

## **Gracie Bernhard- St. Agnes School- Notre Dame Academy**

I am what I consider an “ordinary” fourteen year old middle schooler. I work hard in school and study hard at home to get good grades and be the best I can. I do what is expected and try to please both my teachers and my parents. I have participated in many sports since I was young and continue to play soccer and basketball. I do consider myself a good leader and I keep up the moral on the team by staying positive. I, Gracie Bernhard, am an ordinary person.

I often ask myself, “What can you do today to make this day more than ordinary for yourself?” But as the day goes on, I realize that I am content with who I am and how my life is going. Being “ordinary” makes me content and it make me feel special. As long as I can be a good person each day to those around me and appreciate all the privileges and blessings I am given, I am happy. I have dreams for my future. I do want to make a difference in this world someday, but at fourteen, I must take baby steps in achieving that overall goal.

Even as a young teenager, I am able to recognize qualities of myself that most might think of as ordinary, but I feel they have made me an exceptional person. Such qualities are compassion, empathy, and a willingness to help others. I have had the blessing of exceptional role models from which I have fashioned myself. My parents work hard every day at their jobs with perseverance and determination. I guess growing up in that kind of environment has had a great impact on me in wanting to be successful in all I do. From my role models I have gained a sense of direction that gives me the power to stick to my goals. Yes, I may seem quite ordinary on the outside, but my inside

is quite extraordinary. I reflect back to when I first recognized my special qualities as a person.

My early experiences with special needs children began in elementary school. The school I attended housed the fundamentally mentally handicapped unit for the county. Children from all over the county were bussed to my school and then integrated into regular classrooms. My first feelings of wanting to help and true feelings of compassion for those not treated like others was when Sydney first became part of my life. Sydney had Down's Syndrome and many children either avoided her or made fun of her. I was so upset about how they treated her. We instantly connected and became best friends. I understood her and she understood me. It was natural for us to be friends. We performed in the talent shows together, we had play dates on the weekend, and hung out on the playground. She was nothing but "ordinary" to me. We were "ordinary" together.

Our friendship lasted until we switched schools and I lost contact with her. But I think of her often. It was her who inspired me into wanting to help those who are disabled in some way. I want to make them feel loved, included, and just "ordinary". My plans are to be a special education teacher or a nurse who works with children with special needs. I know that I have skills that will make that dream come true someday. My ability to lead others towards doing the right thing led to me getting a "first time ever presented award" at my fifth grade graduation. It was for leadership and empathy towards others. My family was surprised as well as myself. But we all learned a lesson and that is that just doing the "ordinary" can bring about wonderful changes in those around you. Several years back, my mother read about the Aubrey Rose Foundation

and shared Aubrey's tragic story with my family. We all wanted to help and make a difference with their dreams to keep Aubrey's memory alive and helping others. We were able to raise some funds among family and I was able to fulfill a little girl's dream and walk the runway with my American Girl Doll. It was extraordinary for all!

A few years have passed and my new journey now leads me to high school. I would greatly appreciate a scholarship to help me pursue my goals and go to a great high school where there are high expectations and values taught that are all important to me. I would feel honored to know that I received an award from such an extraordinary foundation. Somehow, my education would have a new meaning and I know that I would not let the foundation down and would do all I can to uphold what it stands for.

I am at peace with being "ordinary" and coming to terms with the qualities I do have to be successful and to hopefully make a difference to others. I am beginning to create action plans to accomplish those successes, yet fully aware that every day is a learning experience and life will only get bigger and better. I am an ordinary person who has been blessed with extraordinary opportunities and experiences. I will use those to make this world a better place and keep Aubrey's memory alive and extraordinary.