

ELOQUENCE: Inspiring Words from the Students of Stand & Deliver

Welcome to our first issue of ELOQUENCE! What you are about to read are original works, some written for speeches in the Stand & Deliver Program. There are also pieces of poetry and essays written specifically for this newsletter, by students in the Stand & Deliver program in Newark.

So much of what is written here are things that most people have a hard time talking about: parents, death, inspiration, passions in life. We thank all of the contributors to our premier issue of ELOQUENCE and encourage everyone in Stand & Deliver to continue to make their voice be heard, both out loud and on paper, on issues that really matter.

--Wendy Davis, Ph.D. Editor.

On Parents:

A Daughter's View by Tanganiyka Mitchell, University High Graduate

The trials and tribulations I have overcome being raised in Newark, New Jersey have molded me into a stronger and wiser individual. Even though I have encountered many obstacles in my life, I embraced each failure as a lesson and continued striving for success.

A major figure in my life departed on December 28, 2000. My father, Eric Robinson, was a single parent of three children who made sure that his children knew the importance of education. My immediate family is not educated beyond high school; therefore I have decided to take on the challenge to become successful. My father drilled into our heads that with knowledge no one could judge you or treat you unfairly and that hard work pays off. He worked hard as a licensed barber to support his children. He was a good role model.

Losing my father was an enormous disappointment to me. I remember that day as if it were yesterday. It was on a cold Saturday around twelve noon. I had just walked into my house from basketball practice to find my grandmother not home. I assume she went to the hospital to see my Daddy who had been there for a bout a week or so.

Just as I was putting my locker bag down, the phone rang. It was my favorite aunt from Virginia. Her voice was softer than usual as if she was crying. She said, "Tangee, you should get to the hospital as quick as possible because the doctor said your Daddy may not make it" A lump formed in my throat but I managed to say, "Alright." I hung up the phone and tears began to roll down my cheeks. I ran upstairs to get my cousin so he could take me to the hospital.

When I got there, my grandmother was in the room beside my Daddy's bed holding his hand. As I looked at my father with different tubes running in and out of his body and blood running from his nose, I began to break down and cry. My grandmother embraced me and said, "don't cry—it's going to be all right." I could not believe my father was lying there helpless and I could not do anything for him. All I kept saying to myself is, "That's not him. My Daddy is strong." Hours later, we received a phone call saying he had passed and from that moment on, my life changed forever.

I was only fifteen, but I was very much focused. I knew exactly what my father expected me to do. To get me through this tragedy, I became very active and began to contribute to my school and community. I became a member of a high school sorority called The National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, Delta Pi Chapter Incorporated. I perform volunteer work daily. During the major holidays, I visit and help feed the homeless. I am presently captain of the Varsity Volleyball Team and a member of the Varsity Basketball Team.

As a college student, I will study business management and criminal justice because I believe that all people have a right to a fair trial. The outcome should not depend on one's race or sex. I will attempt to change society's thoughts and bring peace by becoming an outspoken and determined public defender.

I have realized that my father was and always will be the one person I can say was a true example of parenthood. I have come so far because I allow my father's life to guide me through many struggles. Even though our life together was short, I have grown to appreciate the memory and words locked in my heart, I keep the key in my pocket to unlock the happiness we have shared. When I am going through a struggle and feel as if I want to give up, I sense his presence telling me to keep going and to stay on the righteous path.

Taking Off the Mask by LaShawn Johnson, Arts High Graduate

I guess the saying is true, "If it doesn't kill you, it'll make you stronger." At least that's what I believe. To most people the story I'm writing about may sound like a sob story but it's actually a story about one woman's victory. It's a difficult story, but after listening to a performance for Stand & Deliver at Rutgers by Mykee Fowlin, I've decided to just "take off" the mask.

How can I start? This is a very sensitive area in my life to talk about and at times has made me feel very vulnerable. But since I've taken off the mask, I will tell my story. My mom had an addiction to narcotics for several years of my life. The key word here is had, there's the victory. Since I was the age of eight through fourteen she had "a problem." I was too young to recognize 'the problem' and also too young to realize how agonizing it was and how lonely she felt.

Now, I realize she was without self-control and seeking love. As for me, I stood firmly behind the mask, unsure of whether she loved me. It took willpower and strength for her to pull herself together. She overcame the use of narcotics and inspired me; her strength is real. Not only is she victorious, but she is also concerned about younger people and encourages them not to go down the same path. I admire her courage to "Stand and Deliver" this important message.

Inspiration is defined as, 'stimulation of the mind or emotions to a high level of activity or feeling.' My mom, Geneva Johnson, is truly an inspiration. She has turned her life around. Today I have no doubt of her love for me and her compassion for others. When my mother was addicted, she wore a mask and forced me to wear one too. Now the masks are off and we're showing each other who we really are. We appreciate each other and life together. We can now

move on and grow. Yes, some people may think this started out as a sob story, but it's not. We're still here!

Maternal Inspiration by Dayveonne Bussey, Central High Graduate

The person that inspired me the most would have to be my mother Jacqueline J. Bussey. My mother has risen from the negative effects of being an abused child to a single parent. She has a loving and nurturing ability that calms my biggest fears. At the age of thirty, my mom got married. It was at this time that she seemed to be the happiest, only to realize that happiness turned into an unimaginable pain. By faith she was able to overcome every obstacle that came her way.

From this experience, my mother now speaks to young women all over, about different types of abuse and how to overcome them. She tells young girls in high school about the effects that abuse can have if not dealt with; she speaks to women in the community and Church, to let them know that they must love themselves in order to love others. She gives them the strength to know that they have the power to overcome any type of abuse, just as she had.

My mom has inspired so many to see that they possess the power within to overcome. I simply want to say to her, "Thank you Mom for being an inspiration in my life. You have helped me to see that I possess greatness within me."

On the Inspiration of Friends and Others

'John's' Story by Tabita Delisca, Arts High

It took me a while to sit down and write this but when I really focused and thought about the people around me, one of my friends popped into my head. To protect this person's privacy, I will call him 'John'. John inspires me because he has gone through such a horrible ordeal, it has made him more determined instead of discouraging him.

Even since sophomore year of high school, John's mother was suffering from breast cancer. After she had surgery, they thought it would get better but it only got worse. His mother stopped working because of her condition, so John got a job to help out with the bills. At the age of 16, John was holding down a full-time job and still kept his grades up.

In July 2002, John's mother passed away. Her death was very devastating to him because he and his mother were very close. She was all he really had since his father was not around. Even though his grandmother moved in with him and his younger brother he still had to help provide. It must have been hard on him but he survived.

John will be graduating from high school in June 2004 and will attend Delaware State University on a full scholarship; he will major in math. He plans to start out as a math teacher in Newark and work towards eventually becoming the Superintendent of the school district.

After losing his mother, John could have decided to give up on himself and slack off but he decided to go on stronger than before. Seeing how he handled this very difficult as his and thankfully I still have my parents to help me through things. Watching a friend lose his mother made me more appreciative of my own mother.

In my opinion, John's determination, persistence and resourcefulness makes him a strong leader. He has always been able to get and keep a job because of his good work ethic. Some people would just fall apart in a situation like his but his courage kept him strong.

Gerald Coffee, a top motivational speaker, once stated, "When we cannot change a situation, resolution comes through the way we chose to handle it within ourselves." There was nothing John could have done to change what happened so he did not let it block his way. John is proof that no matter how bad a situation may be, if you handle it with a positive mindset, you will always come out on top. Whenever I feel overwhelmed, I think about John and I am inspired by his life.

Someone Who Inspires Me by Chika Achebe, Arts High School

I am not easily impressed. I have never been easy to impress to say the least and I am definitely not an advocate of people receiving accolades for doing what they are supposed to do but rather for going above and beyond the call of duty. One human being that never falls short of anything but impressive is a young man by the name of Aqueel Salaam. By the end of this essay, I think you will definitely agree with me.

I think one of the hardest concepts that children grapple with understanding is death. It's even harder when the deceased is a loved one or parent. Now, imagine being four years old and being told your father has just passed away and not only is he dead but he is responsible for taking his own life. This scenario is not hard for Aqueel to imagine at all...this is his reality. When Aqueel was just four years old, the man who supposed to teach him everything about being a man shot and killed himself.

Aqueel today is not bitter or malicious but instead believes that everything happens for a reason. He channels all of his energy into maintaining good grades, poetry, and music (he is the best acoustic guitar player and vocalist ever!) He is The New Jersey Forensic League Champ. He is the 2004 ACT-SO gold medal winner for vocal. The list could go on forever, but most importantly, Aqueel Salaam is my friend. He inspires me. He brings out the best in me. He commands every drop of respect that is in me and because of him I dare to be different. He is so creative and is so passionate about what he does, and because his energy is so contagious he stirs up the same positive emotions in me. Aqueel Salaam impresses me and I am not easily impressed.

Light from Out of the Darkness by Ned Wogwugwu, Science High, 12th grade

It struck out of the blue like a snake in high grass. One day my brother Emmanuel or Junior as we called him, was a star basketball player with his whole life ahead of him. The next day the doctors told us that both of his kidneys had all but deteriorated and that he would need a kidney transplant or he would be on dialysis for the rest of his life. The news rocked my family hard. We were upset, angry and disappointed all at the same time for many reasons. The first reason was the time that the doctors found out about it. It wasn't until both of his kidneys had all but deteriorated that they found out that he was ill. The second reason we were frustrated and angry was because my brother had just turned eighteen years old. Realizing this was no way to start his adult life, I cried myself to sleep every night. It was unfair. It didn't make sense for someone to seem so healthy, yet be so ill.

Throughout this ordeal there was one person who kept me with a positive attitude, and this person was Emmanuel. It is pretty sad when someone is going through a n ordeal and the person with the greatest outlook is that person. Throughout everything I do not remember my brother frowning. Even when he began dialysis he still kept his positive outlook. This is an eighteen-year-old boy who was forced to go on dialysis every night starting at ten o'clock. Night events weren't even a possibility. He was cheated out of doing the things that most eighteen-year-old kids did. I am positive that it was his positive outlook, combined with my father's compassion that gave my father the courage to donate one of his kidneys to Emmanuel. When we would go visit him after the surgery., he would always be in a joyous mood. He would tell jokes, sometimes even mocking his current state. He made sure that when we left the hospital that we were in a good mood, knowing that he was in a good mood.

My brother's ordeal changed my community as a whole. Even during the time he was on dialysis, others in the neighborhood could not believe that he was going through something life threatening because his positive attitude and constant smile. The day of the transplant, the whole community was in the waiting room with us waiting for the results.

My brother is the embodiment of a leader. He inspired me by showing me that just because you are in a bad situation does not mean everyone else's situation has to be bad too. His ability to convince us of his content with the situation was amazing. It was to the point that if he was unhappy, I couldn't tell because he was so convincing in showing us his content and acceptance of the situation. These techniques helped him to inspire others to want to do everything that they can to assist us in paying for the transplant. You must understand that a kidney transplant is by no stretch of the imagination cheap and we were required to cover what insurance did not His excellent communication skills still help him today and inspire others such as myself to do their best and to not let bad ordeals break our spirit. It is for this reason that my brother is not only a leader in our community, but he is also my hero.

Who Inspires Me by Washington Gavilanez, Essex County Vo-Tech

While many may look upon Princess Diana, the Pope, or the president as an inspiration, I look towards someone who has really touched my life and made a difference in it. My shop teacher has inspired me through his own success and the hardships he encountered in order to reach it.

There are many things about Mr. Deweaver that inspired me, but I'd have to say what inspired me most was his determination to be successful. He came to the United States when he was in his early 20's from Africa, and as many others who immigrated here, English was foreign language. He was determined to learn the language and with time he did, which pulled him toward college. He was determined to be successful even though he could not pay for college. This pushed him even more to show everyone how hard he could work for his goal. Once he enrolled, he quickly began to excel in all of his classes. He graduated from NJIT not only with a degree in Computer Engineering, but also with Networking and Computer Science minors.

To me, the most essential quality a good leader must have is being a good listener. Mr. Deweaver is the best listener I know. He is aware of everyone's point of view and always gets an overall look at a situation before saying anything. He knows how to get his point across, which is especially helpful when talking about something serious. He's also a good leader because he is a devoted person who won't quit on his goals or people, for that matter. He is leaving the stepping stones of his success behind, so that others in the school also look up to him as a role model.

The challenges he overcame have made and will continue to make a big impact in his school community by inspiring people around him to do something with their lives. He is not afraid to fail at something, and he has shown us that is it not the end of the world if we don't understand something the first time. What is important is not giving up, for that shows that you have great determination, not to mention devotion. He has made a great effort to use what he knows to be a leader who helps other to become leaders, which is what the world needs right now. This is what my teacher Mr. Wendell Deweaver has done for me. He has made me want to succeed in life and to become a leader of my own community. He has made me want to become something that not only I will be proud of, but my friends and family will be proud of as well.

Grandeur by Ah-Tavia Mazey, Central High

Grandeur is the way I felt the first time I recited a poem. It was a day that I will never forget. It was a day that the light at the end of the rainbow shined on me and I realized that this is where I wanted to be—on stage, as an actress.

It was June of 2000, my eighth grade graduation from Burnet Street School and I had to recite a poem. My family was in the audience and I wanted them to be proud of me and I wanted to make myself proud, so without any hesitation, I recited. I performed, Still I Rise by Maya Angelou. The applause that I received made me feel that I had begun a quest for something great. I felt so good inside because I had gained the confidence to stand up and speak in front of my family, the school and total strangers. I also felt proud to have been chosen as an instrument to speak Ms. Angelou's words. From then on, I knew I had to further my education after high school to do something that I love. I knew I had to further my education in theatre and law because I felt a need to make a difference in the community where I live.

Neither one of my parents went on to college after high school, so I made it my responsibility to change that part of my history. Since I am the oldest of five children, I realized that I have to set an example for my younger siblings, so they can continue the legacy and further their education after high school as well.

I plan on finishing college and start a career at a young age. I want to show people that no matter what obstacles are in your way, or what mountain you may have to climb, or what bridge you may have to cross, prayer changes things. That first experience I had of reciting Maya Angelou's poem inspired me to put my fears upon a hidden shelf, to rise and go for my goals, to plan for my future and to set a positive example for my younger siblings.

Montel Williams by Richard W. Smith, Central High

Last fall I was selected to attend the Montel Williams show in New York City at Channel Two. I had never been a part of an audience of a talk show and was delighted to be chosen. I had seen him on television a few times before but really didn't pay too much attention to him. However, I went with an open mind.

As Mr. Williams came out on stage to greet his audience, I could not help admiring him for the role he was playing as an African American male hosting a television show. To my surprise, I discovered that Mr. Williams was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) in 1999. The overall presentation of his show was very dynamic and positive as he was well attuned to the needs of the audience. When someone in the audience asked him what it was like living with MS, Montel said that some days the pain was so unbearable that he could hardly put his clothes on. He also went on to say that the amount of medication he has to take daily becomes overwhelming. As I sat in the audience watching him, I realized that although he is faced with enormous challenges, he is a leader who continues to inspire others through his will power, optimism and determination. I left the Montel Williams show feeling very motivated. His show taught me to appreciate the things in life that we take for granted.

In life, everyone faces challenges. My challenge was losing my mother four years ago. At first I was in denial of her death, and I kept asking myself why she was taken from me. However, as time passed, I realized that life has to go on. Not a day goes by without me thinking what it would have been like if my mother were still alive. Because education was foremost in her mind, I plan to attend college and pursue a career.

An Interview with Kwame Micah.

Kwame completed the Stand & Deliver program at Arts High four years ago. He is now one of the workshop leaders of the summer program, working at Greater Newark Conservancy this past summer.

Q: Kwame, besides, working for Stand & Deliver, what are you doing these days?

KM: I am a junior communications major with a concentration in mass media at Central Connecticut State University. This summer, I am in intern at NJN TV for Henrietta Parker who is the producer for "Due Process", a legal show dealing with the issues that mainly concern NJ as a state. My job here, along with a couple of other people, is to transcribe videos; I also go out on

different shoots to find footage for the shows. We do a lot of research in terms of putting together information packages for the show. In July I will be moving to working for the news part of the show and I will be on camera.

Q: What got you started in this?

KM: I guess I have to take you back on a journey to the time when I was eleven years old. At eleven years old, I had just seen the movie, “The Jackson’s: An American Dream”, which is basically the story of Michael Jackson’s life. From that movie, I had decided I wanted to become a professional singer.... until I realized I could not sing! So I decided if I couldn’t sing like Michael Jackson, I’ll act and dance like MJ. I started taking dancing classes and acting classes. So I took my first acting class when I was eleven.

I used to want to do movies, until reality set in and people were telling me how hard to get that type of break. So I said ok, I could find something more practical and steady than movies, and the closest thing I could see to that to that was news casting. At this time I was about 12 or 13 and I decided I would be both an actor and a newscaster full time. I started training—I was on the debate team, people always acknowledged that I had relatively good oratory skills, especially being someone from Newark. I became captain of the debate team that year, and my acting training aided in my speaking abilities. From there, I went to Arts High, along with taking acting classes. I was accepted into City Kids Repertory. I got to do a lot of performances at the NJPAC. My senior year I won the Star Ledger Scholarship for the performing arts. They recommended that I get some experience out of school. The woman in charge of the Star Ledger Scholarship program recommended that I apply to NJN.

Q: So it really helps to have the right connections in this field. And being a good communicator helps you to establish these connections. What about how you got into the Stand & Deliver program?

KW: Senior year of high school they asked a few of us to do the Stand & Deliver program, We had classes every other week, we got a lot of information and hand outs about communication skills. The Stand & Deliver program was a great refresher course, but I also learned a few new things, like about how when you speak on the phone you are able express yourself more freely if you use hand gestures while talking on the phone. Delacy Davis, who was the workshop leader, asked me to be the representative for the school to perform for the Night of Eloquence. I had originally decided to do a speech, but another student was also doing a speech, so I decided doing, “The Telltale Heart.” Now I am going to teach for Stand & Deliver as I finally have more time to teach at the Greater Conservatory.

Q: Tell us a little about what you are doing in school with a major in communications?

KM: Before you can even get into the communications department, you have to take a course in public speaking, interpersonal communication, and intro to mass media and rhetoric. Because of the Stand & Deliver class I was able to excel in all my communications classes. I will pursue Broadcast Journalism in graduate school; they are very competitive so hopefully I’ll get in. My

school deals a lot with theory, but the internship is actually giving me practice on the technical side of editing and video.

Q: What has motivated you to excel?

KM: I was always into TV and music. My acting classes and I actually watched an episode of “90210”—there was an episode where Brenda, who worked at the restaurant, was saving up to take acting classes. That motivated me to take acting classes. But what keeps me motivated is I see so many people who I’ve gone to elementary school with, who I’ve gone to college with and they’re not really doing anything with their lives. My parents were both teachers, so they’ve also been also were the ones to push me to do well. By the time I got to college I had the epiphany that’s its time to get serious about what you want to do. Everything from this point on should help you in some way toward your future. Also, when I got the awards, I didn’t want to let anyone down—the people who saw me grow from a child to what I am now.

Q: What kind of contribution do you want to make?

KM: Eventually I want to give back to all the programs that helped me, including the dancing company I got a scholarship. I’ve always appreciated everything that they’ve done to help me

Q: What kind of advice would you give to students just getting started in the program?

Things don’t always go as you plan them to. I would just tell them to keep holding onto your dreams. There’s a song by James Taylor called, “Never Die Young” and in the bridge of the song he says, “Let other hearts be broken, let other dreams run dry, let our golden one sail on sail on to another land beneath another sky” and that’s something that I’ve always held on to. I mean even though there are times when I want to throw in the towel because things are looking as though things aren’t going in my favor, I hold onto that quote seriously and that’s what I would tell someone. Keep holding onto your dreams—keep pursuing them.

Reflections on Equality. By Keyee Koneh, Emaculate Conception H.S., 12th grade

I believe in equality and equal rights. We should all be treated equally and fairly. When it comes to education, jobs or marriages, I believe that your socioeconomic status, set or race should be the deciding factor of whether or not you should hold a position of power and/or it shouldn’t limit you from living your life as fest fitting to you. In our day and age, we don’t very much equality; nor do we practice it. Races are discriminated against and citizens aren’t given equal rights in the same way that gay and lesbians who want to marry. I feel that gay marriage should be nationally legalized or at least reserved for the state which it is rightfully reserved for under our constitution, not the federal government. In conclusion, I’ll repeat a saying that you all have heard before that goes hand in hand with my belief in equality: Treat others as you would want to be treated.

My Experience of Stand & Deliver by Alhilah Akridge

During this program, the foundation provided by the Stand & Deliver workshop leaders was a necessity that a lot of young adults need at this point in their lives. To clarify, the experiences of the teachers in the workforce and advice given to us were helpful in facilitating our journey to success. This program helped us to be more open and encourages the students to further our education. Thus this experience definitely has opened another door for me in reference to getting help with my communication skills.

On Achievement by Taimon Campbell, Catholic Community Services

Something that I am passionate about is achieving in life. There are a lot of ways to achieve in life. The ways that I achieve in life are education, athletics and independence. I achieved through education by maintaining a 3.0 GPA and planning to graduate from high school.

I achieved through athletics by being an All-American even though I didn't get All-American recognition. I played basketball, ran track, bowled and ran cross country. I achieve through independence by doing things on my own—things that will help me get through college and the rest of my life.

Everyone achieves in their own way, but the most common for people is making it through a day and waking up for another one.

The Passion Page

My Ultimate dream, by Taliah Glenn, Science High, 11th grade

Over the years I have been contemplating what I wanted to become when I got older. I always liked being around children and giving them my undivided attention. Therefore, I decided to become a pediatrician. I personally feel that if I do something that I'm passionate about, it will make me feel good. And that is what really matters to me. I was always told to do something that I loved so that it would not seem like a job, it would become a part of my life.

Even though it may take a while to fulfill my dream, I'm ready and prepared to do whatever it takes and then some. My ultimate dream is to travel around the world to different countries such as those in Africa, and help the children that need to be helped. I want to be universally known as the best pediatrician in the world that helps the children and their families overcome health difficulties in their children's lives.

Music: My Passion, by Dashawn Walker, Science High, 11th grade

I am most passionate about music because it related to me. When I hear a song on the radio or see a music video on TV, I feel the beat and listen to the lyrics. If the tune is really catchy, I might get up and start to dance to it.

When it come the genre, I don't discriminate. Whether it's rock or rap, I enjoy the music nevertheless. I do not put a limit on what and who I listen to.

The music artists are perhaps the most important thing about music. Without their creativity, style and experiences, their music wouldn't sound as good. It gets even more interesting when there's a group or band because each one of them puts their own twist on the collective sound.

Sometimes I can only enjoy hearing a certain type of song depending on my environment. For example, when it's midnight and I'm lying down, I prefer to hear smooth Rhythm and Blues. If I'm in a club or at a party, I want to hear some hip-hop, reggae, and most of all, house/club songs. There's no resisting the temptation to dance or sing to the songs. No matter who you are or where you're from, if you aren't deaf or you have at least one ear, I'm sure that you enjoy some type of music.

The Issues that Face Young Teens Today by Ashley Cordero, Bloomfield Tech, 10th grade
One of the biggest issues that face teens today is peer pressure. We are all faced with difficult problems that are sometimes hard to say no, so we are pressured to say yes. Whether it's about drugs, sex, violence, or what have you. We all will encounter them. Maybe at home, at school, walking home or at the park. Sooner or later we will be trapped by them. I think we should do what we feel is right. If your friends or peers don't like the way you handled that particular situation, then they are not your real friends.

Another issue we are faced with is trying to fit in. We all want to be popular and fit in, so we do things that later on might make us suffer. We might hang out with the wrong crowd, bully people, or do something that is bad. This can be another sign of peer pressure. Me personally, I don't think we should change who we are for a group of people. If they can't accept you for who you are and what you are about, then they're not worth hanging out with.

These are just a couple of the many issues we teens are faced with. We all have to be strong and try to make what we think is the right decision.

Poet's corner

Those Eyes by DeLisa O'Brien

Tell me your story
Show me your soul
As deep as they go
All I want to know
From beginning to now
Show me your fears
Show me your joyous and horrible years
Show me your sad and happy tears
Through and through
Getting to know you
Without words ever spoken
Without the silence ever broken

Your eyes, those eyes
Tell it all

Untitled by DeLisa O'Brien

You know nothing about me.
Then again, neither do I.
Why does anyone care about me?
Why do I want to cry?

So many things running through my head.
My body feels numb.
So many things going on.
Sitting, waiting for what's to come.

No one will ever love me.
I always push them away.
Maybe I want to be left alone.
No wait—please stay.

I'm trying as hard as I can
To be someone I love
And in order to get there
I need help from above.

The High Angels (**Inspired by Angels in America**) by DeLisa O'Brien

They say God left,
They don't know where He went.
The high angels keep order, but they can't control destruction.
They say progress isn't good,
It's in our nature,
we want bigger, we want better, we want compact.
They say they don't know where He went,
The prophet said to sue Him when He gets back.
He neglected his responsibility
His one and only responsibility,
Us.

We don't blame him because we didn't know.

I know now. I try not to hate Him though.
Suffering makes us see how precious life is.
They say God left.
They don't know where He went.

Untitled by DeLisa O'Brien, St. Vincent Academy, 9th grade

Make me laugh,
Laugh till it hurts,
Hurts until I can't breathe,
Can't breathe until I die.
Make me smile,
Smile till my face hurts,
Hurts until it's stuck that way,
Stuck that way forever.
Hold me close,
Close to your body
Your body against mine,
Against mine always
Be my everything,
everything I've searched for
searched for perfection,
perfection in you.

On Relationships

I love you by Tiffany Martin

When you were here I didn't appreciate it
Now that you're gone I really hate it
I know you said you loved me and I took it for granted
I know it's sad, but I don't even remember when you said it
I won't lie, I didn't love you
You cheated
I cried and asked with who
Then I cheated and lied
But u said it was cool
You forgave me the first time, but then I went too far
I guess I picked too many candy bars out of the candy jar
I didn't see you for a while
We argued for days after that
I admit, I missed seeing you in your red and black fitted cap
We didn't talk for days and I was sad
More days passed and then, I got mad
Angry and full of hate, I came by your house
Your mother answered and when I asked to come in I wasn't allowed
It was different from the way it was before
I expected to see you standing behind that door
But instead it was awkward
Not that same old silence
Your mom explained that you went out again dealing with that gang nonsense

Shot twice in the back and once in the head
At 7:00 pm you were pronounced dead
I'm sorry but I couldn't bear to go to your wake or funeral
I know I could never see myself with someone new
There's a picture of us hanging on my wall and I just stare
Hoping and wishing I could've said I love you while you were still here

Need for a Change by Tiffany Martin, St. Vincent Academy, 11th grade

See on my streets there are
Babies crying
Mommies sighing
Daddies dying
And Students trying
Because they need to be whatever they can be
Just to make ends meet on my streets

Becoming drug dealers
Gang members
Bank robbers
And crooked cops
Just to make it on my streets

No flower gardens and beautiful parks to play in
Broken down playgrounds filled with confused children
Schools with little to no education
Child abuse and molestation
Everyone's sitting here complaining
But no one's making a move to change it
On my streets there is no equal opportunity
You have to make your own way
So before you point the finger to blame or complain
Realize that you're playing a major part in this poverty game

Poverty in the World by Victoria Akanbi, Queen of Peace H.S.

While many of us are wondering what type of new sneakers we are going to buy next, or what new outfit should we get, poverty in the world is around us. Did you know that nearly three billion people live on less than two dollars a day? Did you know the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of the poorest 48 nations is less than the wealth of the world's three richest people combined? Less than one percent of what the world spent every year on weapons was needed to put every child into school by the year 2000. It didn't happen.

All over the world disparities between rich and poor, even in the wealthiest of nations, is rising sharply. Fewer people are becoming successful and wealthy while disproportionately larger populations are becoming even poorer. There are many issues involved when looking at global poverty and inequality. It isn't correct to say that the poor are poor due to their own government. In fact, you can say that the poor are poor because the rich are richer and have the power to enforce trade agreements that favor their interest more than the poor nations.

You know how when you have a craving for that certain thing you want to eat and nothing else seems to fulfill that craving. Guess what? There are millions of people out in the world who are starving. If production of food is increased and provided to more people while the causes of poverty are not addressed, hunger will still continue, because people will not be able to buy food.

The point I am trying to make is that we should give to those who are in need. We should help those in need until they can produce for themselves. And we should keep in mind that we should cherish all that we have.

What Inspires Me by Jonathan Alicea, North 13th ST. Vo-Tech, Bloomfield, 11th grade

There are many things to get inspiration from. It can be the smallest thing, or the biggest depending on how inspiring you may find it. In my case, what inspires me is music, movies, certain reading materials and other types of entertainment. Certain people like family, and friends are another part of inspiration.

Another inspiration for me I find rather helpful would be my artwork. It all depends on what it is, for example, if I'm really into it being original, I'm led to continue until I tire of it. So, many things can inspire a person. You would be surprised to know what little things can.

A Lesson Learned by Stephanie Vasquez, Woodbridge H.S., 9th grade

Throughout the years, I have had many life changing experiences. I can't say I lived such a hard life because I didn't. But I did go through many struggles. One of those many struggles was with my brother.

During his adolescence years, he was struggling with a disease, addiction. I don't know if you all know, but when one person is struggling with addiction, it affects everyone. He had been in and out about five rehabs and still struggling. He then cleaned up his life. He just graduated High School and was going to apply to college to live his dream to become a star football player. But on the 4th of July of this year he got into a fatal car accident. At about 10:30 in the morning the Old Bridge police came to my house and told us the bad news. When I saw the cop car outside, I thought they were at my house to tell us that my brother had gotten a ticket but I never thought that they would tell me that my older brother was dead. Ever since this has all happened, life hasn't been the same. I remember the nights I used to spend with him just hanging out talking and driving around. And I miss that. He has left with many lessons that everyone can learn from. And I doubt that anyone will forget him.

That moment by Christina Colon, Arts High School, 11th grade

Every day I would go see her, love her and hug her as if it were my first time. I would not stand a chance to see her in pain or hurt, until that day came to haunt me forever. That day was the worst day of my entire life. There she was, just lying on the hospital bed. She could not move, speak—she couldn't even see. It was a terrible feeling. I couldn't even think about it because it made me cry, and suffer because she was suffering.

A few days went by and there was no sign of her getting better. My family knew that it was “time”. Time for what?, I questioned. Time to let her go to a better place? That's what it was but that is not what I wanted. I refused to say goodbye. They told me she was waiting for me to say goodbye, but I couldn't. She was waiting for me. I did not want her to keep on suffering, but it was so hard.

That night I went to her for the last time. I burst into tears. I didn't want to let her go, but I had to. As I was running my fingers through her soft grey hair, I leaned over into her ear and whispered, “Te amo, Y te quiero mucho, nunca te olvidare Bia,” and on that same night, she died.

I will always love her, and miss her and I know for a fact she would want me to do well in school, and go on with my life. She was the best thing in my life, and now she's gone. My question is, “how am I supposed to live without the one thing that kept me going?”

About Her by Maritza Colon, Arts High, 11th grade

Life has always had an ambiguous impact on me. I have experienced different ways of life that have varied from complete happiness to heartbreaking and miserable stages. When I reflect on the causes of my beliefs toward life, nothing resonates as strongly as my Grandmother.

From the age of two until nine, I lived with my Grandmother, Ana. I called her Bia. As a child, my sisters and I had come up with a nickname for her and it stayed that way. There are so many wonderful times I can remember that were shared with my family. I could tell what kind of family gathering it would be from the smell of hot dogs and hamburger or rice and beans. If we walked through the doors of one of my aunts and uncle's house and she smelled the hot dogs with the hamburgers, it was a day of her complaining how we drove hours in the car to come and eat fast food. On the other hand, if it was the delicious smell of rice and beans, the hours spent in the car were worth it. There are the good old days that I miss.

If there were one thing I could change about my childhood, it would be moving to Puerto Rico and away from Bia for two years. Throughout my life, I have often heard people say that you should never have any regrets, and I do not. But the love that I developed for my grandmother was inexplicable. She taught me so much about life and how to appreciate. The times I was away from my Grandmother were so sad. When I returned to New Jersey, it was only about three

months before my Grandmother had passed away. I thought my life was over. But what I failed to realize was that my life was just beginning. Death had two meanings in my life. It caused me to cry and hurt, but it also helped me to become a better and stronger person. If it was not for her, I would not have the positive mentality toward my life that I have now. She has become my reason for succeeding in life and I will never fail her.