

the autobiographical form:

Eight Young Lives

The selections that follow are the eight autobiographies of Minnesota's NCTE Achievement Awards runners-up. An autobiography and an impromptu critical essay on a set topic are required of every candidate.

THE STORY OF MY LIFE

By Tim Bardell, Edina High School
Sponsor: John Sheldon

Perhaps you are wondering
Why I am writing a poem
instead of the typical prose.

I can cite no particular reason
But that I can more easily communicate
The disorder of my life in patterned lines.

I was born in Minneapolis
Near Robbinsdale, Minnesota,
And I lived there with my family
Until I was three.

My father had just bought his own business;
My mother helped him at his place of work;
My sister was (and is) a precocious child;
My brother was near death from raging asthma.

And until I learned to read at five
I sat where I was placed
And remained motionless with my unknown thoughts.

My grade-school education was entrusted to
A Catholic parochial school, Our Lady of Grace.
I learned my lessons well there;
I was a willing mouth for food for thought.

And when the tests came, the memories
Glistened through the nerves to my pen,
And the answers flowed out on my paper.

The first two years of high school life
I spent at St. Thomas Academy, Mendota Heights.
The wedding of blood and wine, of military and religion,
Ended in divorce, and the state was given custody of the child.
My junior year I started at Edina High
And I hope to end my education there.

You ask about my reading and I say to you:
Until the day I die, I will be reading what has been written,
And supplying in my mind's eye what has not.

My earlier days I spent in book-born fantasies
But now I write to make concrete what I feel,
And the music I perform will set me free.

For, you see, besides my crude attempts at elementary scrawling,
I have in my possession a Hammond C-2 organ
Which I play for several hours to release my soul at night.

If I could end this sordid tale I would,
But to my friend's regret I have not died.

* * *

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By Lawrence Crawford, De La Salle High School
Sponsor: James Elsenpeter

I was born on July 14, 1952 in Rochester, Minnesota. At age four our family moved to La Crosse, Wisconsin, where I went to St. Wenceslaus Parochial School for grades one and two. In 1960 our family came to Minneapolis, and here I finished grade school at Incarnation Parochial School. There I was a drummer for two years in the school band, and student council president the last year. I am now a junior at De La Salle High School in Minneapolis.

Out of school I read, play drums, and occasionally do some model railroading. For the past year my reading interests were primarily in existentialism and Russian literature. My reading and interest in the latter subject has led me to become a co-leader of a Russian Literature course at school. This discussion course was founded outside of regular junior classes with a small group of students, who are also responsible for setting the course as a regular offering next year.

I am in my third year of Russian language courses in high school, and I find it very interesting. This summer I attended a two-week Russian language camp in northern Minnesota. Earlier I had thoughts of working toward a career in engineering, but

my interest in the Russian language, literature, and history, combined with a few talks with a teaching relative, may lead me to aim into one of those areas. One aspect of any career will be travel; our family has taken many long trips camping, criss-crossing the United States. In any case, I am planning to go to the University of Minnesota or the College of St. Thomas after graduation from high school.

* * *

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By Margaret Fowler, Ortonville High School
Sponsor: Dale Hannewan

My life is very normal and ordinary. I go to high school and conform much like any other teenager. I shall try to avoid a year by year account of my life and instead explain what influences affect my life and interests.

My parents are extremely generous people and they have sacrificed to give me a great deal. They have also been inflexible about what I am to be in return - a good student, reasonably helpful, and eternally grateful. Much unhappiness could have been avoided if I had learned earlier that at least outward conformity isn't difficult and a peaceful home life helps make life a little more bearable.

At the age of fourteen, I wised up or grew up - whatever the case may be. I began to study and found I enjoyed it. I successfully carved a new image around school, one of a quiet scholarly type who was able to take responsibility. This last year has been another year of change. I was elected junior class president and given a lot of work to do. This has forced me to meet and work with people outside my comfortable world and opened the door (I hope) to a fuller life.

The forces that influence my life are mainly an interest in art and a passion for sports. I hope someday to be an artist and try to paint or have a project going almost all the time. I feel, sometimes, that there are so many beautiful things to express in the world that everyone should try. I enjoy individual sports and most of my summer days are spent either at the beach or on the tennis court or flat in bed - exhausted. I love to read and have read at least two books a week from early childhood. Most of my theories and notions about living are from books. My taste isn't discriminating, I enjoy just about everything from Dostoevsky to Mademoiselle.

My every-day life is ordinary and I am happiest when I am in a situation I can control. My home is normal and fairly

happy. Both of my parents teach school so school is an integral part of my life. I feel that right now I'm kind of marking time and preparing for the time when life starts to get interesting. I suspect I have a long wait.

* * *

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By Debbie Krehbiel, Mountain Lake High School
Sponsor: Jerry E. Logue

On November 10, 1952, life began for me or perhaps life simply continued for me, or only switched locations. Who knows? I was born to a young couple. My father was studying to be a minister at a college in Bluffton, Ohio. My activities in Bluffton can be described in a few words. I spent my time screaming, gagging, and turning my parents into total wrecks.

When I was two we moved for my father had graduated from college and would now study at a seminary in Chicago. It was here that I became a tomboy. Instead of bothering my parents as before, I decided it was more fun to beat up little boys. At this time I met my new brother, Thomas. Tommy made me extremely jealous. So one day I tryed to bite a chunk out of his finger. That was me in Chicago, the bully.

My father consented to begin a new Mennonite church in Markham, Illinois and so when I was four, we moved once again. It was here that I played nun, became an official boy by an initiation, and put on dozens of puppet shows. But most important of all it was here that I started school. In Markham, two other brothers joined our family Timothy and John. It seemed destined that I should be the only girl in the family.

Pennsylvania was the next state to be my home. When I was eight, we packed up our belongings and traveled east. I loved Pennsylvania. For the first time in my life there were multitudes of trees to climb and fields in which to run. I spent the summers picking beans, peas, corn, and apples. I spent my time finding secret places, wading in creeks, and picking bluebells. Suddenly, I found myself in junior high school, and no longer desiring to be a boy.

During the eighth grade I moved. This time our family was going to Mountain Lake, Minnesota. In Minnesota, I entered high school. I have become quite interested in the different fields of English. I greatly enjoy poetry especially Millay and Whitman. I entered the original oratory division in the recent speech contest and received first place at the district. During the district one-act play festivals, I was named "Best Actress

of the Year."

To me the word future has an exciting sound. I want to be an English teacher in America and abroad. I want to work in an orphanage and perhaps become a journalist. But most of all I want to do what God wants me to do. Most of all I want to help people.

Some day I will die. I will leave as simply and mysteriously as I came. But I know that when I die, I will be born somewhere else.

* * *

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By Ruth Mooney, Roosevelt High School, Minneapolis
Sponsor: Patricia Ryan

I was born and raised in the conservative, midwestern city of Minneapolis, Minnesota. At the age of six I traveled with my family to Europe, living and going to school in Zurich, Switzerland for about four months.

As I grew older I became very interested in drama. All during grade school, I would meet with groups of my friends to write and produce plays. In ninth grade I performed in a school play, and that summer I took a dramatics course for high school students at the University of Minnesota.

I have always been an avid reader, spending hours at a time curled up with a book. Recently however, changing interests have caused me to spend more time in sewing, church activities, and volunteer jobs. For example, the summer after ninth grade was spent working with Headstart. Now I am helping at a mission in one of the poverty-stricken areas of Minneapolis.

Just before Christmas of 1967 our family left for the unknown (to us) island of New Zealand, stopping briefly in Hawaii, Fiji, Tahiti, and Australia. My sister and I attended a public girls' school with about 900 students in Wellington, New Zealand. We found it an exciting experience to encounter a completely new range of ideas and opinions. While learning what they thought of the United States, we formed an opinion of their government. We also became quite at home in their authoritarian type of school system. New Zealand provided a wonderful chance to see new things and meet new people.

As for the future, I am undecided. Most certainly I will attend college, but further than that I have no plans. I would like to work with children in some way, possibly becoming a social worker or mission worker.

SEVEN-SECOND STATISTIC

By Valerie Murdoch, Cooper High School, New Hope
Sponsor: Carol Peterson

I.

"Seven-second statistic,"
Quoth Uncle Sam.
"One more,"
Sighed Chicago.
A birth, significant
As 99.44 percent
And a mighty city's
Bad breath.
Tiny red creature
With a big mouth,
Screaming
At white face-masks
That murmured.
"She's beautiful!"
Purple shrieks yielded
And the clock purred.

II.

Popsicle smiles
For Mother Goose,
And a special kiss
For Santa Claus;
Cherub nighthawk
Plus now-I-lay-me,
And a Band-aid
On the knee.
Naptime crayon art
That Aunt Polly
Said was bad,
But Comet Cleanser
Fixes all.
Anyway,
The pansies were nice.

III.

"Say good-bye
To sand-pies,
The bus is here."
A blue-plaid dress
And tight braids
Marched onward.
"Good morning, children,"
Said Mrs. Broadwater.
But she flunked
That triangle player

To sandblocks,
And Marcia Norcia
Smiled like a dragon.

IV.

Dick and Jane
Played with Spot,
And Bruce fell asleep
After recess.
Naughty Danny even
Threw a rock.
But then Grandma
Fell asleep forever,
And Point Pleasant
Heard a sad good-bye.

V.

Mrs. Bunker
Had a box for poetry,
So Larry wrote about a crook
Who took a book,
But Saddle-Shoes
Wrote about sisters and dogs,
Because she had three brothers
And a goldfish.
Even some cats.
Wee Wisdom published "Peace"
And Aunt Polly liked it.
Mother smiled nicely.

VI.

A tipsy violin wobbled
In semi-darkness
And Mr. E. applauded.
"Of course, I'm no critic."
The Cray-pa'd Buddha was nice,
Though.
And the still-life squash.
An echoing "Indian Love Call"
Bounced, re-echoed,
And breathed deeply.
He trod on her
Handkerchief anyway.
But square-dancing was fun.

VII.

A "Sound of Music" dolly
Curtsied and shed a tear;
Autumn blazed madly.
"Hurrah for everything!"

And the concertmistress played on.
History sounded sour,
But Math had a nice ring...
Anyway, all school symphonies
Are rather singular.

VIII.

Bedecked with curls
And lacy robes,
She dabbed a dewy eye,
And hearkened yet
To nature's sweet,
Alluring melody.
Mendelssohn graced her
Repertoire,
Candles her flowery
Chambers.
Romance became the essence
Of her charm.
Amen.

IX.

Velvet ribbons, lace,
And cameo rings,
Cultivating dreams
Of yesterday.
But perfection rests
On the ledge of tomorrow.
Whisper education's
Cause,
And view the slaughterhouse,
But paint the sky
A bright pink.
--One man's golden creation
Interpreted on a cheap violin,
Another's naively contemplated...
Wisdom lies in understanding.

* * *

ELLEN ROMSAAS

By Ellen Romsaas, Roosevelt High School, Minneapolis
Sponsor: Patricia Ryan

I am the only daughter of a furniture salesman and a registered nurse and the sister of one older brother and two younger brothers.

Tomboyish tendencies sprang from the experience of growing up with three brothers. There was no difference in our play clothes; I frequently beat them in games of marbles; and climbing trees was a favorite pastime.

Our vacations are always taken as a family. We have seen the Black Hills and have traveled in Montana, as evidenced by souvenirs from Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks. The most energetic of our expeditions from Minneapolis was Our Trip West.

Sports help make life exciting. I enjoy swimming, sailing, and snow skiing. Although sailing and skiing are quite seasonal in Minnesota, swimming is a sport in which I have participated all year round. I enjoyed synchronized swimming for two and one half years until an allergy developed from too frequent 'dunkings' in a bromine treated pool forced me to leave the team.

For the most part, I appreciate school. Drafting is my favorite subject. Besides my scheduled six hour school day, I come an hour early to school each day in order to learn Norwegian. My first hour class, directly after Norwegian, is Latin. Most of the time I succeed in keeping the two languages straight.

My extra time is devoted to handwork. Articles such as samplers, tablecloths, a quilt, and an afgan, show my accomplishments in the fields of embroidery, needlepoint, and crocheting.

Lately I have been giving my future considerable thought. I believe I would enjoy being a doctor. There are two main reasons for this decision. First of all, the intricateness of the human body fascinates me, and secondly, I have just recently realized what my own good health has meant to me. Then too, life is great, and I want everyone to be able to enjoy it to its fullest.

* * *

HIGHLIGHTS OF A LIFE, 1952 .

By Morag Stalker, Albert Lea High School
Sponsor: Paul M. Goodnature

The earliest memory - from which, I am certain, a psychiatrist could infer a great deal - I have of my childhood is one of my third birthday party, at which the table was graced by a delicious ice-cream cake. It is an isolated memory. I could not say, for example, who was at the party, but I obviously regarded that ice-cream cake as one of the highlights of my early childhood. I am sure this has affected me greatly - although I could not tell in what way.

My childhood was a fairly normal one for someone born, as I am assured I was, into a doctor's family in the industrial city of Dundee, Scotland. That is, I was not kidnapped, or anything similarly exciting, romantic, or terrifying, although - since my father's practice was conducted from our house - I did learn what the sound of a telephone bell was earlier than most children! The circumstances of there having been a doctor in the Stalker family for the past one hundred years led many family friends to say to me when I was still very young, "And of course you want to be a doctor, dear." This has had a profound effect on me - I have not yet decided what my career will be, but I am certain I do not wish to be a doctor!

At the age of five I began to attend the High School of Dundee, and went there for the following ten years. I enjoyed my years there very much, in spite of moaning, as all school pupils do, about the work and the food. I also found time for a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, including ballet and music lessons, participation in the Girl Guide movement, and in the Junior Red Cross Society. The first two have instilled in me a great love of dancing and of a wide range of music, from modern "popular" songs and folk music to light opera and classical works. My participation in the Guide movement culminated in 1967 in my being awarded the Queen's Guide Badge, the highest award to which a Guide can aspire. Another memorable event in my life came about through my Junior Red Cross work, when in 1966 I won a city-wide competition for first aid and home nursing. Although I am not extremely interested in sports, my activities also included swimming and playing tennis, both of which I still enjoy very much.

I acquired a fairly broad knowledge of my homeland over the years by spending the majority of my vacations within Scotland. This did not become monotonous, however, in spite of what one might imagine from the size of the country. Several summers were spent at a small seaside resort on the West Coast where it was possible to swim, cycle, or relax on the beach for two weeks and

not become bored - what bliss! In other years there were visits to the Highlands, opportunities for walking, fishing, and enjoying magnificent scenery. One year we extended our horizons and drove round England and down to London, satisfying my passion for history by exploring old churches, universities, and Roman ruins. Another summer we travelled leisurely in Ireland, and in yet another year I acquired my quota of culture - and blisters on my feet - by visiting Belgium and seeing many historical sites and art galleries.

An event which I viewed with mixed emotions was my departure from Scotland to live in the United States. Sorrow at leaving my relatives and friends, my home and school, mingled with anticipation of a new life, new experiences, and different people to meet. The venture did not have a promising beginning, since our Atlantic crossing lasted for ten days of extremely stormy weather, and I discovered that I was not a good ocean traveller. I do not think I shall ever forget the rather numbled feeling I had when I first saw the stern of the cargo vessel on which we were travelling disappear for a few moments beneath the very high waves - it was not an altogether pleasant experience!

It has, however, been eighteen months since we came to live in Albert Lea, Minnesota, and if I have not become Americanized, at least I have settled down here. My future is uncertain - who at the age of sixteen knows definitely what will happen during the remainder of his life? My only hope, though it may be a hackneyed one, is that my life will be a happy one - since I do not believe I should make a good martyr - and that the world will last long enough for me to enjoy it.