



*Voices of Children 2022*



## FOREWARD

Most children find safety and comfort in the arms and care of their family, including grandparents and other relatives. For more than 2.5 million children in the USA, living with a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or other family member has become a permanent or long-term arrangement.

Kinship Care often comes as a surprise to both the child and the relative caregiver. When parents are unable or unwilling to care for their children, placement with a relative caregiver can have many advantages. Kinship Care reduces the trauma children experience when placed with strangers. It enhances children's sense of identity and self-esteem, continues the connections children have to their siblings and other relatives, and strengthens the family's ability to give children the support they need.

What does it mean to a child who can't live with their parents to know he/she/they is safe, loved, and has a place to belong?

Some answers to those questions are offered in this small but powerful book as children ages 5 to 19 from across Washington State relate their experiences living in Kinship Care.

Some are funny, some are serious or even sad, but all are sincere and offer testimony to the value, sense of family, and love each young author experienced living with a relative caregiver.

Enjoy your reading!

Shelly Willis,  
Executive Director  
Family Education and Support Services  
Tumwater, WA

**Voices of Children  
Raised by Grandparents  
And Other Relatives  
&  
Voices of Kinship Caregivers  
2022 Contest**

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**Please note: All entries in this book are printed as received. Some formatting changes have been made. Last names have been removed to protect identities.**



★ ~ *Winners*



# With Many Thanks...



This booklet is a tribute to grandparents and other relatives of Washington State. It is a collaborative effort that could not have been possible without the support, guidance, and partnership of those listed below. Thanks to each of you for your tremendous spirit and dedication to those we serve.

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- Bobbi Chapman                Kinship Navigator Trainee at FESS
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## *Voices of Children 2022*

A compilation of poems, essays, and drawings submitted by Children living in Washington State to the 2022 Voices of Children Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives Contest.

And

A compilation of poems and essays of Washington State Kinship Caregivers Reflecting on their Positive Experiences in Caregiving.

Initiated by the Washington State Relatives as Parents Program (RAPP) and the Kinship Oversight Committee.

Coordinated by:

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This booklet can also be found online at:  
[www.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare)

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**DEDICATION**

***Thank you, Lynn Urvina!***

We are delighted to dedicate the 2022 *Voices of Children* book to a woman who has significantly strengthened supportive services for kinship families across Washington State, **Lynn Urvina!**

There are some people you meet in this world who were just meant for their career. Lynn Urvina is one of those people. As a Kinship Navigator and Director for the past 14 years, Lynn has directly supported thousands of families across Thurston, Lewis, and Mason Counties. Lynn has also been a catalyst for change on local, state, and national initiatives dedicated to improving policies, access to services, and overall awareness of the issues faced by relative caregivers. Lynn’s history of advocacy includes recognition by **Casey Family Programs** who presented her with the “**Excellence for Children Award**”, and by “**Generations United Grand Members**” who selected her to represent kinship caregivers on a national advisory board.

Lynn’s courage, professionalism, critical thinking, collaboration, and tenacious spirit have helped to make significant strides in changing the supportive landscape of our community, our state, and across our nation.

We appreciate Lynn’s leadership and wish to acknowledge that kinship caregivers living in Washington State have greater access to resources and supports due to Lynn Urvina’s dedicated efforts.

With our deepest appreciation, we ***Thank you, Lynn Urvina!***

**Grandchild**

“Will you take her?” “Of course, we adore her.”  
Precious preschooler with night terrors.

“It will be hard on you.” Yes, for we are old.  
You also gave a spark to life!

Dancing lessons, bicycles, horses. Big dreams.  
Mistakes. Learning. Progress

Each class picture on the fridge.  
Have we given you room to be yourself?

Enough that you’ll return when you can fly?  
Please do.





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We advocated with teachers for IEP and Tutor supports, set up counseling, and sat through countless Karaoke and concert performances (brutal), and we took proud photos to document her many hard-earned accomplishments. I was there when she cried over the loss of her first boyfriend and I was there with a corsage and curling iron as she prepared for her first school dance. I was also there when she was diagnosed with cancer, through all the surgeries, and the follow up after care.

I love that kid like she was my own, while all the while maintaining my position as aunt. Love should not be a loyalty struggle over which family member one can love. So we did what we could to nurture those relationships. Even though it meant navigating several counties, fathers of children, state systems, and working with other Kin Caregivers who ultimately also ended up raising my niece’s siblings. We all did it because we all knew it was best for the kids.

Now this child is herself an adult and she lives across the state a few doors down from her mother. She is happily married, and her life is good. I don’t see her often, but I hear she loves to cook and is dreaming of re-visiting Hawaii. I miss her deeply, and find comfort in knowing that she navigated health, emotional, and educational milestones that would have ended very differently had I, and my husband, not been there. I don’t think she knows this. What she does know is she was loved. By many. Sometimes there are Aunts. ... and that can be a good thing. Some might say life changing. Submitted Anonymous-ly by an Aunt.

*Anonymous  
Aunt*



In 1985 I was 21, recently married and thinking about starting a family when my little brother announced he was going to be a dad. My youngest brother whom I helped raise, as is the cultural norm of our family. Expectations of the eldest. I celebrated the birth of that child who came into this world on my birthday. It was soon very clear that this child would not be able to continue safely living with their mother. A sibling was on the way for my niece from another father and the environment she was in was unhealthy. When asked if I could accept the child into my care by the state I said yes. After all what was the option? Foster care? With strangers? Of course, we welcomed her. There was no adoption, no legal action- because we stepped up, the state stepped out. We were happy, the child was safe and we began to parent. Bless my husband who has been there from day one.

Like many Kin Caregivers I grappled with the balance of over-indulgence and discipline. I was walking the path of a parent, but we were Aunt and Uncle. I was guilty of spending too much on birthday gifts just to put a smile on her face. We were thrilled to take her on fun adventures like camping, Hawaii, and Arizona. My husband and I parented this child. We taught her to ride a bike, invest in good hygiene, and to cook. We did all we could to maintain her connection to her parents, driving for four hours one way so she could see her mom for the one- or two-hour visit, all the time praying her mom showed up this time. We negotiated the purchase of a cell phone, drivers education, and slumber parties. And at times it was not easy. I remember my niece asking me while school shopping if we could buy clothes for her because she didn't have many. Of course, we did because it was important to her.

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WHAT'S  
YOUR  
STORY



For thirteen years I have been working at Family Education and Support Services. Every day I meet amazing, courageous, selfless people who have chosen to care for their grandchildren, or other relative children.

Seven years after she started living with us, Nicole's mother said she was willing to let us adopt her. We were surprised to hear this, but within a few days the adoption paperwork was begun and a few months later the adoption was finalized. Nicole is now a beautiful, energetic 17-year-old and will be with our family forever. I have helped her connect with her mother's younger children, who all have been removed from her care. She loves being a big sister, even if it is only for short periods of time.

Nicole has been my COVID 19 buddy this past year. We lost my husband to cancer four years ago, so it is just the two of us now. What a team we make! We have spent more time together than ever and our relationship has grown in many ways. We landscaped our yard together, she learned to cook, and we have taken many walks together. It's been a journey I never expected, but one I will always cherish.

*Lynn*  
*Adoptive Mom*

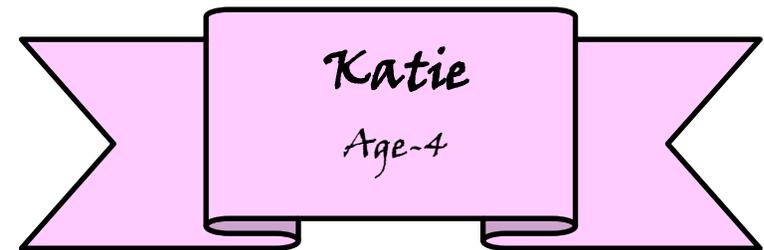
Our family did not know that our granddaughter Nicole existed, until our son was contacted by DSHS, after her birth. Quickly, we realized that she was living in a very unsafe situation with her young mother. She was 11 months old when she came to live with us. Her mother was couch surfing and occasionally sleeping on the streets of Olympia. Our son has mental health and substance abuse challenges and was not, and even today, is not capable of parenting her. We were very worried about Nicole and offered to take care of her as often as possible. Soon she was spending more time with us than with her mother.

Because my husband and I were dedicated to keeping Nicole with our family, we initiated the court process for Non-Parental custody and soon we were caring for her full time. We had the support of our families but had to fight Nicole's mom for over a year before we were granted a final custody order.

My husband's birthday present that year was a crib for Nicole! We had not planned for this, and we were both working full time jobs as retail managers. It was difficult to find childcare with our varied schedules that included nights and week-ends. After a few months I left my job to stay at home with Nicole.

I started exploring resources in the community and began attending a Kinship Caregiver's Support Group. While attending this support group I learned the Agency coordinating the meeting was searching for a "Kinship Navigator". I knew I wanted that job!

### **Winning Contest Entry: Ages 5-7**



## Winning Contest Entries : Ages 8-12

Not all families look the same. Some are different. My Grandpa, Aunt and brother live with me. My Grandpa has to work a lot, so my aunt takes care of me when he's not home. Sometimes she does the grocery shopping. She is patient, creative, helpful, and rescued a dog named Queso before she moved in with us. We call him Luin because it's half my name and half my brother's name. We are a family because we care about each other, even though my brother sometimes drives me crazy. Living with my grandparents and aunt has had a positive impact on my life because it gave me a home.



## Voices from Past Caregivers:

### *My Son*

*A gift from God was intended for me  
He was sent from up above with lots of love  
This child God made for me to receive  
Did have very many special needs  
I was told God gives these children to whom he believes  
Mothers that will take time to give what they need  
I was told that my son would not walk or talk  
But with the touch of many hands  
We all gave him strength to stand  
With more and more therapy he received  
He now walks and talks like you and me  
The power we have with just our hands  
With all our needs in big demand  
These children we have with special needs  
Will grow by just the touch of our hands  
I hope and pray and continue to say  
Mothers help others and guide them this very same way  
Teach them the strength we give  
How much we can achieve as long as we believe  
My son is the proof I've received  
How much we can do  
With just the touch of our hands*

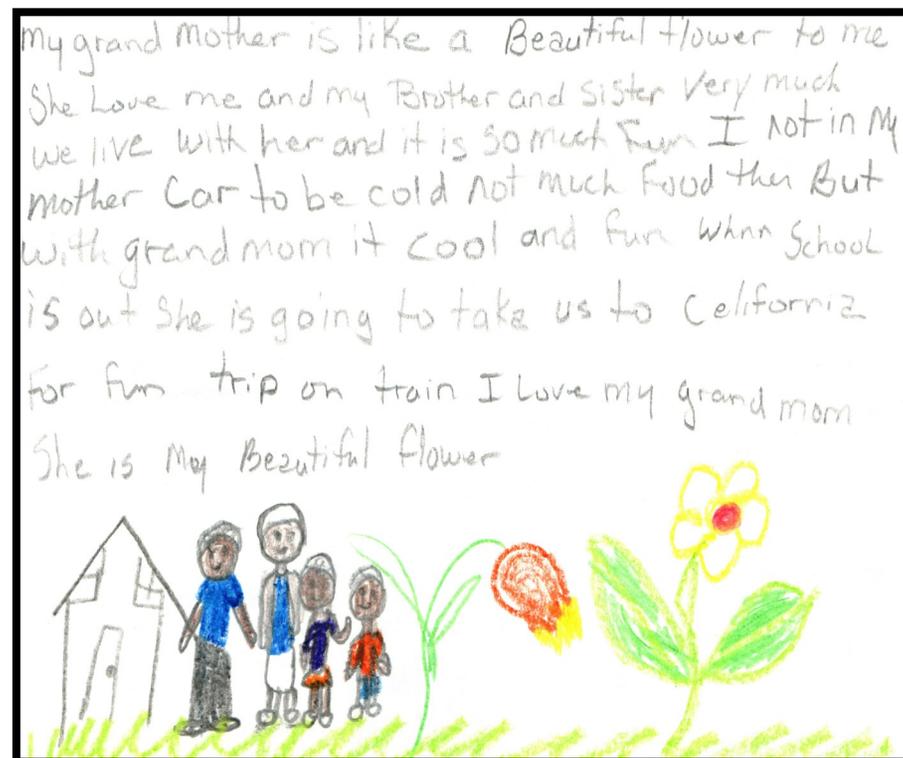


## Entry of Merit:

### Beautiful history

You came to me when you were three months old because your mother went to jail, a year later she came back and took you with her, she took you far away leaving me heart broken and sore, after three years you came back as a gift. A beautiful gift! You only understood English, I only understood Spanish, we shed many tears because we didn't understand each other! Since you were a child, you were very intelligent and you learned to turn on the television, you watched many cartoons in a foreign language for you and that is how you learned to communicate with me, now you are a young girl who speaks two languages, what a beautiful story between the two of us!

*Translated by Mildred Gonzalez*



## Winning Contest Entries : Ages 13-19

"An angel for another angel"  
poem of my life

I, Alison was born on March 10, 2009, I was born with a physical and mental disability.

There was a lot of emotion awaiting my arrival, I cried and then didn't cry anymore, a silence came over the hospital room and the doctors began to act, and when I opened my eyes, I saw myself without a mother and so alone in a hospital crib, with tubes in my nose so I could breathe.

My mom asked, what happened? The doctors answered your baby is not well, your baby is not healthy, she was born with a mental and physical disability, when she heard that, she cried! She was tormented! I was waiting for her with a kiss and a lot of love, but little by little she pulled away from me, leaving me without her warmth. My mother may have abandoned me but never God, sending me an angel, the purest and softest angel, like the clouds that exist in the sky! My great-grandmother Maria, that's her name... a noble and good person who God gave me, the sweetest and most tender, why ask for more!

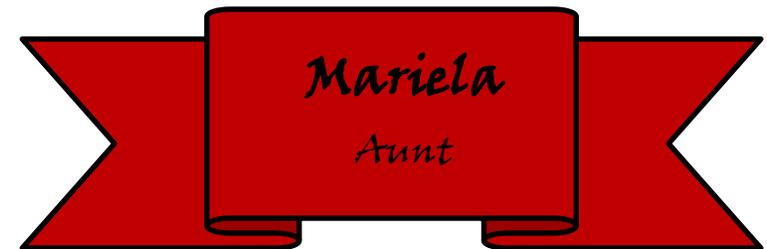
She came to be my hands, my feet and eyes, I learned little by little to walk and half run, but the most beautiful thing is to feel her love and refuge under her wings...

I came to fill the love and the void left by my great-grandfather when he passed, her husband. I arrived at the precise moment to fill her empty heart, here I am, grandma, hug me, I need you!

Thank God to Catholic Charities, I was able to get counseling for all of us and financial help through the Kinship Program and now my nephews are stable and well-rounded young boys.

Present day they are both blossoming, they now have a family that surrounds them with lots of affection and love. I have started a college fund, using my income tax refund for the kids, when they graduate from high school they will have some financial help in getting a higher education.

In closing, God willing when my sister gets back on her feet, I will return her children to her and feel proud of the work I have done in securing their emotional/mental wellbeing and their future.



It has been over one year that I have been a caregiver to an 8 and a 15-year-old nephews. They came to live with my mother and I when we discovered my sister (their mom) had a drug addiction problem. When we rescued the kids from my sister's household, they were having to take care of themselves, since their mom was often gone and their father was a functional alcoholic, whom they saw infrequently.

It has been a difficult experience and rough waters especially with the youngest. He had severe anger issues, he would stab his hand with a fork, bang his head on the door when he was angry or frustrated, was very disrespectful toward any adult to the point where he had me in tears and hated going to school. His older brother was very much to himself, he spent 99% of his time playing video games and not really speaking to anyone, he was a ticking time bomb.

She left her home, family and her own life to dedicate herself to me, for which I thank her with all my heart. She gave her body and soul to my whole being.

Thank you beautiful grandma and thank you more my lord for putting such a big heart in my path, the best angel out of your collection.

An angel for another angel, thank you God.

*Translated by Mildred Gonzalez*



You spend your nights asking why? Why you were never good enough? Why you never mattered, why they hated you? When your done screaming and sobbing your left with the why. And no one can ever answer you. No one ever will. With time it gets easier. With time you learn how to breath again. My nights are no longer filled with fighting. I no longer question my worth. I no longer ask if anyone would care. I've been living with my grandparents the last year and its saved me. I wasn't sure if I'd make it to my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday but I did. I graduate high school in 65 days, something I was told I'd never do because I was too stupid to do. I've screamed and cried asking questions I'll never have answers to but I've made peace with it. My dad told me he would always be there and for a long time I believed him. He protected me from my pszologic mother, who let her boyfriend rape me for awhile. I knew who I could count on. But when I had tears streaming down my face and blood on my arm I knew he no longer cared. The day he told me I was no longer his was the day I broke. I cant say I understand because I don't but I've made peace. If I went through what I did because someone else didn't have to then okay. I'm not able to change what happened and I'll never be able to answer but I do know I'm almost one year self harm free, I have a future, and my goals will be met with ful force.

*Carmin*  
*Age-18*

I am a single parent, raising them along with six of my own children. There are mountains, there are valleys. But every single moment is worth it. To give these children a safe place to be and a person who is entirely invested in them has been one of the greatest joys of my life.

*Samantha*  
*Aunt*

**Entries of Merit : Ages 5-7**

16 years ago, I met a little girl who taught me about true unconditional love. She calls me Auntie. I took her in the day after my first child came home from the hospital. I loved her more than I loved myself and it was a very easy choice to make. Five months later, her little brother was born, premature and fighting for his life in the NICU. Without any hesitation I brought him home from the hospital after 3 months, he weighed 5 pounds and had a feeding tube in his nose. He taught me the true meaning of how to overcome your circumstances and be great.

Loving my brother's children as I love my own is the easy part. Getting them through the struggles of not having their own dependable parents and wading through the trauma is the hard part. My niece and nephew continue to thrive in my care, and I am just amazed every single day by their resilience.



## Entries of Merit : Ages 8-12



**Amyra**  
Age-10

- \*Taking care of them when they are sick.
- \*Seeing the trust in their eyes knowing they are safe at home.
- \*Watching them sleep peacefully.
- \*Seeing Papa get escorted into the playroom to be tackled, jumped on and hearing the laughter that follows.
- \*And lastly, at the end of each day laying my head on the pillow, thankful for another day together.

The impact of being a caregiver has many faces, and even during the most challenging times I seem to connect to the silver lining. With my husband and I at center stage modeling for the emotional, physical, and spiritual growth and development of our grandsons...we realize, what an honorable role!

**Deniele**  
Gma

## Winning Caregiver Contest Entries:

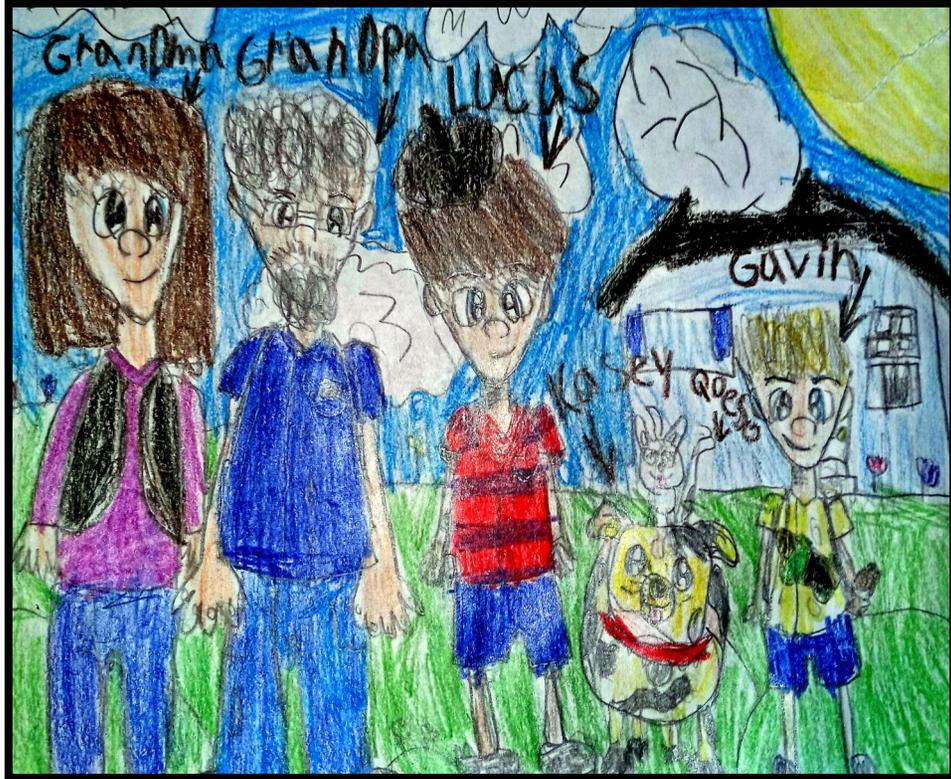
How do I capture the enriched experiences as a kinship caregiver? My husband and I are 53 years old, grandparents of Ezekiel (6) and Ezra (3). They are our strength, hope and future of our family! The following experiences started with a decision to go all in, with no hesitation and guidance from a power greater than ourselves. Our grandsons give us presents by their presence alone and a glimpse into the heart of a child. Children of innocence, wonder, exploration, awe, and dreams. These are our experiences:

- \*Hearing their voices sing the "Ghostbusters" song dressed up in ghostbuster suits & proton packs.
- \*Watching them play in the Pacific Ocean, chasing waves, running up and down the sand dunes totally carefree under the sun.
- \*The excitement of going to the Sea Lions caves for the first time.
- \*Embracing their hugs and kisses first thing in the morning.
- \*Getting ice cream cones after school most days.
- \*Playing in the snow, sledding, and drinking hot chocolate at White Pass.
- \*Being called "Bmama" (grandma) and "Papa" (grandpa).
- \*Getting to comfort the boys when they fall or get hurt.
- \*Teaching them to say "please, thank you, and no, thank you."



Kallie

Age-11



*Lucas*  
Age-9

## ***Voices of Kinship Caregivers***

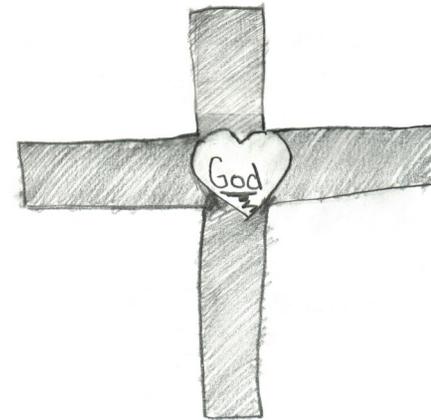
*This year is the 2nd Annual Kinship Caregivers Contest that invites Grandparents & Relative Caregivers across Washington State to share their positive experiences as they navigate and provide loving care for the children in their care.*



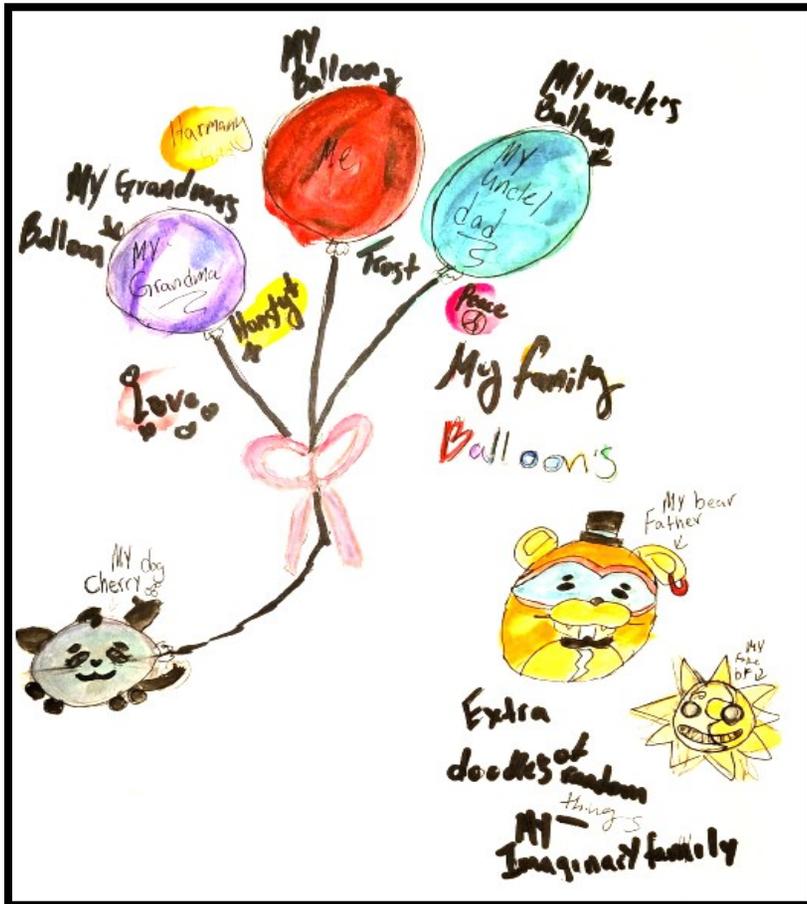
**Entries of Merit : Ages 13-19**



"The biggest failure in life is not failing in something you do, but the biggest failure in life is losing your trust in God. For in life there is nothing that can't be given another try by you. But without trust in the Almighty, any amount of success will feel small."



*Gabriela*  
Age-17



**Magdalena**  
Age-14

I started living with my Grandmother and Aunt in 2021 of October. My brother went over in Lundon to stay with my mother and father, I did not go because I had basketball advanges here in Washington state to pursue. In the beginning we where having big problems with my grandmother's car, refrigerator water in the house, and lights. After going through 6 mos. of that I was not filling well in my health start going to physical therapy for the surgery I had on my knee. But after going through we made it. I fill very Grateful because at first I didn't see us coming out of this situation. But with the help of the most High God Jehovah and Christ Jesus we made it to this day. I did not know that my Grandmother and Aunt had the weather "with all" or the skills with a 17teen year old to help and work a job and go to school too. And to get up everyday and be the person she is. And day by day together through it all this covid-19 pandemic being hear. Staying safe was a challenge. But we are making it, and we are still making. I love my Grandmother and Aunt because I see us as the #3 Amego's indifferent bodys and minds. Pulling together to do what 1# or 2 people and 3# or four people sometimes have to do by them self. And not giving up is not going to work. Pickup peases and keep moving. Make it your Highest mark in life to help others see it can Be done, just keep trying. Do your Best on earth in your life, Be a good person. Reach for you Goul Keep positive, Don't let the people that don't believe in you worry you. Pray stay around positive people and help your family members, you have stay strong.

**Travis**  
Age-17