

Essays on adversity and achievement

by Bottom Line students

I am the opportunity

*Now, I don't see that next challenge
to engage me.*

Afraid? No.

Hesitant? Of course not.

Ready? As I'll ever be.



Bottom Line

Get in ♦ Graduate ♦ Go far

Success depends on you

Finding Paths to Personal Achievement

The essays in this book were written by high school seniors from the class of 2009 in Bottom Line's College Access program. With Bottom line's support, these students learn to navigate complex college research, application, and financial aid processes. Perhaps the most challenging task of the college application is perfecting the essay. This is a piece of writing unlike anything each student has ever written: a 500 word statement that represents their past, present and future. These brief statements cannot adequately describe the versatile, multidimensional students who write them, but they do provide a glimpse of their strength, courage and perseverance.

Most Bottom Line students are in the first generation in their family to go to college. Many have been in the U.S. for only a few years; others play a critical role in providing financial support and other resources for their families. They are all remarkable young adults. Their dedication drives them to travel from all over the city to our office to spend hours with counselors completing their college applications. Their hard work pays off: 98% are accepted into at least one college.

Bottom Line is a nonprofit organization founded in 1997 to help improve the quality of life in urban communities through higher education. Our staff creates opportunities for socially and economically challenged urban youth to lead successful lives by earning college degrees. Bottom Line helps students overcome the formidable barriers to "get in" and graduate with support programs and personalized attention. Our students earn college degrees at twice the rate of the national average in their peer group. Bottom Line alumni overcome incredible personal hurdles and become role models of success for their community, as well as sources of inspiration to their families and peers.

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Solving Problems, Seeking Cures

by Stacy Ogierumwense



At a very young age, Stacy had an interest in the fields of Computer Science and Engineering. At Fenway High School, she is at the top of her class. Outside of the classroom, she participates in activities that reflect her academic interests, such as the Engineering Club, 3D Animation and C++ Programming. Stacy's final college list consists of schools that have stellar Engineering and Computer Science programs such as Smith College, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Tufts University, Rice University, Carnegie Mellon University, and UMass Amherst.

I ripped apart its body and tore ravenously through its contents looking for a solution. Weaving through seemingly endless lines of kanji, I was hoping to decode the package's ambiguity. I was attempting to cook my first healthy dish: Japanese udon noodles with simmered beef in a light sauce for my mother. I have always loved solving problems, especially those that present themselves as unsolvable, so I took this challenge with alacrity. However, I learned that most problems in the natural world are of an uncontrollable magnitude. It bothers me, however, when a problem has no solution; I strive to find it because all problems must contain at least one, right? Coming up with "cures", not only tangible ones, but emotional ones, has become a pastime for me in the last two years.

My family moved from Texas to Boston after learning that my mother had a rare and advanced cancer. My aunt and her husband, who urged us to move to Boston to seek treatment, allowed us to stay in their home while my father resided in New York with his sister, to care for his diabetes. My family moved a total of three times in one year: from one shelter to another shelter and then to a development that is our current residence. It was in this residence that I had a plethora of experiences that molded my character.

Flirting with ideas of homemade cures for quite some time now has led me to search for an authentic one. Whenever the bruises on my mother's leg troubled her, I developed "ice packs", which were a few cubes of ice bundled into a Stop 'n' Shop bag set atop a towel to decrease my mother's resistance to very cold objects. This desire to find such cures continued to manifest from watching my mother sulk to her room after her chemotherapy treatments. Whenever she would start to cry, I would call my brother to her room, and he and I would put on plays imitating our uncle, aunt, and cousins who lived close by. My uncle's nasally voice colorized any verbal mutterings that spewed forth from his mouth and characterized many of our acts. These especially, were my mother's favorite, and she was often "cured" of her somber spell.

This desire to solve problems that present themselves as unsolvable led me to want to 'solve' cancer. The problem with problems so to speak, is that they often have more than one solution. I guess it's my obsessive compulsive nature that makes me want to try another one when one fails. So with this in mind I reverted back to solving this seemingly arduous task of healthy cooking, the English instructions sat glaring at me. I ignored its scathing glare and looked to the Japanese ones that were far more appealing. It was about time that I picked up a few more kanji. Hastily I emptied the contents of the package into the simmering pot that was waiting to devour its cream colored prey. Retreating to a nearby chair and perusing the battered package for any kanji that I had left unread, I listened nonchalantly to the fading sounds of my adversary as its voracious predator consumed the last bits of its rawness. My mother would be satisfied.

A Brighter Day

by Abdulle Anis



Anis grew up in Somalia and moved to the US in time to enter high school, where he has worked tirelessly to make his college dreams a reality. At English High School, he has been an active member of Student Government and the soccer team and has achieved a 4.3 GPA. He has his sights set on Princeton, Brown, Harvard, BU, or Tufts.

My mother's battle began on the banks of a river near our home in Somalia. For two years after the civil war, my mother, my sister and I lived in a two-room structure with no windows, no electricity and no running water. Chunks of the roof had rusted away exposing us to the sky. Conditions did not improve, and my mother turned to our relatives for help. After they observed our living condition, my aunt and uncle, both prominent and wealthy citizens of the city they lived in, looked my mother in the eyes and said they would not help her. It was at that moment that my mother decided never to give up, but persevere. Because of her love, her strength and her will, my mother is the person I most admire and respect, and is a role model for my life. She devoted herself to making life better for her children. It is an example I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

My mother moved our family to Mogadishu hoping to find work, but raising a family in war-torn country was not an easy job. It was challenging in every imaginable way, yet she was determined to get us through no matter what the cost. She managed to set up a tiny kiosk in the city's main market place. I remember going to the market with her where she bought potatoes, tomatoes, and other vegetables from farmers who came in from the country side. She bought as much as she could afford and took it to her kiosk to sell in retail. I was too young to help, but I remember clutching to my mother's skirt as we dodged through the bustling crowd and commotion as we hurried back to our kiosk. She worked long hours and somehow managed to support us. Her focus was always on her children; for today, for tomorrow, and the rest of our lives.

I often ask my mother, "How did you manage to continue back in those days when times were so tough?" Her response was always the same; "Hope! I always had faith in God that a brighter day would shine upon us." Hope and faith was what kept my mother going and still keeps her going even as she faces issues with her health.

My mother's past and present make me more resilient, more optimistic, and compassionate. And certainly her courage inspires me to succeed in all I do. I have seen through my mother what it means to have determination and persistence, even at times when life's obstacles seem too much to overcome. I have learned from my mother as she raised us how a small assistance could change a person's life. For those who have lent my mother the smallest of hand, they did not just help her out on that particular day, but they contributed to our survival forever.

In the world we live in today there are millions of children who are sick, displaced from their homes or have lost parents because of wars or diseases. We see mothers without their loved ones. I might not be able to have a far reaching impact on those lives now, but my past has taught me that a small contribution will have its own larger impact. Whether it is spending a few hours in a community center, or visiting a homeless shelter to share some time with those in need. As I move toward the goals that my mother dreamt about and worked so hard for, I continue to feel indebted to her. Not only for raising me, and being my mom, but also for the values she instilled in me that will guide me throughout my life; compassion, service, and dedication.

Working With My Father

by Huy Nguyen



As a senior at the John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Science, Huy Nguyen has consistently played a leadership role. He is the Co-Captain of the Volleyball team, Vice-President of the Asian Cultural Club and President of the Key Club. Huy applied to seven schools, including Boston College, Boston University, Bridgewater State, UMass Amherst, UMass Boston, Salem State, and Northeastern University. He wants to study international business and global markets.

When I was a freshman in high school, I gave up a spring break to work alongside my father. We got up before the sun had risen and headed straight to his workplace, a book printing factory. I watched him lift boxes and work machinery tirelessly, and I followed suit. During lunchtime, I nagged and complained, asking why he worked such a tiresome and back-breaking job, a job he worked every day for 14 years. He simply replied, "So you wouldn't have to." His motto of determination and dedication is an important part in my life. It taught me responsibility, devotion to the things I do, and pride in my work.

The way I philosophically approach my life is a direct result of the lessons my father learned that have been passed on to me. More important than any other thing I learned from him were the sobering experiences of being a prisoner of war in Vietnam for 3 years, subjugated to excruciating physical labor. There were several times where he felt the compulsion to succumb to the treacherous treatment, but he knew that failure in this situation would be something he would regret for the rest of his life.

Every time I hear this story, it humbles my perspective on life and reminds me of the countless sacrifices my father made for me and the values he has instilled in me. His reason to strive then was his family, and as a tribute to the burdens he carried for me and my family in the past, he has become my reason to continue to strive for success.

With his profound sense of wisdom, every story, every saying, every joke my father tells has a hidden message that leaves me in wonder. I can't recall a time as a child when I would see him in the morning, but I can retell every story he told me before I would go to bed. As I prepare to sleep, I always look forward to hearing his daily saying or proverb as I close my eyes. I know that with the knowledge he has bestowed upon me, I can confront life's obstacles with a determined and sagacious mindset. Last year, when I was failing math, I started studying long hours, staying after school, and holding a study group until I got my grade up to a B. Now, with a lot on my plate, I manage my time so I can fulfill my responsibilities, whether it be managing the clubs I lead, developing a website, or playing volleyball. I have learned, like my father has taught me, to prioritize my duties and make sacrifices, like giving up track and other clubs to devote myself to my coursework and other commitments. My father has inspired me to be a more resolute individual every day, and I will be lucky if I am half the man and father he is today.

My Aunt, My Inspiration

by Christina Alexander



Christina is part of her school's step and dance teams and she has spent her summers working as both a camp counselor and intern at Brigham and Woman's Hospital. She hopes to pursue a career in the medical field, an interest that has been fostered through her experience as a student at Health Careers Academy. In college, she would like to study radiology at either Worcester State College or Clark Atlanta University.

I pushed open the door, and saw my mother sitting in the office, with her head tilted slightly to the left as if she were pouting. It was obvious she was trying to hide her bloodshot eyes from me, but I could tell she had been crying. Without any explanation, she abruptly got up and told me she was taking me home. As she drove, we were extremely quiet; all you could hear were the murmurs of the car against the road. When we pulled up in front of the house, she turned towards me and told me the news of my aunt's death. I couldn't grasp how or why this happened, but as I walked into the living room, I saw on TV the news replaying images of the terrorist attack. As I saw the first plane collide with the building my heart sank.

My aunt once said, "Your life is something that only you can take charge of. Look long and hard at yourself and decide what you want your life to be." My Aunt Shawna, who died on September 11, 2001, in the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, would always tell me about the beautiful view she had from her office on the top floor of her building; she said it was one of the main reasons she liked her job. This tragedy taught me to appreciate every day of my life and continued to influence my decisions in the future.

When I was younger, I was very quiet and reserved. Even around my family, I was shy. Aunt Shawna would often encourage me come out of my shell. Once, during a family gathering she tried to get me to show my family members a dance number. My response was to run up to my room. She reminded me that if I was shy around my family, then I would be shy around everybody else. It was not until after her death that I began to apply her words to my life. A year after she died, I enrolled in a dance class. When it came time to come up with a theme for our recital, I was too nervous to give my opinion. As I sat there, I thought of what my aunt would have said about my nervousness and what she would want me to do. Suddenly, I raised my hand and I told the teacher my idea. My whole class loved my thoughts, and I was able to choose our new theme. Years later, I contemplated joining a step team. As I stared at the sign up sheet with a pen in my hand, I hesitated to sign my name. Again, I thought about Aunt Shawna. I thought about all of the taped step shows she used to show me and how she always encouraged me to try new things. As I reflected on this, I decided to join the team.

Years later, I still think about my aunt. I think about her when I am hesitant to express myself, when I meet new people, and when I am scared to disagree with someone's opinion. My family has known a lot of loss: the death of my aunt was followed by the death of my cousin and my father. Out of all these tragedies, the death of Aunt Shawna was the one that hit closest to home, because from her death I took away a life lesson: to be open-minded and try new things. She is no longer here with me, but she left behind her encouragement and optimism. Through this, I have developed determination and a resilient mind. I will never forget how I came to embrace this attitude.

Lessons of War

by Ahmad El Awad



Born in Dubai and raised in southern Lebanon, Ahmad immigrated to the United States two years ago. During this short time, he has overcome the language barrier and proven to be an exceptional student. At Boston Community Leadership Academy, Ahmad has demonstrated what can be accomplished through hard work and perseverance by excelling in his math and science courses. He hopes to one day become a civil engineer and eventually work on projects to improve the lives of impoverished people around the world.

In my short years on this earth, I have had to face many challenges, but the greatest one of all came during the summer of 2006. July 11, 2006, was a painful day, when in the morning my father and sister decided to emigrate from our home country of Lebanon to the United States. The day took a further turn for the worse when at my summer job, the television news anchor brought news of war. That afternoon, Israel fired rockets into the southern tip of Lebanon with hopes of eliminating a Hezbollah threat. My first reaction was to go home and make sure that my mother and two younger brothers were safe. Due to my father and sister leaving, the responsibility to ensure my family's safety fell on me.

A week after the first rockets landed, all the families from the very south end of Lebanon had to move and leave their homes, if they had not lost them yet. The Israeli government released pamphlets via airplanes instructing citizens to move to safer cities, and my city of Saida happened to be one of them. The war swept the entire country, but the hot-bed of action was focused on the southern parts of Lebanon. When the families seeking refuge arrived in my city, they were given shelter inside of public places like schools and hospitals.

The news of these families traveled fast within my city. I heard about how much they were suffering and wanted to find a way to help. The government was doing its best to provide them necessities like food, water, and medicine, but I recognized that these people needed much more. I was buying some bread and Fadi, an ambulance driver, was talking about how the Red Cross needed volunteers to help those who had fled their homes. I thought about joining and my friends encouraged me, since two of them were already part of the Red Cross relief efforts. When I finally decided to join, I knew that this would be an experience that I would never forget.

Over the next two weeks, we helped by distributing additional food supplies and medicine. We knocked on doors asking, for extra clothing, and anything that was donated would be brought to the schools and hospitals. Throughout my involvement, my mother did not want me to risk my life, but I was always asking, "If we young people do not help them, who is going to do it?"

In the end, this was a very difficult time for all of us. To this day, I can still hear the sounds of bombs ripping apart homes; the sound of a mom calling for her kids who got lost between the black flames still rings in my ears; and the white smoke coming from airplanes in the sky is ever present when I close my eyes. It was emotionally and physically draining, but at the same time gave me the understanding that I take much for granted. For example, the liberty of going out with your friends when you please and the right to live safely with your family under one ceiling, were all things that I learned to cherish during the war.

The Face of Beauty

by Daisy Correia



Daisy attends Health Careers Academy and has spent her high school career volunteering for an HIV/AIDS outreach organization, helping at walk-a-thons, and participating in activities like the National Honor Society and Urban Scholars. Her favorite activity is singing and dancing. She has hopes of becoming a nurse someday and also would like to open her own spa. She would like to attend Smith College.

She played and jumped on the porch while her parents tore boxes apart and cleaned the fish truck. As she occupied herself, she sang. The young girl with a beautiful voice sang until the moon came out. When it was time to come inside, she realized that there was an uncomfortable numbing in her face. Her legs, though short, carried her at a great speed to the mirror. In her reflection, she saw the left side of her face twisted up. She attempted to smile but her face rejected her attempt. Tears flowed down her face and trickled onto the dresser. In a panic, she cried desperately to her mom that something was wrong with her face.

That little girl was me. I was nine years old, confused and afraid. My mother, filled with apprehension, took me to the emergency room at Children's Hospital. Eventually, after a series of tests, I was diagnosed with Bell Palsy. Bell Palsy is a paralysis of the muscles on one side of the face. No one could determine how or why I got it, and doctors just explained to me that it would soon go away. At school the next day, I could feel the children's stares and mouths dropping. It was brand new to me, and deep down inside it was eating up my self-esteem. There had never been a time when I wanted to be invisible, until the day I walked into those school doors after finding out I had Bell Palsy. Endless doctors appointments left me dispirited. I lost a lot of my motivation for school, my determination, and my values in life.

After having Bell Palsy for a couple of months, I had to learn how to smile and cope with my facial gestures. I came to a realization that I could not run away from Bell Palsy because it became part of my life. Although my condition faded away slowly, I still have a small percentage of Bell Palsy with me. Over time, I had to stop killing myself over something I had no control over. Bell Palsy was a roadblock I had to overcome and with that, it has made me a stronger individual. It opened my eyes and let me see that my dilemma was not Bell Palsy; it was the insecurity of my beauty.

Overcoming Bell Palsy taught me an important lesson: I am beautiful inside and out and I should not have to worry about what other people say. It taught me to smile even when my smile is not a perfect one. In life, nothing is perfect therefore; there will be bad experiences from which you will have to learn. On every individual's road to success, small failures and roadblocks will be encountered. Sometimes there will be hurdles to be jumped, mountains to climb, and rivers to swim through. At the end of the day, it will make you a better person. This is just the beginning of my life; I still have plenty of challenges to go through. With every bad day, mistake made, or false hope, I will never give up and my road to success will be ongoing.

Loneliness

by Jiajie Charles Su



Since moving to Boston from China at the end of 10th grade, Charles has developed into a remarkable young man. He is currently a senior at Charlestown High School where he plays the banjo in the school band and is a member of the Bowling Club. This past summer, he interned with Liberty Mutual and during his free time he volunteers at Mass General Hospital. What makes Charles most unique is that he does all of this while living independently. Charles is excited about going to college in the fall. He has applied to Boston College, Boston University, Columbia, Northeastern, Tufts, Dartmouth, and UMass Amherst. He would like to pursue either pre-med or a degree in psychology.

Late winter. Early morning. Dawn had just broken. My mind wandered as I walked to school. One year already, I thought, how time flies! One year ago, my dad and I emigrated from China to America. At the beginning, we lived in my grandparents' home, which was in a senior housing project. We had to sleep on the couches in the living room since there was only one bedroom. A month later, the housing manager asked us to move out because the housing was for seniors only. We quickly found a room to rent for ourselves. After two months, my dad told me that he was thinking about going back to China. I did not disapprove because I knew the language barrier frustrated him. Besides, a decent job, a wife, and a daughter were waiting for him in China.

He left, and I started to live by myself. He called me once a week, asking how I was doing. "I'm OK." I would tell him, "Everything's fine."

I lied.

Having an independent life was not as easy as I had expected. Buying groceries, cooking, cleaning, doing dishes and laundry, managing time and money... All of a sudden, I had to deal with things that I was not good at. The biggest challenge, in fact, was the enormous loneliness and homesickness which I had never felt before. The street, the train, the people, the trees... Everything seemed so alien to me. There were nights that I talked to myself. There were nights that I could almost see the immense shadow of loneliness filling up my bedroom and trying to engulf me. I struggled, but I did not feel lost. My father's decision to leave showed his faith in my self-reliance. I strived hard to adjust to this new lifestyle by balancing schoolwork and housework as best I could.

Time went by fast today. The bell for the end of the school day took me by surprise. Carrying bags of ingredients and a cake bought in Chinatown, I went to my grandparents' apartment. It was just a plain space with old furniture, but it was the only place that I could still feel a sense of home, of belonging. When preparing dinner with them, I could not help but notice that they were aging. I loved them more than anybody else in the world because they had sacrificed a lot for me. In 1998, they moved to America not knowing any English and had been living here in order to apply for my immigration. They wanted me to get the best education and career. Whenever I think of their sacrifices, I know that I will never disappoint them.

After finishing dinner, I put the cake with a lit candle on the table. I felt grateful to my grandparents for taking care of me in both China and America, and joyful for them still being healthy compared to other people their age.

"Happy eighteenth birthday!" my grandparents said cheerfully. No crowds of friends. No dozens of gifts. Yet my heart felt warm and bright. "Hope they will always be healthy and happy." I made a wish and then blew out the candle.

Late winter. Late evening. The silence rested in the darkness. Lying on my cot, I closed my eyes, waiting for a brand new day to come.

Seeing More Clearly

by Joe Rowell



Joe spends most of his time involved in extracurricular activities. He is in the Boston Ministerial Alliance, the Grove Hall Youth Council, has participated in Balfour Academy and works for Project R.I.G.H.T. He has been a student at Boston Latin Academy since 7th grade. He is interested in attending Northeastern University, Umass Dartmouth, or Morehouse College.

One chilly winter, when I was 15, life made sure that I stopped taking her for granted. I woke up one morning and clearly seeing my reflection in the mirror was impossible. You might ask how I ended up here, and the condensed answer is: I had a rare reaction to a prescribed acne medication. This reaction damaged my optic nerve and slowly deteriorated my vision, leaving me legally blind. Prior to this point in time, I had 20/20 vision. Now, I see things in the world like never before.

My life changed that winter. Family dinners are always more interesting. I find it to be slightly comical when I can not recognize which relative I'm speaking with until we are knee deep in a conversation. Commuting has large potential to be calamitous, especially because I opt not to use my white cane. To me, using it signifies defeat. I have enough vision not to walk into things and I use little tricks and tools when out in public to accommodate for my lack of vision. I also use my hearing to supplement my vision. I learned that the safest way for me to cross the street is to go parallel with the traffic. I always wonder how I must appear to drivers when they see me waiting at an intersection with no cars in sight. Driving is out of the question for me. This makes the public transit system my chauffeur.

In the mornings on my way to school, I use the aid of a miniature telescope in order to guarantee timely arrival at my intended destination. Needless to say, I catch odd glances from on-lookers when using the telescope. I put labels on my shoeboxes to let me know the color and model of a particular shoe in order to expedite getting dressed. This also helps to ensure that I don't leave my house looking as if I got dressed in the dark. It wouldn't be peculiar to see me at a restaurant, reading a menu with my hand-held magnifier; or maybe at the grocery store, practically putting my face on a shelf to check the price of an item.

It took time and maturity to lose the apprehension I had about using my tricks in public. As I matured emotionally, I began to see the silver lining in the clouds. My strength comes from handling the world that I inherited in 2005, day by day. I realize that I possess an inner resilience that would have otherwise gone unnoticed without living in this new world. My vision hasn't altered my goals or my will to succeed. I am as determined now as I have ever been. I cherish the memories of the world I knew when I was fully sighted. I appreciate the world that I know now and understand that it is my primary focus. I will never forget that callous winter when the nuances of life grew dramatically more attractive.

Nine Bullets

by Erika Pena Terrero



Erika was born in the Dominican Republic and moved to Boston at the age of two. She attends Madison Park Vocational Technical School and has worked hard to achieve a 3.4 GPA. In addition to being involved in JROTC, Drill Team, Peer Leadership, and volunteering at charity walks, Erika was also crowned as Queen of the Dominican Festival last summer. She plans on studying criminal justice in college and would like to eventually work in law enforcement. Erika has already been accepted to several colleges including Suffolk University, Salem State College, Newbury College, and Lasell College, but is still keeping her options open for next year.

Senior year was supposed to be the highlight of my high school years; I was finally going to apply to college, attend my senior prom, and spend a final year with my friends before graduation. On November 2nd, 2008, all of this changed when my friend, Keldrin Peña, passed away. Keldrin was in the passenger seat of a car when one of nine bullets shot in his direction plunged into the right side of his head.

Walks around the park, late night phone calls, and three years of friendship vanished with those nine bullets. Now I am flooded with thoughts of what I could've, would've, should've done. In the aftermath, his death overshadowed everything in my life. School seemed like an obligation instead of a priority. My two jobs became unbearable. Thoughts of Keldrin and his suffering stabbed away at my heart every time I thought about it. As a result of his death, I felt angry, hopeless, and lacked focus. I was no longer myself. I never used to think twice about living my life, but now before making a move, I feel like I have to watch my back.

Violence is an everyday issue in my community. The Boston I used to know is gone along with the innocent lives that are being taken away week after week. This is a serious matter and I am enraged when these cases go unsolved and justice is not served. The reason crime rates have escalated is because people are rarely convicted, which allows them to think that they can continue getting away every time they strike. People are selfish and never think about exactly who they are affecting as they pull the trigger. Not only are they taking away a life; they are taking away a son, brother, father, or a friend. Many people in the community add to the problem because they know details about crimes but will not come forward due to the unspoken law of "No Snitching."

Because Keldrin's death was so recent, I do not have the luxury of reflecting on how this experience has changed me as a person. It is difficult to find a silver lining in the situation when the wounds are only just beginning to heal. What I do know is that this tragedy has fueled a fire in me to seek justice and solve these crimes through the law. I have always toyed with the idea of going into law enforcement someday, but now I am certain that this is my career path. When I am a police officer, I will be more determined than ever to solve crimes and bring justice to the families and friends of those who are victims of crimes. I am looking to the future now and planning for college and a career, which helps with the healing process. A college degree will help me accomplish my future goals of becoming a police officer and studying Criminal Justice. A future career in law enforcement is more than just a duty; it is a responsibility. I know I cannot prevent every crime from occurring or spare everyone from feeling the tragedy of losing a loved one, but I am committed to do my part to make Boston safer.

Keep Ya Head Up

by Stephanie Santil



As a student at Boston Latin Academy, Stephanie has challenged herself with a rigorous course load. She has participated in activities such as Classics Club, Yearbook, and Mock Trial at school, but it was her experience as a teacher at Summerbridge in Cambridge last summer that had a profound affect on her educational goals. Stephanie is also very active in the Haitian and Mattapan community and was involved in City Year for four years. Stephanie plans to study nursing and would like to attend Simmons next year. She is passionate about using her education to give back to the City of Boston.

Referencing public opinion in regards to the African American community, Tupac Shakur once sang: "[they] Say there ain't no hope for the youth, the truth is it ain't no hope for tha future." In his song "Keep Ya Head Up", he speaks of the disparities and plights of the black community and the misconceptions that have plagued and continue to plague my community from selling drugs to dropping out of school. Even I seriously contemplated leaving school for numerous reasons, but I never went through with it. Since this song was written more than a decade ago, some aspects of the black community have changed, but for the most part, a negative stigma still lingers. As an African American female, I am interested in doing everything that I can to combat this negative stigma by helping and inspiring others to improve our community.

Because of my interest in the inner city community, I was referred as a potential teacher for Summerbridge Cambridge, a national enrichment program for low-income students who need academic support to be successful in the next grade that upcoming fall; most of the students were black and Hispanic. Prior to teaching, I had no clue that I as a youth I had so much power to affect children. My persistence and relentlessness made them a product of progress in the community of Cambridge. Before getting involved with Summerbridge, I was unaware of what it took to be a teacher. I had no idea that teachers worked so hard after school and during their personal time to prepare for the upcoming days in the classroom. The stress of a ten-hour workday and the loss of my weekends made me doubt my decision to take on this internship. However, I knew that if I quit, I would be quitting on my students. To them, I would be one of those people who came and went in their lives. On every occasion, I refused to let them quit on their work when it became difficult, or make excuses for work that was below satisfactory. I applied this same theory to myself.

At the end of the summer, I had helped my students to avoid the destructive path that Tupac mentions in his song. I worked to give my students hope that there is more out there for them than selling drugs and dropping out of school. I feel that I was able to combat the negative stigma of the black community and encourage them to expect more from themselves. The truth is, my students are the "hope for the future," and I told them so everyday.

By the conclusion of the program, I was so proud of my students and myself. Most of my students were up to speed and fully prepared for the upcoming school year. During the official closing of the program for the students, they made posters for each teacher and left comments on them. Many of my students expressed their sincere gratitude; some thanked me for pushing them and others mentioned that I gave them hope that they could do well in September.

If the forfeit of my summer could make one child change his view about his ability to be more in this world, then I would do it all over again just to change more children. My experience over the summer was a blessing; it allowed me to blossom into an open-minded young woman. My hope for college is that I can motivate others to implement this type of change within the neighboring community and throughout the lives of others.

Finding Warmth

by Edwin Gonzalez



Edwin is a senior at English High School, where he takes a challenging course load of AP classes. He is a member of JROTC, The Student Editorial Board, and the baseball team. Outside of school, he has further challenged himself by participating in summer programs such as Bridge to AP Biology and the A+ Academy at Boston University. Edwin has been accepted to Suffolk, UMass Dartmouth and Bridgewater State College but has yet to make his final college decision.

Walking along the sidewalk of Washington Street, all the cracks seem to look alike. Along the same sidewalk, a pair of feet walks past mine. It's a cold cloudy morning, and the streets are buzzing with early morning traffic. Traveling in the same path as always, a cold wind whips past my face, waking me from my trance. I turn my head to the side to shield my face from the unbearable cold. At this moment, I wish my parents could have given me a ride; there was no chance of that. By now the winds have passed and it's safe to raise my head again.

My cold walk began when I was thirteen; I was confused. Infidelity took my family from what it used to be and turned it into something I scarcely recognize. My parents started to fight and I had no idea why. They fought about things I thought were trivial, but I could not see the truth then. My dad cheated on my mom with a girl half his age and made her look foolish. My mom kicked my dad out of the house. I was fatherless. All the stress of raising three children while maintaining two full time jobs took its toll on my mother. Even with this heavy burden she was able to hold our family together. No one was ready for the cancer that would eventually divide our family and take her from us.

Now I'm halfway up the Dimock Street hill; the sight of frozen slush on the street corner reminds me of how cold it is. I don't live with my parents anymore and it's been tough going through life without them. The support they gave me was a necessity. My parents taught me that hard work will take you far. All the hard work I put in is to make up for missing parents.

As I cross the lonely intersection of Amory Street and Dimock Street, I think about what has happened to me. I also think about where I'm going. I can see the towering English High School building off in the distance. Even though I lost my mother, she is still with me, and helping me go forward. She taught me to be strong during tough times. By now, I'm a few feet away from the English High School and students are discussing the freezing temperature.

My childhood has not been the easiest, and it has not been the hardest. I have learned to accept my childhood for what it was and move forward. I'm ready to take on the challenge of college and become the first in my family to graduate. My mom is taught me what I need to know to be a successful person in life; discipline, ambition, and education. I open the door of the school and the warmth of it takes me over. I am Home.

How You Can Help

Thank you for taking the time to read the essays in this book. We hope you agree that the preceding pages tell the stories of some remarkable young adults. Each of these students was fortunate to have the support of a Bottom Line counselor throughout the college admission process. Unfortunately, the reality of the overall situation is more daunting:

- ◆ There are nearly 3,000 high school seniors in the Boston public schools
- ◆ Only about 2,000 of those students will enroll in college
- ◆ Fewer than 700 of those students will graduate with a degree in 6 years

The message is clear. Boston students need better help getting into the right schools, and many of them need ongoing support while in college. Bottom Line's proven programming model addresses these formidable issues head on. We work with students to help them gain access to college and maintain a constant presence in their lives until they graduate.

For the last twelve years, we have been able to offer a high quality advising service at no cost to the students. As happens with any quality service, word has spread quickly among our constituents about the work we do and the demand for our program has never been greater.

To learn more about how you can help more disadvantaged students get in to college, graduate from college and go far in life, please contact us or visit our office. We look forward to hearing from you.

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