

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2011 Essay Contest

Winner: High School First Place



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12TH GRADE

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What will I remember the most?

The smallest things in the world could leave the largest impacts on a certain person. You know the saying, “Every rose has a thorn?” Well, then is it also true that every thorn has a rose? In my case it is. Throughout the duration of the last two years, I have come to learn a lot about myself as well as others around me. I was steadily growing and developing as a person with these intelligent children as well as my own peers. What will I remember the most about this whole experience in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program? Where do I even begin? One specific thing doesn’t stand out to me because there have been a multitude of experiences that I’ve had.

Primarily, my main focus has always been on my well-being. How will I get where I am going? I never saw anyone else in the running, only myself surrounded by a wall of glass, ready to break. I was on the brink of losing everything that I had worked so hard for. Then, things just went from bad and skipped over worse to extremely terrible. The only thing that kept my feet firmly planted on the ground was the knowledge that I was here for someone else, and they were depending on me. Over the last few months, my priorities have completely been rearranged. After my mother kicked me out of the house, it was like I had this epiphany. No one is going to make my life better because that is something I have to do on my own. I have learned that if I do not keep my eyes focused on something real to me, it is so easy to

fall. My grades started to slip, and I could see my dreams getting farther and farther away. That was when my focus was thrown from my emotional well-being, to my academic well-being.

I had more drive than ever. For the first time, the only thing I saw was the fact that I have to do this for me, and if I wanted to make a change it was now or never. I started going over to the elementary school more and more, really any chance I had. I put my life on hold and focused on theirs. I figured if I focused on them, then I wouldn’t get lost focusing on myself. You see, when you are enveloped in a cloud of darkness and you can’t see which way to go, there’s not much you can do. These children were my light. I came to find that I was learning as much from them as I was with the rest of my peers. Every time I sat down to help them out, it felt more like I was escaping from my own reality and diving head first into theirs. I was completely submerged in a realm of total comfort. You could find me going over to the elementary school both in the mornings as well as in the afternoons, that’s how hooked I was.

One of the hardest, best things that had ever happened to me during this whole situation was the fact of changing partners when the year began. I had spent an entire year getting to know these two people who graduated last May. This



meant that I would be forced to meet someone new, convince them to join the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, and then get used to working with them. So, I met this young man who was my age, and it was surprisingly easy to convince him to join the program. He had a totally different personality than I was used to working with. Somehow, he just seemed to connect with the children on a level that I did not think was possible. I learned a lot from my new partner, and thanks to him we helped to improve the grades of pretty much the entire class. If there is anything that will stick with me throughout my college years and the rest of my life, it is the valuable lessons that I have learned from him.

This is my last year, my last chance to make a difference in these children's lives. This is their last chance to make a difference in my life. Looking back, it seems so bittersweet to say goodbye to all of this. I'll never forget my teacher, Ms. Smith, for all of the help and support that was and will forever remain a part of my extended family. Next year, when I am sitting in a college class helping a fellow student, I will always remember the influence that she had on me. No one learns the same things the exact same way, and that's a lesson I have learned from this program. No matter what, that is what I will remember the most from my two years in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program.