

Fourteen New Jersey high school and middle school students were the winners of the New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) New Jersey Teen Media Contest in 2017. The contest helps the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development, reinforce its mission to instill a sense of parental responsibility in New Jersey's youth.

Students were honored for their winning entries, which celebrated the students' artistic portrayal of a favorite weekend memory with their family. The contest was open to all New Jersey high school and middle school students.

1st Place – High School -- Artwork

Sharina Kuo

Cherry Hill High School West, Cherry Hill

Down by the Bay

Teacher: Sandra R. Sharp



2nd Place – High School – Artwork

Jackson Giesin

Piscataway Township High School, Piscataway

Game Day

Teacher: Dorothy Amme



3rd Place – High School -- Artwork

Corey Hallam

Union County Vocational-Technical High School, Scotch Plains

Snowy Weekend

Teacher: Patricia J. Schreiber



1st Place – Middle School – Artwork

Lydia Yang

Schuyler Colfax Middle School, Wayne

Walk With Me

Teacher: Debbie Kissel



2nd Place – Middle School – Artwork

Tanya Aravind

Academy 1 Middle School, Jersey City

The World I Come From

Teacher: Martha Garcia



3rd Place – Middle School – Artwork

Fajrhafza Sohail

Academy 1 Middle School, Jersey City

Family Fun Outdoors

Teacher: Martha Garcia



1st Place – High School – Digital/Computer-Generated

Giselle Criollo

Piscataway Township High School, Piscataway

December Heat

Teacher: Lisa Lentini-Pombrio



2nd Place – High School – Digital/Computer-Generated

Kiyomi Sutton

Piscataway Township High School, Piscataway

A Stroll in the City

Teacher: Lisa Lentini-Pombrio



1st Place – High School – Written Word

Stephanie Padilla

Kenmare High School, Jersey City

Wax Museum Rap

Teacher: Gina Irizarry

Wax Museum Rap

Yo, I'm just going put it to you like this-

If you don't listen carefully, there's things you will miss

I said my favorite memory's with my family when we went to New York.

We saw a man on the train eating pork with a fork

We saw different famous people made out of wax

It was pretty expensive when you counted the tax.

I'm not going to stunt.... it was pretty boring,

Because it was pouring.

I met "Jenifer Lopez" from down the block

Also.....I had a conversation with "The Rock".

There was Alicia Keys... from the streets..... and we were making beats..

We went through the different sides... we saw a bride.

My mother said lets go and say "hi".

We walked up to her and all she said was "goodbye".

We had the best day ever all kidding aside!

2nd Place – High School – Written Word

Brittany Richardson

Point Pleasant Beach High School, Point Pleasant Beach

Orlando

Teacher: Stephanie Woit

Orlando

Within the past decade, the United States of America has witnessed a significant drop off in regards to the average employment rate and the middle class. While I have a wonderful family, rich in love and compassion, we are well aware that money does not grow on trees. It is this life lesson – knowing the value of money and family that always sends waves of memories barreling towards the front of my mind.

About two years ago, in 2015, after twenty-five years on the job, my dad pulled the plug on his job and all it entails, consequently becoming a retired firefighter. My family was aware there would be a slight decrease in our annual income, but we were prepared. A few months later, the business my mother worked for closed and left her unemployed. She quickly found a new job, but received less than her prior position. In no way, shape or form were we poor, however, my sisters, parents and I did learn how to cut back on our expenses.

My parents had booked me a trip to Orlando, Florida prior to the unforeseen income issue and although money was tight, they were still determined to supply the vacation we had all been looking forward to. Instead of hitting up Universal Studios and all of the Disney parks while we were there, we decided to spend the duration of our trip at our timeshare, putting their amenities to good use. Our timeshare, Orange Lake has always been our top spot to escape to, but usually we were always busy park hopping, this time was different though and actually served as a true vacation. We did things on our own terms, at our own pace.

At the resort, there were plenty of activities to take part in; we never experienced a dull moment. My parents bought my two sisters and me a “3 day play pass” that enabled us to choose the days we wanted to go to the driving range, play mini-golf, climb the rock wall, or go on their mini, wet, inflatable obstacle course. The rest of the time we would swim in one of the three pools, drift down the lazy river, play a few rounds of tennis, or soak in the August rays. One of the days, we took a fifteen-minute drive to Celebration, Florida, which is a master-planned community in Osceola County, Florida, United States, located near Walt Disney World Resort and originally developed by the Walt Disney Company. It's a cute little town with diverse architecture, a beautiful downtown area, and a park.

It was the simple things that made this trip so memorable. My parents go above and beyond for me; their sacrifices are selfless and plentiful. They'll never know how much I truly appreciate everything they do for me and this vacation was just one example of their generosity. My family vacation to Orlando, Florida is an unforgettable memory that I will hold close to my heart for years to come.

3rd Place – High School – Written Word

Jude Lovgren

Point Pleasant Beach High School, Point Pleasant Beach

My Last Hoorah at Childhood

Teacher: Stephanie Voit

My Last Hoorah at Childhood

As I got off at exit 98 and headed back home, it hit me that I had just had my last “hoorah” at childhood. Now I know that this may sound a little cliché due to the fact that I’m still in high school but as I drove home from the Poconos I realized that I just had my last weekend as a kid who enjoyed the fruits of childhood. As dreary as this realization may sound, it has been thus far my favorite memory with my family because it is one I will never forget.

Our weekend getaway with cabin camping in the woods was followed by two days at an indoor water park in the Poconos. Although my whole family wasn’t there, partly due to the fact that my oldest brother is past the childhood fun of camping and amusement parks, my little brother and dad were. My brothers and I don’t often get to spend much time with my dad because he is always out fishing and when he is in its hard to catch him between sleep and waking up at 3 AM. That being said, when he has time off he always plans fun stuff to do with us. When he proposed the idea of the water park and camping, my brother and I were thrilled. When we arrived in the Poconos, the first night was spent camping, roasting marshmallows, and watching movies. While all this was great fun, the real excitement we were waiting for was the water park the next day.

When we woke up the next day we headed to the water park which was just a 20 minute drive away. Once we got inside, my brother and I went off and had a blast immediately. We spent a good portion of the first two hours going on every ride possible in the park, but before I knew it I was bored. I didn’t know why but the excitement of going on the rides over and over again just didn’t appeal to me the same as I remembered when I was my brother’s age. I came to realize that I was on the older side of kids at the park and the fruits of childhood began to fade. Accommodating to my brother who was still enthralled by fun, I continued to go on rides with him. The next day was followed by the same until we left around 5 PM.

As we headed home the next day, my brother and I were so tired we slept most of the way home. Heading down the dark empty highway, I began thinking of our trip and realizing that it wasn’t that bad after all. Heading down the dark empty highway I began thinking of our trip and realizing that it wasn’t bad after all. Even though the fun of childhood wasn’t the same as I remembered it in years past, it was a different kind of fun. It was the fun of watching my brother having the time of his life and spending time with my family. Realizing that my childhood is slowly fading behind me, I am thankful to savor these special moments spent with my family. Although our trip to the Poconos wasn’t the blast I had recalled in the past, it was a new kind of experience, one that I will always remember and my last “hoorah” of being a kid.

1st Place – Middle School – Written Word

Meghan Lepsis

Olson Middle School, Tabernacle

Indiana

Teacher: J. Drozd

Indiana

"Are we there yet" I whined, but after two hours in a car, and two hours on a plane no one complains about it. "Almost" my mom responded. I fiddled with the bracelet my mom-mom gave me on the plane.

I dozed off for about an hour before being awakened by my brother yelling, "We're here!" Suddenly, I was awake and annoyed until I realized we were here, and in two seconds I was darting into the house thinking over and over again "turtle hunting, turtle hunting, turtle hunting!"

The second I reached the door I was welcomed by my Uncle Paul, Aunt Claire, Uncle Rick, and Paul's girlfriend Natalie. We exchanged hugs and soon my mom-mom and Uncle Drew walked in, but I was too busy exploring the redone house to notice. "Can we go turtle hunting?" I asked.

"You are just like your mother," my aunt joked. "Give us a minute." I brought my stuff up to my room boiling with excitement. I lay down on the bed and thought of all the reasons I loved Indiana so much. I listed them in my head: It gets dark at 11:00 at night so we go to bed at 12:00 which really throws us off, but we love getting to stay up late, swimming in the crystal clear lake, riding in the pontoon boat to my 2nd cousin's house, sleeping in, my aunts cookies, and best of all is the turtle hunting with my family.

A few hours later we waved good-bye, as Mom, Matthew, Dad, Emily, and I got on the turtle boat. I was so excited this was going to be the year I caught my first ever turtle- I could just feel it. (turtle hunting is going out in the canals, catching the turtles in hand-held nets, holding the annual turtle race, and releasing the turtles because there is no killing). We went out in the lake, and soon I spotted my turtle. "I see one," I yelled, "Dad go in." There they were, six of them sitting on the edge of a wave runner. I leaned off the boat, holding the net out in front of me. One by one they hopped off. My hope was gone, it was pretty much impossible to fish one out of the water, especially the bigger ones. We came over to the side of the boat. None of my family saw it but the biggest one had just come up for air, not thinking I thrust the net under him and scooped him out. "I got the biggest one out of the water!" I yelled "That's like impossible!" I pulled the turtle into the boat "I'm gonna call you the Alpha Turtle" I said. My family chuckled. My mom caught two other turtles before heading back to the dock. When we got back I took the Alpha turtle, still in the net, and gathered the two other turtles from the tank, ran across the street, around the house, and into the backyard. "Look mom-mom" I yelled "I caught the big one all by myself. I fished it out of the water.

"Really, wow, very cool" she complimented. "Let me get a picture." I posed with all three turtles in my hand. I was so, so happy. My mom and dad walked over and took some more pictures with the Alpha Turtle. I felt like I had proved myself to the family.

2nd Place – Middle School – Written Word

Harsh Patel

Morris County School of Technology, Denville

Trees

Teacher: Bohn Drake

Trees

Trees grow in various ways

As branches stretch in one's gaze

Leaves change as seasons sway

Roots develop in the nightly days

However trees grow old and trees don't stay

However close the trees will fade

And when trees fade the close shall weep

They will sadden at the loss of thee

Yet, the cycle of life is sustained

And as a life ends another starts

A leaf falls as a seed is planted

A child is born into the family tree

3rd Place – Middle School – Written Word

Julie Ham

Churchill Junior High School, East Brunswick

Enigmatic Relationships

Teacher: Alyssa Yang

Enigmatic Relationships

"There is always an anticipation for perspiration whenever sports are involved," father cried out triumphantly, holding his cobbled glass to an abrupt toast. There was a mist of drunken labs around the table as father looked around pleased with himself; no matter how radical the experiences were with the family, there was always a jubilant mood around the table at thanksgiving: with good food, nothing could go wrong.

Honestly, I never really took Thanksgiving seriously and I didn't plan to anytime soon; when I was ten, I loathed the annual trip to Vienna and begged my parents to depart without me.

"This holiday is for celebrating family and food, Julie. You are as part of the family as the turkey is to the food," mother lectured.

The nostalgia of my ostensibly far past entrapped me for a couple of seconds before the screaming of my brothers and cousin came rushing through my ears. There seemed to always be an infinite ball of energy roaming in the children every second of the day. But as reality started to hit me, everything grew quiet. Grandpa had walked in.

He nodded at my father who was still standing in a toasting position, probably preparing for another toast to some other trivial matter. My father stood there gawking at my grandfather who looked disapprovingly at everyone else sitting around the table but few met his glances as he sat down at the vacant head of the table.

Father tried clearing his throat but his frog wouldn't go away. Grandpa glared at him while father tried receding deep into his chair. "What are you waiting for? Some sort of announcement for you guys to eat?" grandpa slammed the table, looking angrily from face to face.

There was a sound of food stuffing as each and every family member dug ravislingly into their plate like a pack of wild hyenas. I watched admiringly; how can a man so senile have so much control over a group of people?

But in a stoic perspective, even this imbalance in familial hierarchy somehow strengthens the family itself; it helps members empathize with another while all still cowering under renowned fear, sometimes to the extent of being cynical. But family is family; no matter how many problems and obstacles are implemented into the familial relationship, those ties cannot be erased.

They're in your blood.