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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. With the support and encouragement of the Templeton Foundation, the Kiwanis Club, with the help of President-Elect Carol Ivey, brought this contest to Orillia in 1997. 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 was resurrected for 2010, and the quality of essays was outstanding. 2011 was no different.

Each participating student receives a certificate of recognition and the English Department of each participating school receives a \$100 donation. The winners receive cash prizes: first place (\$300), second place (\$200), third place (\$100), and runner up (\$25). Our young people have a lot to say, and we can all learn from their insight. Thank you to all students who had the courage to put their thoughts on paper and opened their hearts for this contest.

Sincerely,

Susan Thomas, Chair, Laws of Life Essay Writing Contest

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As the current President of the Kiwanis Club of Orillia, it is my sincere pleasure to be able to offer our gratitude and our congratulations to all of this year's participants.

Since 1924, the Kiwanis Club has reached out in support of the children and youth in our community through our various programs, and we are very proud to bring the Kiwanis Laws of Life Essay Writing Contest to our community. Having said this, this program simply would not be possible if not for the commitment of our dedicated volunteers, including our independent panel of first-rate judges, and the efforts of this year's Chairperson and Past-President of the Kiwanis Club, Ms. Susan Thomas. Thank you!

Of course, the heart and soul of this program comes from the participants themselves. Their submissions are based on personal life experiences – their own “Laws of Life” – and as such they are often difficult to share. We appreciate and admire the courage, the insight and the leadership that these participants demonstrate each year. Not only do we learn from their experiences, but we are inspired by their example to do more.

To the participants: a heartfelt “Thank You” from all who are fortunate enough to get a chance to read your incredible submissions; we will surely benefit from reading your “Laws of Life”!

Kiwanis Club of Orillia

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Timpano', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tim Timpano

President

Special Thanks

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, a special thank you 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. All of these volunteers offered up their time and commitment to the project without hesitation. Without them, this contest would not be possible.

The Judges

TOM EARLE was born in Orillia and played Junior Hockey for the Orillia Travelways and the Barrie Colts and collegiate hockey for Dartmouth College of the NCAA. After finishing his hockey career in the British Ice Hockey League, Earle earned his teaching degree from York University. For the past twenty years he has taught grade seven and eight in Simcoe County. His critically acclaimed debut novel, *The Hat Trick*, deals with the rise and fall of a young hockey superstar whose life is derailed in one tragic incident. Earle lives in Oro-Medonte with his wife and three children.

BRENDAN HUGHES is Lakehead University's Development Officer for Central Ontario. Originally from Thunder Bay, Brendan has worked with Lakehead University for over 15 years in a variety of capacities. Brendan is a student-centred educator who would like to see every aspiring person reach their full potential. Believing that we will go further together, Brendan looks forward to working with community partners in Orillia, Simcoe County, and Central Ontario to further the educational opportunities in this area for generations to come.

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.

PROFESSOR KEVIN WILLISON, PhD University of Toronto, BA Queens, MA Lakehead, was 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. Since January of 2010 Dr. Willison has served as one of 14 research leads on a 2-year funded Pan-Canadian research project (funded by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada – HRSDC). This project is focused on defining and measuring elder abuse and neglect and was initiated by the National Initiative for Care of the Elder (NICE), of which Kevin is a member. He has actively participated in a number of conferences and has authored, to date, eleven internationally peer-reviewed journal articles. Kevin's law of life? – The more one learns, the more one comes to understand how little one knows (so be cautious of those who let on they know everything).

DON ROSS, M. Env. Studies, spent 16 years in Public Policy and Strategic Planning for the Ontario Government. He is owner of the Manticore bookstore in Orillia and is the current Chairman of the Orillia Museum of Art and History. He reads 50-70 books per year, mostly literature and history.

Humility (Junior: 1st Place)

-- by Jessica Andrea Linda Snache, Grade 10, Twin Lakes S. S.

Humility: it is easy to define but not as easy to find. Humility is a composite of awe, respect, gratitude, compassion, love and contentment in the world, and it is a quality which these days is slowly disappearing in a cold and ungrateful world.

Humility is feeling awe for our beautiful Earth and universe. Awe is the feeling of surprise and being impressed with the world's wonders. A young child's eyes are filled with awe for a long time, but as the child grows older those interested eyes fade to a cold and logical, empty place. Nowadays, awe is hard to feel. It seems there is no surprise and that everything has an explanation. It takes much more than a simple 'penny from behind the ear' trick to impress anyone. Our wonder for the world is slowly falling from our eyes. We continue to seek answers, but without innocence and hope. We want to be awed, but it seems we've seen everything so that awe is no longer there. *"The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed."*

Humility involves having respect for others, but also having respect for yourself. If one does not respect oneself, how does one expect to give others the same level of respect? Current generations are beginning to see one another as just another person getting in their way in this world. Suddenly, moving out of the way for someone coming towards you down the sidewalk turns into a shoulder bump. *"To become truly great, one has to stand with people, not above them."*

Humility involves the gratitude you feel for others. Have we heard the words "thank you" lately? Why do I not include these words in my vocabulary? Why can I not thank a person

who has stopped to hold a door open for me, or thank my bus driver? We no longer seem to feel grateful for what we have or for what others do for us. We've always been in such luxury. When have we had to say thank you for our clean water? *“Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world.”*

Humility is compassion. It is the feeling of sympathy for the little girl crying on the streets or the man being hauled onto a stretcher and into the ambulance. It is the urge to volunteer to work for those less fortunate. It is the willingness to hear the stories of the blind, elderly man on the bus. Compassion is taking time to hold your best friend's hand when her boyfriend breaks up with her or making your family dinner because your parents are stressed. Compassion is taking the time to care for others. *“Compassion is sometimes the fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you, too.”*

Humility is love. Love is what we all seek whether we want to admit it or not. We all yearn for someone to hold us, to tell us they love us. If that is true, then why do we not see love? Why do we see bombs exploding from wars on the TV? Why do we see people being murdered? Why do we get made fun of for who we are? Is love not what we all want? Love is caring, not just for yourself and your needs, but for others, as well. The next time you see a man on the streets, will you stop to give him a meal or money, or will you keep walking and think ‘ he should have tried harder’? It seems there is no time to love. The world is moving so fast and becoming so cold and unfriendly that people are scared to step out of the line being drawn for us. They say that, long ago, people who had disabilities or didn't fit in were cast aside or killed. Have we really changed today? People are still being cast aside and hurt. Love is calling

someone beautiful when they are sad; love is caring for a stranger; love is listening to others; and love is helping those in need. Will our great-great-grandchildren look back at our era and say, “Where is the love? Why is war and the killing of people so common?” *“Love is the condition in which the happiness of another person is essential to your own.”*

Humility is the contentment we have in this world. Why, oh why, mother, why am I no longer grateful for what anyone provides for me? Why can't I find contentment in what I have? I want. I want. I want. Why should I be grateful for things I already have when I do not own what I want? This cycle never ends. It seems these days we can't be satisfied with having a roof over our heads. We need the new plasma screen TV. We need the newest, fastest car. We need the new Barbie doll or the new game console. We forget that some people in Africa have no homes, no clean water and starve. Children in third world countries like Africa have never even seen a Barbie. Yet, everyday poverty stricken people can smile and have the most wholesome laughs; it is they who have been able to see the world's beauty. *“Contentment is natural wealth, luxury is artificial poverty.”*

Humility should be life's number one law. If we all were humble, we'd stop the cries of starving children in Africa and bring our soldiers back from war. We'd stop being jealous and power hungry. We'd stop thousands of tears from falling and we'd see more faces smiling. Let's free each other from the chains of despair and walk into a bright new world filled with wonder and innocence.

“Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself at all.”

~William Temple

Life – The Ultimate Match (Senior: 1st Place)

-- by Olivia Di Bacco, Grade 12, ODCVI

Wrestling. No other sport has taught me more about life – or about myself. Defined by Michael Clapier as “the most physically and psychologically grueling of sports,” there is no question that wrestling is a demanding teacher. However, while most of the lessons I’ve learned on the mat have been harsh, through them I have gained something very valuable. Wrestling has shown me a law that I now view as central, not just to how I wrestle, but more importantly to how I live. It is a simple law – don’t give up.

My journey as a wrestler has been marked by two significant events - two trips to OFSAA, the Ontario provincial wrestling championships. At my first OFSAA, I did not abide by this law. As a result, my final placing was lower than anticipated. However, worse than my standing was the knowledge that I had not done my best. In my toughest matches, I had folded at the end. My coaches, my teammates and my family all congratulated me on what they viewed as a successful first OFSAA – but I knew better. I knew that I had been capable of more; my failure came not because I was lacking in ability, but because I had given up.

To be a successful wrestler, you must be determined. There will be countless times when you will fall. You will hit the mat hard, wincing, your mind thinking “not again.” The question is, will you rise after you fall? Will you pick yourself up, give yourself a shake, and try again? How you react to failure, to disappointment, will have a huge impact on your future as a wrestler, and on your future as a person.

In the year leading up to my second OFSAA trip, the memory of my previous failure was a powerful motivator whenever I felt like giving up or slacking off. Recalling the faces of those

who had beaten me, the way it felt to be pinned – these were all motivating. The biggest push of all, though, was remembering how I felt after quitting. Lance Armstrong once said, “Pain is temporary . . . if I quit . . . it lasts forever.” I can attest to the truth of this statement. I did not want to feel the pain that came from giving up again. “Don’t give up” became my mantra – both on and off the mat.

As a wrestler, you are alone. On the mat there can be no excuses. There is no one else to blame. And while others may motivate you, once you are in the ring, it is the choices you make that will determine the outcome. When you are winning, it is because of you. However, the same is true when you are losing. You must accept responsibility for your actions, remembering that the attitude with which you approach the match will go a long way towards deciding the outcome. In victory and in defeat, you are the deciding factor.

Wrestling is no sport for the fainthearted. There will be matches when you face an opponent who is stronger, faster, or more skilled than you. You will look across the mat, and fear will make your hands shake, your mouth dry, your stomach roll. Faced with a seemingly insurmountable challenge, you will feel inadequate, ill prepared for the battle ahead. How you react to challenges, to adversity, will shape both who you are and who you will become.

On the mat, you will hear many voices. Some will be cheering, others, booing. There will be those who want you to fail and when you do, they will rejoice in your shortcomings. And sometimes, when you hear those voices, you feel as if all hope is lost, and the world has turned against you.

However, when you want to give up, remember the other voices. Take heed to the voices telling you to keep going, the ones inspiring you to push yourself, encouraging you to be the best

you can be. Both in life, and on the mat, you have a choice. You can listen to the voice that is telling you that you don't have what it takes. You can give up. Or you can listen to the motivating voice from your corner, the encouraging voice in the stands – and press on towards the goal. Will you let the voices of fear and failure drown out the cheers of those who believe in you? The choice is yours.

No matter how talented or successful a wrestler is, there is always something new to learn. Learning must be continuous, not just because there are others waiting to knock you off the podium, but also because the moment you stop learning your growth as a wrestler will grind to a halt. Yes, we learn so we can succeed –we hone techniques, sharpen movements so that we can win. However, if that is the only reason we are learning, what happens when, as is inevitable in sport, we lose?

If learning is success-oriented, there will come a time when you will want to give up. Your results won't meet with your expectations; you will feel that you are a failure. Such is the mindset of those who learn solely for the purpose of achievement.

We should learn hoping to achieve, yes – but that is not the primary goal. As a wrestler, I study the sport not just to win more medals (although that is an incentive). I learn for the simple reason that I love to wrestle. When I learn something new, I am excited to try it out. I ask questions, lots and lots of questions, because I have a desire to know all that I can about this sport. I want to become a better wrestler because the satisfaction I feel after a hard-fought match is one of the best feelings in the world. The challenge of pitting yourself, alone, against an opponent, the stress release after a hard physical workout, the knowledge that you are responsible for your fate on the mat – these are just some of the reasons I love to wrestle. For

these, and other reasons, I keep coming back to the mat. And as I do so, I discover more about the sport – and myself.

As a second year wrestler, I can – indeed, I must – learn from all around me. When I watch the younger kids wrestle, I am reminded that wrestling is about fun. If you don't enjoy what you're doing, why are you wasting so much time and energy on it? From the experienced veterans, I learn what it takes to sharpen my skills – and the sacrifices necessary to become a champion.

However, it is from my opponents that I learn the most. They are the ones who shatter my confidence. They strip away my pretenses. In defeat, my adversaries expose my weaknesses to the world. Losing is a humbling experience. It is, though, something we all must go through in life. It has taught me much about myself – about what motivates my actions. Losing has also revealed glimpses of my character that I am not proud of.

There is one match burned into my memory. It was an important match at my first OFSAA. In a split second, I lost the advantage, and found myself in a compromising position. Instead of fighting, I did what I now view as a cardinal offence.

I gave up.

I let her pin me.

Even now, thinking back on it, the memory leaves a bitter taste in my mouth. What made things worse was the consolations of my coaches and teammates after the match – they were congratulating me, expressing regret that I hadn't ended up winning.

They didn't know - couldn't see - what I knew for a fact. I knew exactly why I had lost. I had given up when it became most important to keep fighting; I had folded when the match got tough. Looking at myself, I saw something that shamed me - I was a quitter.

I went home that night and did some serious self-examining. Was this how it was to be? Was I going to keep giving up, when things became difficult? What kind of person did that make me, to stop trying when I got discouraged?

I was disgusted with myself. That wasn't the kind of wrestler I wanted to be. That wasn't the kind of person I wanted to be.

That match, although the memory still stings, proved a pivotal turning point in my development as a wrestler.

I came back to training with a new mindset – do your best, and let the results take care of themselves. During tough practices, with pain my constant companion, if I ever felt like giving up, I would recall that moment of failure. I would remember how it felt to be pinned. I would remember watching someone else's hand be raised in victory, not because she earned the win, but because I gave it to her. I would remember the hot, angry tears of shame I cried that night at home. And in remembering, I would find the strength to keep going.

I have been to OFSAA, the provincial championships, twice.

The first time, I came home carrying the weight of disappointment and failure.

The second time, I came home with a gold medal.

There is no shame in losing – I have lost many times and have still been able to walk off the mat with a sense of accomplishment. There is shame, though, in failing to give your best effort. When I could have done more, yet chose not to– that is the definition of failure.

My wrestling journey has just begun. I still have so much to learn. Yet, I may have already learned one of the most important lessons wrestling can teach a person – that determination and a refusal to quit can reap rewards. If I can wrestle this way – if I can live this way – I can walk off the mat with my head held high.

We are not all wrestlers. But life, in many ways, is like a wrestling match. And as such, the law that applies to wrestling pertains to life as well. Don't give up.

Yes, there will be times when you are beaten – but don't let it be because you gave less than your best effort. If you do your best, regardless of the final outcome – that in itself is a measure of success.

So enter the ring. Shake hands with your opponent. Put your heart into your match – and leave it all on the mat.

Words of Dr. Seuss (Senior: 2nd Place)

-- by Megan White, Grade 12, Park Street C. I.

We all have something to live by, some phrase or quote which keeps us going when we're down or if we need something to believe in—a law of life, if you will. When I was younger I was bullied for the way I was, for being myself. I have a really bubbly and happy personality—which, of course, to many meant I was “fake.” I like to dance—so I was “a show off.” I made friends with guys easier than with girls—so I was “promiscuous.” People would say the meanest things, and when I really had no one to rely on, it was the wise words of a man named Dr. Seuss that held my hand: “Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind.”

Ever since I was a little girl, I've been very free-spirited and an all around happy person. I hardly complained about things and cried only when I was truly hurt by something or someone. For some reason, that didn't help with the friend-making process in high school. I was nice to everyone who passed by and never judged a person before I spoke to them and got to know them a little bit more than I would at first glance. Unfortunately, people didn't feel like using such consideration towards me. To a lot of the people around me, I was considered fake just because I was nice. Because I always had a smile on my face, I was not actually being me—which was the exact opposite of the truth. I was called fake for being myself. I guess, according to Dr. Seuss, those are the people that don't matter in the big scheme of life. If they mind that I am confident enough in myself to be myself, then I guess they have no business being in my life.

I've been dancing since the age of five (going on thirteen years now). I've progressed as a dancer and in a way found myself through the dancing that I've done. People say that I'm quite good, and I could be modest and say that I'm no good, but I know that I am. I'm a good dancer because of the time and energy that I've put into it. Sometimes my school has talent shows, or we have a musical with dance numbers. As the dedicated person I am, I will practise whenever and wherever I can. Apparently this makes me a show off, because I dance in front of people who don't dance. This is one of those things that I do not understand at all. People who are good at basketball or soccer play the sport in front of a huge crowd, but they aren't show-offs? People who are amazing singers sing down the hallway and they aren't show offs either? But if I happen to do a plie or leg kick in the school, I am automatically showing off how much "better" I am than the people around me. I'm sorry. Last time I checked I can do what I want; it's a free country. Dr. Seuss was right: I should be able to do what I feel if that is something that I enjoy. People who mind need to keep it to themselves because I am just being me. If they don't like it, then what are they doing in my life?

I am a very laid back, chill person who just wants to be happy in life and drama-free. Most girls are *not* like me at all. They feed off the drama that other girls create and are constantly craving it in their everyday life because that is the most exciting thing that happens in their lives. This is my main reason for having more guy friends than girl friends. They are chill and don't care how you act. Most guys accept you for who you are. If you're willing to play a little pick-up hockey with them, you are considered a friend. They are easy to talk to and are the last ones to judge you on appearance or personality. Since I have mostly boys in my group of friends, many of the girls in my grade like to consider me somewhat "promiscuous", for lack of a better or more appropriate word. Apparently I am stealing away all the potential boyfriends and

keeping them all for myself? Those girls can gladly date them; I have no interest in any of them that way. I'm simply making friends that are actually true friends and won't talk about me when I'm not looking. As Dr. Seuss says, I am simply being myself with people who matter, because they actually don't mind.

We've all got something to live for, something that we believe in because there is nothing or no one there for us. Dr. Seuss is my getaway from the horrible people that I have had the misfortune of encountering in my life. He helps me understand that I am allowed to be strong and block them out to make room for things that truly matter in my life. "Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind." That is my law of life.

Walking in Another's Shoes (Senior: 3rd Place)

-- by Gabrielle Spencer, Grade 12, Twin Lakes S. S.

Before entering grade nine, I went to a country school and lived in the small village of Washago, meaning that there were never many options for who your friends were. I hung out with the girls I had grown up with and known since I was very little. When we were very young, we were the best of friends and usually got on great. I had always been quieter than they and not very confident, but I was willing to go with the flow as long as I could be included. However, in our later years of elementary school, as we became teenagers, I dealt with what many may perceive as typical teenage girl behaviour. Because I take everything to heart, the comments and silly games they'd play were always hurtful.

I became that girl on the outside of the group, the odd one out who never really felt a part of anything. I remember my so-called "friends" making plans together in front of me, deliberately leaving me out and acting as if they didn't know how hurtful it was. They'd talk about something that was apparently very funny and interesting, but would never let me in on what it was, even when I asked. One thing was for sure, though: I would NEVER let them see that they were capable of hurting me.

Because of my pride, I'd wait till I got home from school to cry. I could never understand how girls could knowingly be so mean and hurtful. My mom has always been my comfort, there for me at all times and trying her hardest to protect me and make me see that I am better than those girls who deliberately bring me down. She'd say to me, "*Maybe there's a reason they feel the need to make you upset.*" After hearing that, I asked myself, what could

possibly be so wrong with their lives that they needed to hurt me in order to make themselves feel better? I realised that I would never get the answer to that question.

Experiencing this type of bullying at a young age taught me to be considerate of other people's feelings. I have always been careful to take my time and think about how a decision or action of mine will affect someone else. I developed a very important trait which enabled me to put myself in someone else's shoes and imagine how they are feeling, a trait which many people lack but which I believe to be a law of life: empathy.

No one really knows someone better than they know themselves. Perhaps if we were able to hear one another's thoughts, we would understand the reason why someone feels a certain way. But because we can't, those who lack empathy are incapable of truly understanding a situation which someone else is in and, consequently, do not have compassion. Empathy is important in day-to-day life and should be a law of life to society because it gives us the ability to visualize another's position and understand another's feelings, ideas, actions and desires.

Whether it's helping someone who has knocked a stack of cereal boxes off a shelf in the grocery store, or something more serious, such as comforting a friend who has just lost someone close to them, empathy allows you to take a walk in another's shoes and imagine how you would feel if you were in that situation. We should treat others as we would like to be treated. This characteristic is very valuable and has many traits associated with it, such as tolerance, respect, sympathy and compassion. Due to its importance, empathy is an attribute which we should all strive to achieve in order to keep ourselves and others happy.

Honesty: Life's Beacon at Sea (Senior: 1st Runner-up)

-- by Grant Mask, Grade 12, Twin Lakes S. S.

Honesty throughout one's life is a tremendously important quality as it is a measure of one's moral success. It is the definition of integrity, personal triumph and victory. Honesty in life epitomizes the beam of a lighthouse tower, piercing through the darkness above an endless sea, revealing to us the proper passages to follow despite the efforts of the vast waves and high winds to lead us astray. Honesty is a self-truth so significant, in fact, that without it one could not lead a life full of legitimate intentions, build genuine relationships, or achieve a sincere sense of self-direction. Without such guiding beacons in life, many are lost in a sea of obscurity and despair, forever sailing in circles around the mistakes and wrong turns they have made in the past. But how do we go about making the right choices in life? How can we avoid repeating the same mistakes over and over again? The answer is simple. In order to attain such desirable attributes of a successful and satisfying life, not only is it important to be honest with the people around you, but also to remain honest—in every aspect—to yourself.

First and foremost, the most recognizable form of honesty may be depicted as a lighthouse beacon from which we direct others through a foggy haze of half-truths and duplicity. We have all experienced those familiar situations where a quick, simple twist of the truth seems to be the ideal solution to all of our troubles. Sometimes, this is the passage we choose to follow, and often we manage to get away with little or no consequence. Other times, however, we are led to discover the shipwreck of a consequence that now far out-weighs the initial difficulty we experienced in the first place. By taking the dishonest route, we have only accomplished making things much harder on ourselves. It is just like that all too well-known quotation we have heard time and time again: "If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging" (Anonymous). This saying

accurately emphasizes the concept that if we are dishonest with others, we have only discovered a quick fix and not, in fact, a genuine solution. In the long run, once the truth has been discovered, people will lose faith in us and consider us to be unreliable—again, only broadening the original severity of the problem. Alternatively, if others do not realize our dishonesty, we will have shamefully gotten away with misleading them by navigating them away from any real truth. We will fail to establish sincere and candid relationships with the people around us. This poses a potential problem when the wind’s direction turns back upon our sails, for then we will feel as though we are being deceived by everyone around us. It is a cold, hard fact: if we cannot be honest with ourselves, then how can we be certain of honesty in others? Is it likely that we should feel we are told the truth when we ourselves would lie in such a situation? Certainly not! In reality, what it all comes down to is merely a matter of asking ourselves, “Am I being honest with myself?” We base our response to this question—as well as define our character—on the past experiences and personal beliefs that we hold inside. Ultimately, honesty is a choice that we are faced with throughout life, and it is up to each of us to make the right decision.

As suggested above, in addition to the importance of one’s honesty among friends, neighbours and strangers, there is an even greater value in having the trait emanate prominently from oneself. Consider this: where does the value of honesty stand if we constantly mislead ourselves? If inner truth and sincerity fail to indicate north on the compass that guides our life’s voyage, then what is to keep us from sailing helplessly in the wrong direction? It has been said that “Like all valuable commodities, truth is often counterfeited” (James Cardinal Gibbons). An asset as valuable as the truth is bound to be forged just as money is often counterfeited. It is much easier to simply print one thousand dollars than it is to go out in to the real world and make the money; similarly, it can be easier to lie than to tell the truth and deal with the consequences

of that truth once and for all. If the truth is something that we are willing to throw overboard so readily, do we not risk losing everything sincere and certain about our character? Neglecting to be truthful with others is bad enough, but if we cannot be honest with ourselves, then what can we honestly say about our self-worth? As mentioned, in order to achieve a legitimate sense of satisfaction in life, we must strive to be honest and sincere to ourselves.

In conclusion, honesty throughout the voyage of one's life plays a key role in judging the measure of one's moral success. It is the means by which one can construct the foundation of life's expedition, develop true relationships, and achieve a legitimate sense of self-accomplishment. In the end, it is inconsequential whether or not your dishonesty can pass by others undetected, as it will only reveal a temporary passage past your problems—and into the treacherous waters where you will inevitably shipwreck. Honesty must be guided in all aspects toward the people surrounding you, just as it must exist within yourself in order for a greater sense of direction and feeling of satisfaction with life to be achieved. Let honesty guide you throughout your journeys on the great sea of life. To have it any other way would only be to mislead yourself.

Live Your Life (Senior: 2nd Runner-Up)

-- by Amanda McConnell, Grade 12, Twin Lakes S. S.

Is the light of the candle that you cast upon your life a darker glow or a brighter ray? Whatever the candle, it is how one views one's life. It is this view that changes the aspects of life as one perceives it. For instance, a young, ambitious spirit could go about this world, curious and seeking knowledge, finding beauty within the complexity of architecture, the structure of society, and even the blossoming of flowers. At the same time, a haggard, withering old man may see the destruction of life as he knows it. He sees a technology-based society full of liars and thieves ruining the value of families and what used to be unconditional love. These are two different people, two different views, two entirely different worlds.

Your view on life can ultimately affect how you feel, think and act. In my personal experience, I have found that thinking positively has changed my outlook on the world greatly. Perhaps the old man may not have been so haggard if he just accepted what 'is'. Perhaps the ambitious spirit would have a different outlook on life if he or she were brought up differently and in harsher situations. Everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion and perspective, but life might not be as bad as it feels if you just *try*. I consider this to be a law of life and one that I live by: light a candle rather than curse the dark.

Most often, people tend to wallow in self-pity, refusing to look at the brighter side of things. It is hard when everything seems to crumble around you, disintegrating into ashes, but it can be done. Everyone has felt like this at one point in his or her life; however, in light of things, it creates a golden opportunity. That opportunity is realisation. It is when you can look at what has happened, what will be, what happens next, and reflect upon it. Reflect upon the fact that

you can change your surroundings and atmosphere, learn from your experiences, and help others in need. In turn, this helps to better yourself as well as others.

I have learned that I shouldn't be sorry for things I cannot change; instead, I accept things the way they are and I continue to let those realisations help me and change me into a better person. The old man refuses to accept the change occurring within his life with each passing day. Little does he know change affects everyone else, too. People change and adapt to the way the world turns, but some choose not to accept, and they curse the plague that they think has caused a disturbance in their environment. The ambitious youth takes these experiences and works with change to help him or her succeed in everyday life. They take opportunity as it comes and they do not waste a moment's time contemplating the affects of change.

Furthermore, is anything so tragic as to be unsupportable? Someone will always be there, whatever the problem, whatever the time. The death of a family member or friend, a missing child, perhaps the quitting of an addiction—not one person shall be alone within the dealing of a disaster or problem. Does one really have a reason to be as upset compared to if they were alone? Help is just a reach away; it all depends on whether people decide to spread out their arms to grasp it.

I have had eight years to find help. I was never able to because I kept being caught up in my fears. I had fears that I would be ridiculed or shunned or made fun of. I thought they would laugh at me because I didn't have a mom to help me fix my hair.

The man continues to cast away help, telling himself that it isn't needed or wanted. This can cause unease and frustration within family and home life. The youth grabs help whenever it

comes and, in turn, helps others when needed to create a balanced bond between him and society.

Lastly, the ones who decide not to help themselves can't receive help from anyone else. Until they decide that they can and will appreciate it, not a single other person can be there for them. This is one of the many problems society has today, accepting help. It may be for attention, loneliness, or fear that no one *can* help them. No one truly knows until they try. Those who say they are unable to be helped are so absorbed in their own problems that they are unaware of others' feelings. It hurts people when someone says they cannot be helped or that they should just stop trying. Everyone can receive help; it just has to be accepted and appreciated. 'Help' is the candle in the dark for many people; it is a choice that has to be made to truly become happier.

The haggard man eventually died due to old age. He had his last moments with his family who all loved him dearly. With his last few breaths, he realised the potential of change and how it can influence someone in ways good or bad, but it is what you make of it that matters. The ambitious spirit went on to travel the world, to seek beauty in many places—and realised how good things can really be. They both embraced change and the potential of making things good for themselves. It is easy to light a candle; you just have to find matches or a lighter.

I found the matches to help me through the darkest of times. Those matches were symbols of love in a time that I needed most. Most of my life I have grown up without a mother and the loss shook me to my core. What do daughters do, without a mother to help them through their troubles? We accept change, grasp opportunity, receive and give help where needed, push through the dark days when there was no candle to find, and love unconditionally.

I am Amanda, and I lost my mother to suicide when I was nine. I was able to light my own candle and find help in many different ways. I found the light of love within my darkest times.

Mental Strength (Senior: 3rd Runner-Up)

-- Andrew DeCola, Grade 12, Park Street C. I.

Different people use different strategies and plans to prepare for events such as a hockey game. Some people listen to music, some people chat with teammates, others just get their equipment on. I like to mentally prepare for big events in my life. As Epictetus once said, “First say to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do.” This quote really strikes home with me because it is exactly what I do. I like to be prepared and confident for any major event that happens in my life.

Rocky Balboa may not be a real person, but his stories are the source of inspiration for many people, including myself. After a bad round where he takes a vicious beating, he stumbles to his corner and Mickey yells in his ear. “NO PAIN, NO PAIN!” is all Rocky hears. But why say “no pain”? He obviously feels the pain of the multiple cuts and contusions on his face from the battering of punches that he has taken to his ribs and surrounding areas. Still, through all of the pain he physically feels, he can just suddenly get back up and go fight another round—and fight well. The Italian Stallion is like an unstoppable force in the ring, not because he is the biggest or strongest, but because he is determined and prepares himself properly for every fight. Mental preparation is key for Rocky. He runs through the same routine before every fight and between rounds, and this is what makes him so successful and inspirational. When the right mental buttons are pressed, his mental toughness maintains his physical toughness, and he can achieve his goal no matter what the circumstances.

Rocky is the original “Italian Stallion,” but my peers have used the same nickname for me for many years now. Other than this nickname, Rocky and I do not have much in common,

except our brains. I am not saying that I am stupid like Rocky, but that both of us can block out whatever we want and focus on the task at hand. I believe that this hockey season was the best of my career. I think that the way I prepared for games this season contributed to the season it was for me. Before every game, I would go for a light jog and do some stretches. This would not only help get me physically prepared for the game, it would also give me confidence, knowing that I was physically prepared for the game. Aside from stretching, I would be at the rink about one and a half hours before the game, so I could just be around the rink and get comfortable and relaxed before the game. I would always be ready about fifteen to twenty minutes before game time. I would use this time to just sit and visualize the game: what I would be doing in certain situations, a big hit, a pass to set up a goal, stopping a two on one, making a good first pass out of the defensive zone—whatever I needed to do to help the team win. When I was finished visualizing, I would listen to my coach’s pre-game talk and add my input if I felt it was needed. I went through this same routine about forty times this season, and it did seem to pay off for me. I felt I had my best individual season of my career. Apparently so did my coaches, as I was selected by them as one of two players to represent my team at the Georgian Bay Minor Hockey League All-Star Game in Creemore. I believe that this happened because I changed my pre-game routine and began to prepare more for games.

I have been a student who does not need to study much for tests. Everyone thinks that it is just because I am smart. I don’t think that I *am* actually that smart. Some of my friends that know me well always say that I am “the dumbest smart kid” that they know. I can attest to this because I do not always make the best decisions. Even though I may not be smart, I still do well in school. I think that the reason is because I have a good memory and I listen, for the most part, in class. The teachers give everything that will be on tests throughout the unit, and I listen to

them and remember what is said. Writing notes makes it easier because writing things down helps people remember more. So when test time rolls around, all I have to do is review my notes the day before or the day of, and everything that I may have forgotten will come back to me. After reviewing my notes for about ten to fifteen minutes, I have confidence that I know everything, and I feel prepared for the test.

“Think before you do” seems like such a simple task, but it is surprising how many people act on instinct and end up making the wrong decision. Mental strength is important to all people; it is much more powerful than physical strength. I am a thinker before a doer; I use my brain to my advantage. Your brain is a powerful thing when you use it, so my law of life is “Use your brain.”

A Dealt Card Away (Senior: 3rd Runner-Up)

-- Courtney Fletcher, Grade 12, Park Street C. I.

Many people say that it is love which binds us all together, but is it? In a world full of seemingly unhappy people, can it really be love that binds us together? Human beings have a history of trying to destroy each other, and that is what we are best at as a species. Empathy is seen as weakness in a world where lies translate into dollars and happiness. Everyone lies, whether to themselves or others, and in society lies are simply written off as “being sensitive to other’s feelings.” Are we in complete denial? Are we a complete bunch of bumbling, baffling buffoons? Lies do not help other people or ourselves; they simply make us feel better in the here and now. Which are the most detrimental lies? The lies that we tell ourselves—particularly the lies about our past regrets—are crippling to anyone’s existence. Life becomes like a poker game, with everyone lying until they can guess the other person’s weakness. Only one person can win, but no one makes it out of life alive.

The lies that surround us in our day-to-day lives fill the space around us in a dense and sticky web that we cannot pry ourselves free from. We tell lies to give ourselves some comfort when something is too depressing or difficult to think about. A lie places a halo around any negative topic that is not simple and positive. We like to lie, and maybe not all of us are good at it, but we still try. Who are we lying to protect? The “kind” liars would say that it is to protect the people that we care about from hearing a hurtful truth. This is completely bogus, because we all lie for one person only—ourselves. We cover up the fact that we do not want to be the person to tell someone something hurtful by saying that it is “for their own good.” Friendships are run by half-truths and lies, as are cities, governments, and whole countries. Half-truths like “Oh, they do not need to know how huge they look in that.” Lies like “No, the public doesn’t need to know

that they were the ones who just bailed out the banks who took their money and almost crashed the stock market.” We don’t need to know these kinds of things? Yes, we do, for that way we can recognize the lies when we see them. You cannot be looking for something if you do not know it is there. Lying is something that is going to be there always, but we need to stop acting like doe-eyed teenagers when we see it. Can you guess whether or not the players at your table are lying? Can they see that you are? To beat the game, we must play it better than those who are playing against us.

We lie to ourselves about our past regrets, claiming that we have none. Yet everyone has regrets because no one has done what they always wished to do. People make sacrifices for their careers, for someone that they love, or even the greater good. These regrets sit on the backburner of our consciousness and simmer. Have you ever met one of those soulless people whose dreams have been completely destroyed? You’ve seen them. They walk down the street from home to their jobs day after day, eyes empty because the sparkle of hope that used to be there has been extinguished with their own lies. No one wants to become consumed by what they did not do, but how can they escape it? Some people pick a new path and pour all of their essence into it. Others simply lie and say that it was not really their dream. People often have regrets about the ones they loved. They lie to themselves at the end of it all and say that they would have spent more time with their family, given more to charity, been a more compassionate person. No. The person they were was the person that they were always going to be. If they could do it again, they would react the same way and be as selfish as before. People always have regrets when there is nothing that can be done to correct them. Maybe this is related to the fact that we always want what we cannot have. If you are a mean creature like Ebenezer Scrooge, that is who you are; you cannot convince yourself that it would be different the second time

around, that you would suddenly be a Gandhi or Mother Teresa. Place yourself back at that table; you just put back a card only to draw another that is far worse than the one before. If you could turn back the clock, would you still take that card? Yes. You *would* have taken that gamble again because that is the person you are. There is no use in lying about past mistakes.

Lies and regrets keep you in the past. If you want to do something, you do it. You do not stand there talking about it until the opportunity is just a mirage in your memory. Opportunities are like trying to hold onto smoke; they slip through your finger tips in a fraction of a nanosecond. People on the brink of death know this better than most. If you wait, there is no way to get that chance back again. There is no telling where you could have gone if you turned left instead of right. Climb the mountain now, set the record now, and, for goodness' sake, do it as soon as possible. As a teenager, I know that I have missed things that most people would say meet the criteria of being "important." The missed dances, the missed teams, and other things I do not regret in the least. Why do I feel this way? I know implicitly that, if I had wanted to do these things with every fibre of my being, I would have done them. Our lives are short, brief and messy, and they never happen the way we want them to. All right, so maybe there are certain activities that someone may want to save until they are sure that their death is eminent. Perhaps any personal grudges and illegal activities are better saved for when we cannot be incarcerated. Anything else is purely you telling yourself that it can wait, or that age old lie of "I really shouldn't." Yes, you must—not just for yourself but for all others who are too ignorant to see what is staring them in the face with flashing neon and waving arms. Are you going to call the person's bluff? Why not, considering you won't get that chance again? Win or lose, you played the game.

A character who possesses few regrets is the TV character, Dr. House. It is from this cornucopia of cynicism that we can derive our philosophy: “Dying people lie, too. Wish they’d worked less, been nicer, opened orphanages for kittens. If you really want to do something, you do it. You don’t save it for a sound bite.” I live by this wholeheartedly because I have seen too many dear people die inside and become a hollow shell. If I want to do something I do it. No one can stand in my way. Let’s be realistic. I do not give myself false hopes and expect to reach them. But neither do I discount a road that seems to have an astronomically low chance of success. Sometimes you take that dive over the precipice without looking down. There could be jagged rocks below that impale you or a lake to break your fall before you carry on. It is that pivotal time; the poker player next to you has called your stake in the game. Your move is next: fold or cash all in?

Kiwanis Club of Orillia

Just some of our 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!

We are always looking for new members. Please visit our website at

www.kiwanisorillia.ca

Our annual Mammoth Auction is our largest fundraising event. Please come out and support us on Saturday, November 5, 2011 at ODAS Park.