain, or it can flourish with that overpowering inner feeling of satisfaction from giving something of you to another. Life can be lonely and solitary, or it can be filled with certain individuals and things that have been gained from your generosity. Life can be selfish and greedy, or it can blossom into endless acts of kindness. Life's archive comes from what you give to the world. So leave your mark on the environment around you because once you leave life behind, all that will be left is what you have given back to the world.

The woman in Ottawa kept finding a way to slip into my mind. I realized that my pocket change could have possibly been the only money she had for the rest of her day, week, or even month. I could have easily spent it on a euphoria of candy and chocolate but instead I had given it to a desperate woman and her young child. Candy sure does taste good but the feeling I still have from giving that five-dollar bill is incredible. I have learnt that giving is a necessity of life, and its value overpowers every instance of receiving. Giving is far more rewarding than receiving could ever be. Winston Churchill once stated, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."



LIVE, LAUGH, LOVE
Paige Sillaby, Grade 12
Twin Lakes Secondary School

Unpredictable! Life is simply unpredictable. We, as humans, go through life with blind eyes and little to no knowledge of what the next day will bring. To some it brings excitement while others will fear the unknown. Yet despite life's unpredictability, we all wake up each morning and go to bed each night, knowing that we can't possibly know what turns our lives will take. That's life: instead of questioning the unknown, embrace it. Based on my own short life, I have found three words that sum up the laws of life: live, laugh, and love.

Live. Live life to the fullest, as if each day on earth could be your last. Instead of putting off or regretting what you think is too late, stop and remember life is meant to be lived. Never put your life on hold because those who have stopped living always seem to be waiting for their lives to start; it never seems to begin for them. From my own experience, as it may be for many others, it takes a life-or-death situation to clear your mind of what can happen in a moment's notice. Within seconds your life could forever be changed and everything you've ever planned for yourself means nothing. I, personally, have learned not to take life for granted but also not to let my fear of living be a setback, for otherwise it becomes a waste of life controlled by fear. While you're living, you need to live it up, because life is unpredictable, and you should enjoy the time you have. Try new things, go places, and stop putting off till tomorrow what you could do today, because you live only once. If living your life with no regrets brings joy to life then, in my opinion that makes it a law of life.

Laugh. Laugh out loud. Laugh until your tummy hurts and your cheeks are sore from smiling too hard; to my knowledge, no one has ever died from an overdose of laughter. I ask you to reflect on your happiest memories and remind yourself that the best times of your life were when you were giggling about something silly or when a smile was upon your face. I was always told that "nothing can beat a good old giggle fit" and to this day I still believe in those words. If I see

someone sad or appearing upset, my initial thought is they need to experience laughter in their life. You can laugh about anything, really, and somehow it makes everything feel okay. Because life can be hard to understand, sometimes you need to find the humour in it. In my opinion, laughter is the cure to life's problems and is therefore a law of life.

Love. Love life! Love another unconditionally but, most importantly, love yourself. The word "L-O-V-E" gets thrown around a lot these days without a meaning; to love is to care, to be passionate, and to give without taking. And to tell someone, "I love you" means that you should be taking ownership for those three little words. I love my family and without their love in my life I would feel lost and alone; I tell them all the time how much they mean to me, because they have made me the person I am today. Before you can love another, though, you must learn to love yourself. For some this may be a difficult and long journey but well worth the feeling. Life is a journey and over the course of a lifetime you will meet people, care, and love many that will make you a better person because of their love. I feel that those that are most important to us are a reflection on our own happiness. In life I feel satisfied that my love for another or for myself can bring others happiness and so I am confident that love is an essential part of life's laws.

Three words that sum up the laws of life: live, laugh, and love. Life is based on the happiness that can come from living. I truly believe that if you live by these laws of life you will get the best experience out of life, with the most happiness a person can feel. I wish everyone the adventure of living, the gift of laughter, and the joy of love.



YOU ALWAYS HAVE A CHOICE

Jaina Kelly, Grade 11

**Orillia District Collegiate and
Vocational Institute**

“Nothing can bring you happiness but yourself.”—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The most valuable law of life I will ever learn is this: You *always* have a choice. No matter what situation you’re in, you can turn it around if you grasp the reins and give it all you’ve got.

I came to this realization after many decisions I made affected my life in negative ways. It’s hard to believe but up until a month or two ago I lived in self-pity and self-hate. At SIXTEEN I was sitting there, completely hopeless for my life, convinced I would never accomplish anything or be anyone important. Shouldn’t someone at my youthful age with a loving family and potential be glowing with happiness and opportunity?

Instead of taking hold of my life and looking for positives, I dove deeper into the web of lies I’d woven for myself. I told myself that I was worthless, stupid, unlovable, and pathetic. These words echoed in my head so much I was convinced. I was heading nowhere. Until very recently, that was my life, self-absorbed and without purpose. I couldn’t identify what was wrong with me. It just *was*. I would lie in my bed and wonder when I would feel better.

After a few unproductive sessions with a local counsellor, we came to the conclusion I should get medication for depression. Depression I supposedly had. At the time I fully believed this was the solution to *all* of my problems. I had a choice to turn my life around *without* a false sense of happiness in the form of a little white pill.

I am perfectly aware that in the year and a half I'd been torturing myself, in the corner of my mind; I knew that I was worth *more*. However, I wanted so desperately to feel horrible. As insane and ludicrous as that sounds, I just couldn't figure anything out—as most teens can't—and thought it was my only escape.

I can imagine others feel the same as I did—doomed to failure—and as a result they go down the dark path of drugs, alcohol, and self-destruction. Except most of these people go all the way becoming addicts or committing suicide. They drag themselves into Hell and have no voice telling them what they're worth.

I was with my brother when I had the epiphany. I finally saw how blessed I am. I have a loving home. I'm safe and free in this country. I don't live in poverty or face domestic abuse. There are *millions* that are struggling every day to make ends meet.

I have an *amazing* life ahead of me. I have discovered that, through all of this, I had a choice. I had a choice to say, "No, you are not going to hurt yourself any longer. You can rise above this and be all you want to be."

It's so easy to hate myself for any little thing and to look past the good things. I lived like that for too long, hoping for attention and direction. I got neither because everyone else is too caught up in their lives. I thought I would get sympathy but instead it was a slap in the face when I realized I have to live my life for *me*. The more I lived misery, the more I was going to waste the precious life I had been given.

You ALWAYS have a choice, and it's you who chooses to fail. After so many days of voluntarily suffering, I refuse to suffer anymore. I wish everyone else could do the same.

I only have one life to live, and I am going to live it *happy*!



LET YOUR CONSCIENCE BE YOUR GUIDE

**Jordan Burke, Grade 12
OASIS Alternative School**

As a young girl—well, since I was about twelve—I have always wanted to ‘fit in.’ Being one of the “cool” kids has no real description; there is no set standard for that. Since I was a baby I have moved about seventeen times and have attended thirteen schools up until now. Moving this much made it hard for me to fit in and make true friends. When I was twelve, I started letting my peers influence me; whether it was a dare; what kind of music to listen to; or how to dress, I let them influence me. Most of the time, the actions were considered normal for someone of my age. Eventually, the certain group of girls I hung out with at thirteen started wanting to bully others. One thing I never wanted to find myself doing is bullying because I had been bullied most of my life. One time I was standing with the girls when they dumped this gross liquid of ‘God knows what’ into some girl’s backpack; of course, by being there, I was labelled as one of them. From this incident I learned not to let others influence your actions negatively.

Ever since I can remember, my Mom always taught me not to let others influence me. Her exact words were, “Always let your conscience be your guide” as taken from the movie *Pinocchio*. She would say, “If you don’t feel right doing what you’re doing or what your friends are doing then leave the situation.”

Of course, at thirteen I was in the wrong place at the wrong time once again. I was staying with my friend one week in her basement apartment when there was a fire upstairs. The house had to be evacuated, and we all went to stay in a hotel. My mom had given me some spending money for that week (which I earned by doing little chores around our house) so I suggested we go to the nearest shopping centre so I could buy myself something. While we were there, my friend kept disappearing randomly, and I

kept looking for her. I asked her why she was doing that, and she told me she was just looking for something specific to buy. Anyhow, when we left the store, I had bought myself some nail polish and a lip gloss. My friend then showed me what she got: two lip glosses, some underwear, and a candy bar. I wondered why she had so much stuff since to my knowledge she had no money, so I asked her. She said she stole them. I was always taught that if you can't afford it, don't even touch it, so I never felt the urge to take something that didn't belong to me.

A few days later, she asked if I wanted to go shopping again. I was leery whether or not I should go because I didn't want her stealing again. She reassured me that her mom had given her some money this time so she wouldn't have to take anything.

I had a tiny bit of money let so at the store I picked out a shirt. She seemed to be acting very strange. She said she couldn't find anything she wanted so I set the shirt down, and we decided to leave. As we were leaving, this guy walked up to us just outside the doors and told us that we had some things we didn't pay for. I said I had no idea what he was talking about, and he said he thought I did. We walked through the store with the guy and entered his office. He told us to empty our pockets and purses. With no resistance, I did as he asked, as did my friend. She pulled out many things of make-up and other little knickknacks and to my surprise I pulled out one tiny lip balm that I'd never seen in my life. I realized she must have put it into my purse when I wasn't looking so, if she went down, I did too.

Anyway, the police were called, and they phoned my mom and she was very upset. I swore to her that I did not steal, that my friend had set me up. My Mom later believed me as I had no reason to ever lie to her. After all of this, I realized that, after the first time shopping with my friend, I should never have gone again. I should have listened to my conscience. I should not have let her influence me; I should have kept my word and my promise to my mother.

When I turned fourteen, I started high school, which was a very big deal. All I wanted to do was make friends and feel wanted and popular. I started hanging out with this girl I had met years before. We had never pursued our friendship until then. She was a very opinionated and judgmental person who always wanted things to be her way and always thought she was right. When first getting to know her, I thought nothing of it. I just thought she was right because she was pretty and popular, so I ignored it. She liked to go out drinking on weekends, so I started doing that, as well. It seemed fun, so I enjoyed it.

After hanging out with her for about a year, her attitude started rubbing off on me, and I was becoming a very stuck-up person. But I was popular, and people always wanted to talk to me and hear my opinions, so I felt like I fit in. My marks in school were fantastic, as I was making the Honour Roll and impressing my mother and family. I started to party more, but I was still keeping up in school. Then I got a boyfriend, and things were perfect.

I wanted more money to spend on alcohol and clothing so I got a part-time job and began working after school and on some weekends. I eventually got money hungry and dropped out of school so I could work full time. My friends said it was a good idea I did that. They had encouraged me to do so in the first place.

At this point I was someone I didn't want to be just to fit in, and it was suddenly not making sense any more. I sat and thought: if I'm not happy, there's no point in making others happy. Again, I was letting others influence my actions and wasn't thinking anything of it. The results were not positive, but negative.

Thinking back to all this, I wonder why I have been so naive. I was a very intelligent young woman that had grown up with morals, and I knew right from wrong. I wasn't considered an average girl for my age. I think the reason I acted in these ways is because, in the world today, it is much harder to be a part of the 'in crowd,' and young adolescents will strive to be cool and smart and have so many friends so they feel good about themselves. As you grow up, you realize that out of all those friends you had when you

Senior: Runner-up

were young, you may only still talk to one of them. All of those clothes are gone and all of those ridiculous choices you made which were the result of peer pressure meant nothing.

When you reach a certain point in your life and look back, it seems so immature and pointless and then it comes to you: never let others influence your personal actions negatively. Always let your conscience be your guide.

Notes

Notes

Kiwanis Club of Orillia

Local Projects:

Children's Safety Village
Basketball nets in Morningstar Park
Orillia Museum of Art & History—Children's Kiwanis Art Education Centre
Fire Safety Training Trailer
Kiwanis Skate Park
Atherley Road Section of Trans Canada Trail
Kiwanis Music Festival
Paediatric Oncology Equipment
Kiwanis Children's Health Centre
Kiwanis T-Ball
Kiwanis Music Festival
Hoopla Sponsorship
4-H Club Sponsorship
Easter Seal Sponsorship
Atherley Road Clean Up
High School and College Scholarships
High School CPR training mannequins
Up With People student sponsorship
Terrific Kids Program
Brian Orser Arena & Community Centre Basketball hoops

Plus many other community service projects, sponsorships, and partnerships yet to come!

Together we do make a difference!