

# My Personal Michigan Hero



ESSAYS  
BY MICHIGAN  
EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS  
2011 EDITION

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MICHIGAN'S INSURANCE COMPANY

America & Me  
ESSAY CONTEST



# Michigan: the Land of Heroes

Michigan has two great peninsulas... and thousands of great heroes. In fact, it seems that every community in Michigan has its share of heroes, according to the Michigan eighth grade students who participated in the 2010-2011 America & Me Essay Contest.

The theme of the contest was “My Personal Michigan Hero,” and thousands of students took the time to submit entries describing the personal heroes in their lives. They chose local teachers, parents, grandparents, business people, soldiers, community leaders, and a host of other heroes who filled the students’ lives with hope, encouragement, and inspiration.

This booklet contains the top ten essays from the thousands of entries, as well as excerpts from several other essays submitted in the contest.

Farm Bureau Insurance has been sponsoring the annual America & Me Essay Contest since 1968, encouraging hundreds of thousands of Michigan eighth grade students to write about the country, state, and people they love.

Take a few minutes to read through this booklet and gain a new appreciation for the amazing people who live in this state. We think you’ll enjoy the people you meet inside.

It’s a good reminder that each of us has more influence than we realize... and that each of us can be a hero to someone.

## Top Ten Essays

From the 2010-2011 America & Me Essay Contest

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# First Place



## Noah McGivern

Edwardsburg Middle School  
Edwardsburg

America & Me  
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### I'm Glad I Tried

Ever since starting 5th grade I felt left out. Everybody was doing sports and here I sat talent-less getting good grades and nothing more. I was hoping this year would be different. I wanted to find something that I would enjoy and excel at. This year we started band, and I hoped to meet some new friends. I did, but I also met my Michigan hero, Mr. Spencer White.

When I entered band in 6th grade he was the new band director at our school. He made me believe that I was not talent-less. Instead, I felt like I was one of the most talented people in the world. He teaches the rewards of being disciplined, how to play our instruments, and the importance of having fun while working to achieve a goal. He also encourages us to keep trying new things, which is why I switched instruments in 7th grade. Now band is one of the reasons I look forward to school. I realize that those who play sports are not better, they just have different interests.

We have seven years of band, seven years with my hero, and what I am sure will be the best seven years of my life. What we have been taught is that discipline and hard work is well rewarded, and it produces some of the most beautiful sounds in the world. To make these sounds you have to have teamwork and cooperation, and that is why everybody has to work together to do their job, because a job well done is a job well rewarded. At our last festival performance, we were rewarded with a rating of "1." The best you can get.

Mr. Spencer White has also made me excel in math and reading. There is a lot of math involved in reading music. This has helped me improve my grades. Reading music is like reading another language; at first you don't know what to think of the "symbols," and then your eyes will fly through the "words," reading and knowing every note that is printed.

My hero also taught me to be myself and people will like you. He encourages all of us every day, and has a positive influence on hundreds of kids. I tried something that interested me, met others who had done the same, and now we are all great friends. Doing something I am good at made me realize I have the same interests as many other people. If I had never tried band, I would not have an activity, my hero, or some of the best friends I know. In addition, if it had not been for Mr. Spencer White, I probably would still feel like that talent-less kid, looking for my niche in the world. He is truly someone that has inspired me to try my hardest, set high goals, and enjoy the music.



# Second Place



## Savannah Burbank

Wolfe Middle School  
Center Line

America & Me  
ESSAY CONTEST



### Michigan is My Hero

The word “Hero” in and of itself, in today’s society, is more often used in reference to fiction than reality. People seem to be more interested in the action of a character that they just watched in a movie than the true heroes they neglect to notice in their everyday lives.

My hero is no one single person or entity, it is the State of Michigan as a whole. Simply said, Michigan is still here and we are fighting to keep ourselves off of a list of has-beens. Every day I turn on the news, every day I turn on the radio, Michigan seems to be the punch line for the worst of what America has to offer. The funny thing is, when I walk down the street or go to the store, I see people smiling, laughing, and proud to be called “Michiganders.”

My hero includes the laid-off autoworker who still provides smiles and hope to the family he now raises, on ten percent less of what his past earnings were. My heroes are the families down the street who have a moving truck in front of their homes due to foreclosure and circumstances that were no responsibility of their own, all the while telling themselves that “things will get better.”

My heroes are the men and women in cities across the state of Michigan from Detroit to Lansing, Flint to Mackinac, Keego Harbor to Muskegon, who continue to put their lives on the line daily to protect us from harm while taking cuts from pressured department heads.

I’m being told that Michigan used to be the “auto capitol of the world.” I am being told that our Great Lakes have been reduced to wasted water holes filled with past greed and shady policy. It has also been said that Michigan is the “ghost town” of the industrial age and the victim of a middle-class phase out.

What I see are hundreds of factories, buildings and corporate offices that line I-75 expressway from Flint to Monroe. The signs on these buildings say Ford, GM, and Chrysler and my heroes are in those plants and factories working to make the cars that the world drives, even if the wages are lower than they used to be. The workers and volunteers for the state, who keep Michigan beautiful for all of us to enjoy, are also my heroes.

My heroes aren’t ghosts, my heroes aren’t phased out middle-class citizens. My heroes are my family, my neighbors, YOU, the people of Michigan that pay the tax increases, and take the cuts that allow me to continue to get an education that Michigan taxpayers pay for. Hopefully one day I can be a Michigan hero to another 8th grader whose hard working and struggling father happens to work in the Motor City, earns what he can and spends what he can in the beautiful Great Lakes State.



# Third Place



## Trevor Greissinger

Upton Middle School  
Saint Joseph



### A Promise Fulfilled

He drove her to every appointment. During chemotherapy sessions, he held her hand while also entertaining the other patients with his dry sense of humor. He kept a log of every medicine she took and every doctor she visited during her sickness. But most of all—he loved her. And at the end, when it was time, he brought her home to the place they both cherished... their home on a little lake in central Michigan.

This is the home to which they retired fifteen years ago. After working for many long years, they simply wanted a quiet place to enjoy life and their family. It was here that they first received the news that they did not want to hear. Lymphoma. My grandpa, a true Michigan hero, drove my grandma to Grand Rapids countless times for treatments and consultations with a team of trained experts. He reassured her that, together, they could endure all of these hardships. This reassurance led to a promise kept, and grandpa fulfilled my grandma's final wish of leaving the hospital to bring her home to the lake.

You'd never expect that a 70-year-old man whose wife had cared for *him* for almost fifty years would so readily take on nursing duties. This is what I admire most about my grandpa... his unwavering support for those he loves. Every time I visit him, I end up leaving happier than when I arrived. Before we even embrace as I walk in the door, he gets me in a headlock and gives me a noogie. He then proceeds to make me alternately laugh and shake my head in disbelief with a never-ending repertoire of jokes and stories about his past. His offbeat humor is what brings our relationship even closer, and it was this sense of humor that comforted my grandma through two years of treatments.

After years of depending on her cooking, it was time for my grandpa to learn how to cook for himself. While he has always been known for his fantastic grilling skills, grandma was known for her expertise with the side dishes and desserts. Potato salad and batches of homemade cookies in the cookie jar were staples whenever we visited. Of course, my grandpa still grills, and with practice, he has mastered the potato salad. As for the cookies? When we look in the cookie jar now, Oreos fill the jar. Not exactly homemade, but that's okay. He took care of my grandma, and for that, he will always be my Michigan hero.



# Fourth Place



Jenna  
Hale

Fremont Christian  
Fremont

America & Me  
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## A Blueprint for a Remarkable Life

A blueprint.

Perhaps the first thing you'd associate a blueprint with is construction, the designs of white on blue paper. A blueprint is, after all, a tool that builders often use to outline a project and thus know what to do. I think that a blueprint could also be defined as a legacy—something to build on, something left unfinished, an unassembled work of art. Throughout the life of my hero, an amazing blueprint—a legacy—was formed.

It all began sixty-eight years ago, during the Second World War, when my great-uncle Jacob Lucas enlisted into the Navy. At the young age of 18, and having always wanted to be a builder, he joined into the Construction Battalion, sometimes known as the "Sea Bees." During his three years of service, he built bridges, airstrips, and roads on New Guinea, repaired landing strips on the Admiralty Islands, and even constructed runways on the recently bombed Okinawa. Finally, after 30 straight months of service, the war was over and he was allowed to go home.

Soon after he arrived back home in Michigan, he started up a humble construction business that evolved into a successful company, named Lucas Builders, which built many homes in the Grandville area.

My great-uncle realized that he wanted to reach out in his community by building houses for Habitat for Humanity, a foundation dedicated to constructing houses for the poor. He was also inspired to help with several disaster relief efforts—he helped rebuild many homes and many dreams as well.

Over the years, Jake and his wife, Esther, have fostered 25 kids, giving the opportunities to turn rough lives around. Many simply walked away unchanged, but there were a few success stories, including one teen that they ended up adopting! That teen is now married with her own children.

A short while ago, my great-uncle was asked to help build Halfway Houses, homes for the partially mentally-impaired, who need a little assistance, but also want to lead an independent lifestyle. Jake built several and they are still in use today.

One of the last, and I think one of the most heroic deeds my great-uncle Jake has ever done is caring for his dear aging wife, who has just recently passed away from Alzheimer's. He stuck with Esther for an extraordinary span of 64 years, from just after coming home from Okinawa all the way up to present day.

Even though this is the end of my story of my great-uncle Jake, his involvement, his devotion, and his determination has left a legacy—a blueprint—for others to build on. He is the kind of person to base your own blueprint on, and I'm working every day to be somebody like him.



# Fifth Place



## Abigail Jeske

St. Joseph Middle School  
Battle Creek

America & Me  
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### Real Heroes Give Love

I used to wait. I always waited. I waited for someone to come and make me part of their family. Family was a dream. But I still had a splinter of hope that left me waiting.

As they always say, “waiting pays off” and it sure did. I don’t think that anyone would ever understand the feeling that I had when our caretaker told me, “Abigail, your parents are here to see you.” No one could imagine the way I felt when all eyes turned toward me as I walked past each one of the orphans. They looked up at me and watched as I went out of the room. I then met my brother by the door and we grabbed each others’ hands. Then we walked into the room that our “new parents” were and my heart instantly took them in as my parents. I could feel that they loved me too. I just could feel it in me. We spent about an hour together and then we parted only to see them the next day and the day after that. We would get to see them for about an hour and we would play and draw and be a family.

Then they brought me to America and I thought that I was in heaven. I did not think that there was a better place on Earth. They took me shopping and got me clothes that were going to be my own. I was then brought to the house that I would later call my home. I had never seen such a beautiful house. Everything about it was just perfect. We ate the loveliest food ever (which later I found out was mashed potatoes and gravy). And for the first time I slept in a very comfortable bed. All this was provided by my parents because the first minute they saw me they loved me to the fullest.

How do I know that they love me? Well the answer is simple. Whenever I have a bad day at school or I am sad, they give me a hug and I feel their love radiating from their skin onto me. Their love warms every inch of my body and it melts my sadness away. When I do something bad or deserving of punishment they are not hesitant to do it because they love me so much. And you ask “how do they show love by punishing?” Well, they are merely preparing me for the real world. They are teaching me responsibility and they want what is best for me.

Heroes are people that save other people and they teach important lessons. But people think that Justin Bieber or some other famous person is their hero, but are they really? Do those people help you when you most need them? Do those people really teach you something that needs to be learned? No, they are there for enjoyment. Real Heroes give love and they are there for you when you need it most. For me, these people are my parents. They saved me and they continue to teach and prepare me for life. My parents are and always will be my Michigan Heroes.



# Sixth Place



## Joey Denton

Our Lady of Sorrows  
Farmington

America & Me  
ESSAY CONTEST



### To Make a Change

Have you ever wondered how life would change if kindness was extended to everyone, even those who we thought did not deserve it? Well, I have, and I'm positive my Michigan hero, Dr. McEvoy, has too.

This thought was put into my mind only a week ago at school when we had an assembly on bullying and its effects for two days. Dr. McEvoy, a trained professional in the behavior of children and teens, talked to us for about an hour each day. She is dedicated to teaching anyone who will listen to the positive effects of treating everyone as the individual wants to be treated. She has tirelessly traveled around the globe preaching her message to students of friendliness and compassion to all. Her devotion to it and her drive to make a difference make her a person that many kids my age, myself included, look up to.

At the assembly she talked about cruel behavior and bullying. While I was listening to examples of these actions, I examined my conscience. I scoured my mind for things I had done recently or in the past that fit into this unfortunate category. The embarrassing part was that I could find several examples. I am sure other people could find a good amount of examples also, but I realized that the only person's behavior I could control was my own. That is why I wanted to change MY attitude towards other people.

After the assembly, I felt inspired and wanted to change the view others had of me. It was not like I was the school bully or even thought of as a bully. I did not want to be the kid who always spread rumors, talked behind others' backs, and made fun of "that one kid." I wanted to be the guy who everyone was friends with simply because there was no reason not to be.

Now whenever I have a choice of doing the bully thing to do or the nice guy thing to do, I pick the nice guy thing to do. I also started talking to people that I usually never talked to or even made an effort to talk to before. I ended up finding out that these people were really cool, nice, and just fun to be around. I have not said one thing bad about someone behind their back since that assembly, and I hope to keep it that way! Whenever someone tries to talk to me about someone behind their back I just tell them, "Who cares?" or "That is not very cool" in a friendly way and try to make them feel that what they were saying was not very kind or needed.

Dr. McEvoy definitely had a great and positive impact on my life. Dr. McEvoy is my personal Michigan hero not only because of her profound influence on me and the world, but because of her ability to be that hero even though we were only recently acquainted. A person who can achieve that is not only a Michigan hero, but a true hero.



# Seventh Place



**Paul  
Braman**

Faith Lutheran  
Bay City

America & Me  
ESSAY CONTEST



## My First Time Crying From Joy

On June 10th, 2010, we were waiting anxiously for the arrival at Bishop International Airport in Flint, Michigan. My niece, Sami, and nephew, Greg, restlessly ran around knowing that “Daddy Boy” was coming home. My other niece and nephew were yet too young to understand what excitement was on the horizon. James, a newborn, was held by his mother, Nikki, while one-year-old Ella, followed my sister, Shelby, asking for cheese curls. My parents, separated from the rest of my family, were being interviewed by the local newspaper. John, my brother, and I waited earnestly while standing in the middle of the terminal exit prepared to present a large cloth sign that stated, “Welcome home Sgt. Braman, We Love you!”

My brother, Sgt. Andrew Scott Braman, had been in Afghanistan with the United States Marine Corps for the past eight months, and had missed the birth of his son. Since his wife, Nikki, needed surgery, Andrew was allowed to return home a month earlier than the rest of his unit. With regret for having to leave his fellow marines, yet with excitement to hold his family, Andrew traveled nine sleepless days in multiple countries coming to this very moment.

Due to national recommendations of security, Andrew had shared limited information regarding his arrival. We waited for what felt like hours. Each time a plane landed, all would gather at the window hoping for a glimpse of our missed brother, son, husband, and father. As our excitement grew, it infected other people in the terminal. They also started watching planes land and people depart from them. More time passed, seconds as hours, but eventually the time had come.

Somebody catches a quick look of a digital desert camouflage uniform between bustling people. Then, confirmation, “It’s Andrew!” People separated with respect as Andrew approached his family. Greg tumbled out of his grandpa’s arms running toward his “Superman.” Sami, first asking for permission to see her “Daddy Boy,” squealed with excitement as she trailed Greg. Next, Nikki and James advanced as Andrew reached out to touch his new son. Everything grew silent as we witnessed Andrew tearing as he kissed his wife, ultimately stopping the moment.

Yet Ella, in Grandma Jo Jo’s arms, refused to even look at her father. I watched as the pain in my brother’s eyes grew. Andrew calmly explained, “It’s ok, Mom, give her time.” Then I couldn’t hold the tears back as I witnessed this moment of love, joy, and sorrow. I then realized the sacrifice made by every soldier and his family. He protects me, my country and he will always rebuild love and protect his family through all costs. My Personal Michigan Hero is my brother, but I also realized that every soldier who willingly leaves his family and risks his life for others is a hero to someone.



# Eighth Place



## Hannah House

Coleman Jr./Sr. High School  
Coleman

America & Me  
ESSAY CONTEST



### “My Michigan Hero”

When my teacher asked me to write about my hero, I didn't know who to write about. My family, friends, and others have helped me in many ways. I guess you could say they are my heroes... but only one person is my true hero. That person is my dad.

When I was one year old, my birth father left. I had no father to support or care for me. For years, I didn't have a dad to sing “Happy Birthday”, or teach me how to ride a bike. There was a part of me missing, and I wondered when my “daddy” would come back—but he never did. That's when my TRUE dad came.

My dad was there when my birth father gave up. He is my real dad, and I'm happy God gave me someone as great as him. He has always been there, from helping with schoolwork to talking to me when I'm upset. It's just things like that, that show me he cares.

Most people think heroes are only in movies or books, and if they don't save people, they're not truly a hero. But that's not true. A hero is someone that is there for you, and won't give up. Someone who is brave enough to stick up for you. Someone who is strong enough to protect you, and who isn't afraid to make sacrifices. Someone like my dad. He may not have an “S” on his chest, and he may not save people's lives, but he saved me.

One thing I love about my dad is he never gives up on me. People have walked in and out of my life saying they care, only to suddenly stop. My dad hasn't, that's why I trust him. I know he wouldn't lie to me, leave me, and most importantly, won't stop loving me. The people who walked out of my life are gone because they weren't supposed to be in it.

I realize how much I take him for granted. I'm not as appreciative as I should be. He's the one who comforts me when I'm sick and watches me play sports... even if it doesn't fit into his schedule. I complain, but my dad never does.

If I were to lose him right now, my life wouldn't be the same. He helps me in many ways, I wouldn't know how to do it on my own. He is not only my hero, he's my best friend too.

This essay has made me change my view on a lot of things. I appreciate my dad even more than I ever have. I lived without a dad before, and it's the hardest thing I've ever had to do. So remember to never take your dad for granted, always tell him thank you, and that you love him, because I've learned that some dads don't stay forever. I'm lucky to have a dad that will.



# Ninth Place



## Victoria Potapenko

Immaculate Conception  
Ukrainian Catholic School  
Warren

America & Me  
ESSAY CONTEST



### My Personal Michigan Hero

When my language arts teacher notified my class about this essay, I immediately knew I was going to write about my mom. I know the idea seems so cliché, but she has always been my Michigan hero.

My mom was born in Chicago, Illinois, but moved to Michigan to marry my dad. My mom has received her master's degree in Education at Wayne State University. She has lived in Michigan for eighteen years and has been teaching in the Detroit Public School System for fifteen years. She has taught first, second, fourth, and fifth grades, and is currently teaching second.

There are so many stereotypes and misconceptions of Detroit today, many of them following the teachers of DPS like my mother. There are so many people in Michigan saying that ALL of the teachers of DPS "don't care about the kids" or "don't even know what they are doing." Sadly, some teachers are like that. Most of my mom's life consists of her job. She has such a passion for it, and it really shows through her teaching and behavior. These teachers pay out of their own pocket for supplies, posters, and many other things to give these kids an excellent learning environment.

There are so many people in our nation who have their own opinions of the Detroit Public School System. Some of them say that it's the teachers' fault that the kids don't listen or don't do their homework. But they need to look deeper and see that it is their home environment. So many of the children and their families are affected by the economy, the criminal behavior of others, and the decisions of others. The children have to pay for it in their own ways. My mom helps the kids lead a better life and get a quality education so they can change the future of Detroit. It's never the teachers, the staff, or the principal holding them back.

This year my mom and many other teachers of DPS did not know where they were working up until the third day they were supposed to report to their jobs. My mom was so upset, saying that she was supposed to be making lesson plans. Teachers that don't care would have been grateful for the extra days off. My mom is ready to go back to work weeks before she is supposed to report.

There are not even words in the dictionary to describe the love, passion, dedication, and just plain hard work my mom has given to the district and the children of Detroit. She even keeps in touch with her former students. She was nominated for the "Who's Who in Education" for helping one of her students go to college and is named in the book.

My mom is possibly one of Detroit's most hardworking teachers and continues to show her love for her career. Even though the district has some flaws and doesn't give the teachers what they deserve, my mother doesn't really care. All that my mom does affects these children and proves that they really have hopes and dreams and can fulfill them.

My mom has always had a positive attitude in whatever she does. I admire her for keeping her chin up even during the toughest of times. My mom, Lisa Potapenko, changes Detroit one child at a time. This is why she is my Michigan hero.



# Tenth Place



## Elisabeth Billman-Benveniste

Hayes Middle School  
Grand Ledge

America & Me  
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### My Michigan Hero

Before now, I have never really sat down and thought about who my hero was. I've always thought that a hero was someone who put their life on the line for others, and risked their own well-being to do something great for someone else. After thinking for a while, I realized that a hero does not have to follow certain "guidelines" like I thought. A hero can simply be someone who affects your daily life like your family, and friends, and helps you grow as a person.

In my opinion, no other person has done that more than Mr. Horrock, a man who opened Horrock's, a local grocery store in Lansing, Michigan. Horrock's carries exotic fruits and vegetables from all over the world and also carries many brands from Michigan producers that are usually not on the market in most grocery stores.

I have many reasons why I consider Mr. Horrock to be my hero. For one, he often tries his hardest to buy only Michigan brands in canned and boxed goods. This helps Michigan's economy, which is important to protect our state from economic downfall which we have been facing for a while now, not to mention the hundreds of jobs he has supplied the people in our community. Another reason why I consider Mr. Horrock as my Michigan hero is how he started his own business. Horrock's used to be no more than a small fruit stand on the corner of the road, selling reasonably priced fruit to the community. With hard work and dedication, Mr. Horrock turned that small fruit stand into his store. I find this story as an inspiration to me. It seems to show that with hard work your dreams can come true, and anything can be done. Talking to some of Mr. Horrock's employees, they have nothing bad to say about him. Even with his stressful life, he seems to find time to come into the store each day to greet his customers. I have met him personally and he is a very pleasant person to be around. As well as being a very pronounced businessman, and overall nice person, Mr. Horrock also promotes environmental awareness, and other community services.

Mr. Horrock is a great person with an inspiring story, and provides great services to our community, which is why I consider him to be my Michigan Hero.





# Excerpts

**From Other Outstanding Entries in the  
2010-2011 America & Me Essay Contest**



## Heather LaBrecque

Allendale Middle School, Allendale

Emily is a patient who has Cystic Fibrosis. The doctors told her that she would not live to be 18, but she proved them wrong! Emily's parents didn't stop her from doing things that other kids would do. They made her realize, even though she had a serious disease, it didn't have to stop her from doing anything. She is my hero because if she can do anything with a disease, then I can do anything!

Emily raises awareness of CF by riding her bike and running. She started a non-profit foundation called Rock CF in 2007. She also organized a fundraiser event called "Just Let Me Breathe." She provides entertainment and raises money for CF all while inspiring people like me.

Emily does this because she has the ability to help others, and loves doing it. She said, "I want to educate people and share hope."

## Haley McDowell

Davison Middle School, Davison

My grandpa has taught me many things in my life but I think the most important thing is to be happy in life. He says life is too short to be unhappy and that there is always something to smile about. He works hard in finding joy and happiness in things.

When I was in first grade at Grandparents Day we were told to draw a picture of what we wanted to be when we grew up. I wanted to be the person that rode on the back of the garbage truck so I drew a garbage truck. When my grandma saw it the first thing she said was "Girls can't do that job. You should pick one that girls do, like a teacher." My grandpa immediately leaned over and told me that I can be whatever I want when I get older. I no longer want that particular job, but I know that whatever I choose to be my grandpa will support me and encourage me to follow my dreams and never give up.

My hero is the person who makes me smile no matter what, the one I admire, the person who I want to grow up and be like, a person I could never live without, and that person without a doubt is my grandpa.

## Nathaniel Sculley

Byron Center Christian School, Byron Center

My uncle Andy is a design artist, a former cross-country winner and a person that had a dream. At state he had a severe asthma attack which took him out of the running for being able to reach his full potential. But he didn't give up on life. He persevered. That's the quality I admire about my uncle. His endurance and his willingness to accept failure and move on.

My uncle has inspired me to run, to draw, and to chase my dream through any troubles life throws at me. Today he still inspires me to follow my dream.

Uncle Andy was always the person who I admired. He was a role-model, he gave me something to follow, and became my hero. He showed me how to live and follow my dream and use my many talents to achieve excellence in life. He taught me to work at the things I love. His impact on my life has changed me forever. Failures are now a step forward, not back, a foothold for the climb through life.

Your dreams are a big part of your life. If you don't dream, you don't strive for excellence in the things you love. Dreams take you through the good and the bad. Follow your dream and it will take you places you would never imagine you could achieve.

## Brooke Mathias

Bark River-Harris School, Harris

He volunteered as an EMT and a firefighter throughout his whole life. When he turned forty he went to college to be a nurse because he loved to talk and help people.

My grandpa will always be my hero. Through all of life he never stopped trying and held our family together. Also, he never complained; he told us he would rather him have cancer than someone else. He was always happy, even when he was in pain and he always believed in "Pay it forward." He always found a way to help people even after he died. He donated his wheelchair, scooter, and other things that many handicap people cannot afford. I hope I can be as courageous and strong as him one day.



## Sidney Arcidiancono

**East Rockford Middle School, Rockford**

That day, I had found loss.

That day, I also found Holly.

The world is balanced, I think. With death comes life, with hate comes love, with dark comes light. With anything broken, comes the person brave enough to put the pieces back together again. That person was Holly.

Holly sat me down, in my awful mess of tears, and dared me to speak; something I have always been afraid to do. "You have a strong voice, girl. Don't let the world scare you out of using it," she said. She showed me how to live with abandon, without fear of being hurt; that, without risk of pain or loss there could be no joy. But most of all, she showed me how to love.

She taught me that a hero doesn't need a cape or a flashy outfit. She taught me that a hero isn't necessarily someone that saves the world, sometimes it's just someone who knows what being a true friend means. A hero is someone who can say so much by being silent. A hero is someone who can mean everything just by being there.

Holly showed me how to stand up, you must have something to stand for.

Holly taught me what it is really like to be brave.

Holly showed me how to love. And for this, she is my hero.

## Eileen Wieber

**S.S. Peter and Paul, Ionia**

To my twin sister Madeline.

You're my Michigan hero because of the way you treat me, as well as others, because you make me laugh and smile even when I'm hurt, the dedication you have towards reaching your goals inspires me to do the same, how you help me with problems, in life or homework, how your words comfort me when I am anxious, the forgiveness you give me when I make you mad or hurt your feelings, and how you have been, and always will be, at my side.

I believe that from the beginning that God puts us on Earth, the choices we make, the people we meet, and the events that happen, shape us into what we are today.

## Kelci Gormley

**North Branch Middle School, North Branch**

Marguerite is considered one of the best known and highly regarded author/illustrators in American children's literature. She was one of the first to be inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame. The public library in Lapeer is dedicated to her and her amazing works.

Marguerite lived my dream. My vision is to someday become a published author and perhaps win a Newberry Award. Marguerite was a very inspiring individual. That fact that she was born right here in Lapeer county is exhilarating to me. Just seeing her illustrations and writings on display at our local library is very motivating. It shows me that an average girl like her, like me, can reach their aspirations and fulfill their highest goals. It was her dream to write children's books—it is my dream to be just like her.

Marguerite worked hard to pursue her love of writing. If she could do it more than a century ago, I know I can do it. She gives me inspirations; she challenges me. These aspirations will keep me pushing on until my conception is realized, my goals are achieved, and my dream is my reality. With every word I write and every thought I try to place to paper, I have in mind and in my heart that my work may someday be recognized—just like Marguerite de Andeli, who is my Personal Michigan Hero.

## Rebecca Hurshman

**South Arbor Charter Academy, Ypsilanti**

Along with helping the community, Donna has helped me in a lot of ways. She is the leader of my 4-H club and introduced me to that world with a lot of support and guidance. She also is an experienced horsewoman and has helped me reach my dreams of showing horses. I have spent many hours at the stables, learning from her wealth of experience. In the past, she has shown out of state and at World competitions.

With encouragement and a willing spirit, Donna can be an inspiration to us all, but especially to me. Thank you, Donna, for all the good times and the years of experience all channeled into hours and hours at the barn. You inspire me to become a better leader and to do my best.



## Grace Ciaramella

**Shelby Junior High, Shelby**

To me, a hero is someone who goes out of their way to make things easier for others. It is someone that other people look up to, and someone that people can learn from. A hero is someone that you think of when you hear the word inspiration.

Mrs. Pritchard made learning really fun for me, and this had a big impact on me. The methods she taught me have stuck with me, and I feel this is one reason for my academic success. Mrs. Pritchard was also someone who was easy to relate to, and I loved having conversations with her. Even in years after I had her as my teacher, I would talk to her at recesses, or stop to say "hi" in the halls.

Mrs. Pritchard's room was always colorful, and when you walked in, it just made you smile. You could (and most likely still can) feel her bright and happy energy.

I consider myself lucky to have been a student of Mrs. Pritchard and am proud of my academic achievements that were made possible through her.

## Elle Gallagher

**St. Francis School, Ann Arbor**

My dad helped me see that even though it was a really rough time in our lives it was going to be all right and we would get through it together. He stayed positive and did not let it bring him down. Even to this day when he does not have the highest paying job he still is positive and supports our family. I hope that in the future that my dad knows how much I appreciate him for the lesson he has taught me. I hope that my actions every day demonstrate the positive attitude that I have learned from him.

I choose my dad as my Michigan hero because he leads a very good life with a bright outlook and I would like to follow in his footsteps. He always stays positive and does not complain to my mom or me about money problems or the hard day he had. He tries to make the time we have together good. I hope that when I grow up I am someone's Michigan hero for how I lead my life. I would love to be just like my dad and stay positive all the time and show people that staying positive can change everything. I am so proud of my dad and I am a very lucky girl to have him around to show me the way.

## Abby Rentschler

**Saline Middle School, Saline**

A single tear rolled down my cheek as I gazed at the girl before me. Her complexion was a sickening yellow color from improper nutrition. Her bones popped out of her skin at every angle. I could scarcely make out her frail body as it shivered from lack of muscle to warm her. Her hair had lost its sheen, and there was no longer a twinkle in her eye, to remind people that the carefree, little child, was still there. I watched the girl sympathetically as she lay helplessly on the floor; never a smile appearing on her face. I reached out to her, trying to give comfort in any way that I could. However, my hand touched nothing but the sleek glassy surface of a mirror. The girl through the looking glass was me.

I am anorexic and I am my own Michigan hero for finally building the strength, and will to overcome the grip this disease had on my life. My conscious efforts to rebuild lost bonds with my family and friends, and improve my skills as a volleyball player, eventually felt natural. When I look in the mirror now, I smile. If I need to remind myself what "pretty" is, I focus on things that really are important: love, happiness, and support. Thanks to my drive for a better life, I was able to turn my world around for the better. The greatest lessons I have taken from my experience is that life is too short to be miserable and looks are not worth anything if they cause you pain.

## Chloe' Fringer

**Three Fires Middle School, Howell**

She taught me many important things. How to bake the best brownies, how to be quiet, how to be a pro at war, how to always win in heads up 7-up, how to dance in the rain, be observant, curious, thoughtful, where to hide Easter eggs, how to love, and how to be myself. It may be the little things she taught me, but those may be the things to get me through life. She was my hero, I looked up to her. She taught me all these things without even trying. She taught me by just being with her. Like dancing in the rain, she pushed me out the door and said "dance, Chloe', dance!"

My grandma, Donna Fringer, the one that taught me how to live my life to the fullest, the woman not afraid to stand up for what she believed in, and who took risks even though she knew what the consequences were, is my Michigan hero.



## Raleigh Milner

**St. Stephen Lutheran School, Waterford**

My uncle pursued what he loved and followed his dream. He made sure his grades were good, so he was able to graduate from Lutheran High School Northwest a year early. After he graduated, Michigan State University offered him a scholarship to play college hockey.

My uncle Mike knew what he wanted to do with his life. He kept his priorities in order, and made his dreams come true. The dedication he feels towards his hockey is how I feel about dancing. It's how I want to spend my life, it is my life.

I look up to my uncle because he kept going. If he didn't get picked for the team or didn't get played in a game, he didn't give up. He kept fighting for his dream! And that is why my uncle, Mike York, is my personal hero.

## Jacob Ignasiak

**St. Joseph School, West Branch**

Mike had decided and announced with all of his family around, "I want to be a professional baseball player or a pitcher." It was silent for a moment, but then the entire family laughed at him and said, "You'll never be a baseball player; you're too small." Mike was upset but felt that if he worked hard enough, he could achieve this amazing goal.

Day after day, night after night, Mike persisted and believed in his dream of professional baseball.

One night, late after supper the phone rang. Mike ran into the living room and picked it up. The head coach of the Milwaukee Brewers was on the line asking him if he wanted to join the team for the season.

Mike did what many others failed to do. When everyone had no faith or belief in him and his dream, he was confident he could make it. He achieved his goal when no one thought he could.

Uncle Mike is an extraordinary inspiration to me because I love sports, and one day hope to play in the big leagues myself. He has taught me that if I want something, I have to earn it, and that everything is not handed to you. This Michigan hero is the best example of making the most of what you have and never giving up.

## Christian Lupo

**St. Paul Lutheran, Sterling Heights**

My friend Gina walked into kindergarten and will graduate eighth grade in a wheelchair.

Gina has to sit in a wheelchair all day and I feel horrible for her, yet she inspires me. She faces greater challenges than I do. I look at her and realize that if she can do it, then I can most certainly do it also!

She also makes the best out of her situation. She accomplishes activities despite her disability. She attends physical education class and gets involved in as many activities as possible. Gina refuses to let her disability take complete control of her life.

My friend Gina has inspired me to be the best person I can be. She has taught me to be content with what I have and to look at life in the best way possible. It makes me sad knowing that her condition might get worse over the upcoming years, but I have confidence in her that she will continue to try her best and never give up.

## Ramzy Samara

**Waverly Middle School, Lansing**

My father came to this country as a young Palestinian refugee, not knowing what was before him. As time went by he found a path. Not wanting others to have to feel the same pain that war brought to him, my father joined the United States military; he protected his people and guarded his country.

My father has watched his father, oldest brother, loved ones, and best friends die at the hands of others. He doesn't want anyone else to go through the sorrow, the pain, the anger, the hatred, or the grief.

My father puts everything on the line so we the people of Michigan can be with our families. He does it for us to be safe in our homes and to allow us the opportunity to have a promising future, instead of no future at all.

The only person that truly holds the title of my hero is my father, Moussa Samara. Even though the soil beneath my father's feet might change, his reasons to fight will never.



# Saiko Jawo

Wayland Union Middle School, Wayland

Pete belongs to Woodlawn Christian Reformed Church and they sponsored refugees from Africa. My family was picked to come to America to start a new life. Pete wanted to know my family more, so he became part of the United Way Big Brothers and Big Sisters Program.

Over the years Pete became a father figure to my brother and me, since our Dad passed away before our family moved to America. Pete is an easy person to talk to and he can make friends in a room full of strangers. I feel like I learned how to talk to people and make friends easily from Pete.

Pete has taught my brother many things in life. Pete still comes to my games, takes me out and always asks me how I am doing. Pete didn't have to help my family out; Pete did because he cared about us. This paper is to thank Pete for everything that he has done, continues to do for me and for being a great role model. I hope that one day I can help people as much as Pete has done for me.



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