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When I look back at my grade school years, I feel that I was a leader without even knowing it. I would like to think that I have encouraged others to be their own person, to try new things without being afraid, to set goals, step up to help where there's a need and not just go along with the crowd. The following are some examples where I stepped up.

I was the first and only girl to join chess club with more than 70 boys. I enjoyed learning the game, and won the year-end tournament for my age group. There have been several girls to join chess club in the years that followed. In the sixth grade, I was the first girl and second student to make the 250 mile club in the school walking program. Since then, three more girls have reached it too. Although I wasn't elected, I ran for Student Council President, and I am glad that I tried. This year, my school decided to start a news crew, so I thought I would try it out, along with some of my other friends. Although it is not the "cool" thing to do, all of the younger kids enjoy it, and I have fun. I try not to care what anyone else thinks of it.

Six years ago, I joined a jump rope team from North Avondale. I now have friends from all different ages, races, religions, and backgrounds. One of my friends is Jewish, and I teach him about the Catholic faith, while he teaches me about the Jewish faith. Our team travels to different schools on behalf of the American Heart Association, to jump and talk about the importance of exercise and nutrition. At the end of our performance, our coach always asks the kids if they know someone who has had a heart attack or a stroke, and almost everyone raises their hand. I hope that we have motivated kids to exercise and be healthy, in order to protect their heart and lead healthy lives.

When a girl with Down Syndrome came to our school in third grade, I didn't hesitate to become friends with her. I invited her to my birthday party, without knowing that it was her first invitation ever, and she was ten years old. When she went swimming with us at our pool, she took off her floatie for the first time. We have gone to the Down Syndrome Buddy Walk together for the past three years, even when it rained. I tried to help her to try to ride her bike, braid her hair, change classes and handle stress. She knows how to make me smile when I need it, and I can almost always cheer her up when she is having a bad day. I'm trying to help her get excited about her new high school, because we won't be going to the same school. I'm really going to miss her, but I am sure that we will still remain friends.

My friend Jeffrey was born with Spina Bifida, and has been confined to a wheelchair all his life. Once a year, the Spina Bifida Association of Cincinnati puts on a Walk and Roll fundraiser, where we walk or roll all around Miami Whitewater. My principal thought it would be fun to surprise him and have a lot of kids in my grade come to walk with him and support him, so I made flyers and my friend and I passed them out without Jeffrey seeing. We had a pretty good turnout, and Jeffrey was so happy to see all the people who came to support him.

My grandma and I go to the Ronald McDonald house once a month to serve meals to the families who are staying there. We make the food and then serve it to the families, and then clean up afterward. When you see what they are going through, it makes you want to help any way you can and be thankful for what you have.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my essay. Reading Aubrey's story really makes me think about how precious life is, and how much one person can make a difference.