

First Place

Jessica Cyrell

Easing the Pain

It's morning. The alarm radio sounds; Earth, Wind & Fire's "Shining Star" booms from the speakers. Alice Kossack, unphased by the constant pain that impacts her entire body, rises from under the covers with a smile on her face. She flips off the alarm clock and sweeps her wild, bouncy curls out of her eyes. She lifts her toothbrush with an unsteady hand and laboriously brushes her teeth, her hand shaky and erratic in movement. She dons a pair of giant, silver, chandelier earrings to match her vibrant peasant top. Her back support cushions in tow, Alice is off to another day at work—another fulfilling day where her Cervical Dystonia is the least likely element to bring her down. Today, Alice will meet with her prized "Girls' Group," and later, with her "Grief Group." At Corona Del Sol High School in Tempe, Alice works with, or better "hangs out with," teens whose problems range from drug addiction or suicidal behavior, to losses of mothers, brothers, girlfriends, best friends. Alice laughs and cries with her young friend, but best of all, she shows them love and compassion, which is what these teenagers yearn for. Michael has lost his mother, but Alice shows up for him at his band concert, and is his number one fan at his soccer game. Jennifer calls Alice personally on her cell phone when her father has abused her. Katie has never been to California Pizza Kitchen, but tonight, Alice will treat the entire girls' group to pizza, to give them as memorable time—a time that, probably, for once in their lives, is dedicated solely to them. Alice's own children, Sophie and Sam, and her husband Ron, share their family with dozens of other children. She is changing lives, saving lives, shaping characters,

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Secondary

and bringing contagious love and unity to her community. Alice has played a key role in my life. She has shown me the beauty of selflessness. She ends the workweek without paycheck, but instead, with a silent, yet deafening, gratification that she has made a difference. And there is no better way to live.

Second Place

Liat Spiro

Numbers, the logical count, the cold facts...

Eighty-three years

Two children.

Three grandchildren.

One degree.

Four occupations.

Rose Alexander's life defies count.

Eighty-three years.

But how many years has she enriched in the lives of all she meets?

Innumerable.

Two children

But how many has she adopted in her heart by donating money to charity?

Countless.

Three grandchildren.

But how many children does she help by substitute teaching every school day? By creating a scholarship fund for Assyrian student?

Incalculable.

One degree.

But how much intellect and vigor did it take for this woman to enter college in the

1940's? To obtain a degree from the Art Institute of Chicago?

Immeasurable.

Four occupations. Mother, teacher, activist, grandmother.

Mother: Caring fore Debbie and Carol

Teacher: Caring for the students of Old Orchard Junior High

Activist: Caring for sixty ambitious Assyrian students each year since the 1980's

Grandmother: Caring for Krista as well as Alexander and Nicole, currently conquering
autism

One goal: To better the lives of loved ones and strangers alike.

For all she has given, she has taken nothing.

Her love for humanity?

Infinite.

Third Place

Rachel Frost

“Beyond the Dream: Building Communities through Servant-Leadership”

True, you probably haven't heard his name before, but you will. True also, he is a friend close to my family, but this is not why I wish to share his inspiration. I am the type of person that shares generously, that likes to help people, that wants to do good in the community, but sometimes I forget the meaning of community service. And then I remember Soroosh. I remember two summers ago when Soroosh broke the news that he was leaving for the summer. “I'm going to Rwanda. I want to help people,” he told my sister. That summer was to be part of the one year of service that, as a Baha'I, he is expected to fulfill. But, Rwanda? No average teenager decides to send himself to a country recovering from genocide. Oh yes, he knew what he was getting himself into, though I think we were all a little shocked to learn that part of the preparation for the big trip was taking malaria pills. Somehow Soroosh survived a summer of eating mainly fruit, having to kill livestock himself in order to get meat. Somehow he survived visiting Kigali, Rwanda's capital and one of the most dangerous cities in the world. No, it wasn't the guards provided for his safety that got him through the summer. It was his heart that enabled him to help so many people and lead the way through hardships. His selflessness provided the foundation on which he built shelter and community centers to bring together the conflicting ethnicities of a nation in dire need. His genuine love of people provided the key to teaching cultural awareness and AIDS awareness to Rwanda's

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2006 Student Essay Winners
Secondary

youth. He may have come back a little thinner and with a little less excitement at the sight of fruit, but he came with more compassion and he was more open-minded. This alone is an impressive accomplishment for a 17-year old, but Soroosh's ever-expanding record hasn't gotten in his way of servicing the people of his community. He has been a course facilitator in a moral education program that teaches moral education and self betterment. He has played a role in Baha'I youth groups. He has attended Baha'I conferences. He has organized fundraising events. And even so, during his high school years he found time to join the lacrosse team, and to spend time with family and friends. And in his journey through college there is no doubt that he will do the same. His accomplishments may sound to some like a meaningless list, but to the ones he has touched his accomplishments mean the world. He has reached into the hearts of young children and of wizened old men. He stands as a role model to siblings and friends. He has inspired and reminded some of the importance of helping less fortunate. True, he may not be a Martin Luther King, Jr. or a Susan B. Anthony, yet. And true also, you may not have heard his name before, but you will. Soroosh Varahramyan stands for servant-leadership.