

# News U Trust

APPRECIATING, DEVELOPING, AND SUPPORTING SCHOOL STAFF

## TWENTY AWARDS IN UTRUST WRITING COMPETITION

By: Dan Tollett

The Utrust Annual Writing Competition produced hundreds of stories about how individual school employees made a difference in the lives of students. Each essay writer was asked to present a copy to the person about whom it was written. Every essay was a winner, whether or not it was recognized with a cash award, because each recognized a school employee who went above and beyond the call of duty to make a difference in the life of a student.

We are tremendously pleased with the effect that these essays have had on staff morale in the schools. Schools where students and staff took the time to participate in this

competition were rewarded by joyous and warm moments. It was a privilege to be a part of several such occasions in schools across Tennessee and to see expressions of appreciation result in tears of joy. Schools not participating in this program are missing both some great morale boosters and some touching and life changing growth for their students.

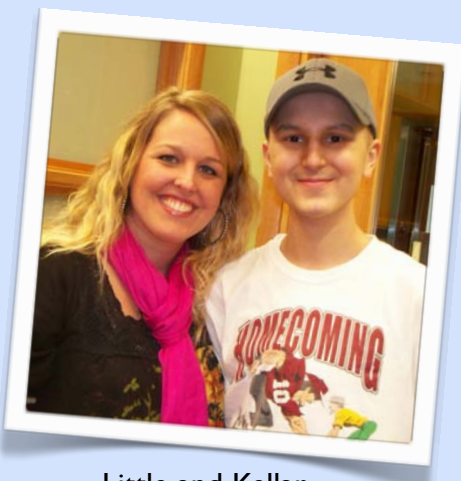
Twenty cash awards were presented by Utrust to seventeen students and three adults. Winning essays were about a variety of school employees including teachers, principals, guidance counselors, teacher assistants and custodians. Five

winners were from West Tennessee, eight were from Middle Tennessee and seven from East Tennessee. Trousdale County and Hamblen County each had five winners.

A summary description of each essay is presented in this issue and a link is provided for each to the full essay.



## Grand Prize - Student Division



Little and Kellar

Forrest Kellar, a student at Crockett County High School was the \$1000 grand prize winner for the state. His essay, entitled "[More than Just a Teacher](#)" was written about how Amanda Little, a high school teacher at St. Jude, helped him with his studies and life issues as he was struggling with cancer. He wrote, "I've also had one very special teacher who has shared

her knowledge with me, believed in me, inspired me, and brightened my life during its darkest time. ---Her guidance and encouragement have helped me learn that anything is possible despite whatever else that I may be going through. That is something that I will remember, not only now, but for the rest of my life.

# Tennessee's Regional Winners

## Ashton McCage

- First Place -  
West Tennessee

Ashton McCage, a student at Crockett County Middle School won first place in the West Division of Tennessee. She was presented with a \$500 prize for the story. Her essay, Not Just a Book, expressed her appreciation of the school librarian, Carol Wirwa.

Ashton wrote, "She is just like a mother to the school. She can tell when we are sad or upset and she takes us in and loves us like her own. No matter how loud, bad, or wild we are she still cares."



McCage and Wirwa

Makayla McCoy, a senior at Trousdale County High School was the first place Regional Winner for Middle Tennessee. Makayla wrote about Mrs. Karissa Oldham, her fifth grade math teacher. In the essay, she said, "Mrs. Oldham does not know me as anyone special or maybe just a quiet youngster that was in her class seven years ago, but this is giving me the opportunity to let her know that she is sensational and I can never forget her presence in my life."



Dr. Dan Tollett presents a check to Makayla McCoy

## Makayla McCoy

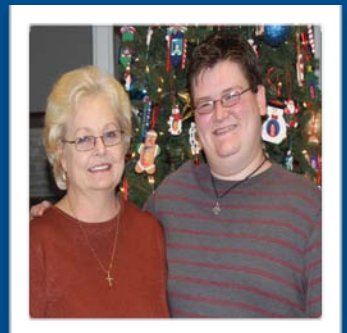
-First Place-  
Middle  
Tennessee

## Samuel Long

-First Place-  
East Tennessee

Samuel Long, a high school student at Clinch School in Hawkins County, praised his fourth grade teacher, Linda Church, for helping him during a difficult time. The essay won him first place in East Tennessee and a \$500 cash prize. He describes her as 'one of the most loving and caring people he has ever known'. During his fourth grade year Samuel started having some physical issues with his legs and he wrote that Mrs. Church always encouraged him and told him "We will make it through this together."

Samuel believes that without Mrs. Church he wouldn't have passed fourth grade and become the straight A student he is today. Mrs. Church consistently encouraged him with "You can do it!" He plans to become a teacher himself so that he can inspire other students the way Mrs. Church inspired him.



### East Tennessee-2nd Place Winner

Joshua Mandzak, a sixth grade student at Meadowview Middle School in Hamblen County was the second place winner in East Tennessee. His essay about fifth grade teacher John Watkins won him \$250.

Joshua described Watkins as a teacher who “made learning the most fun thing to do.” Joshua feels that without Mr. Watkins he may not have been male valedictorian of his class because Watkins always pushed him to do his very best.

### West Tennessee-2nd Place Winner

Cameron Cooper, a student in Harrelson School has won \$250 and second place in the West Division of the state for his prize-winning essay in the annual statewide Utrust Writing Competition. His essay, “Second Grade, a Life Changer” told how Sandra Paschall changed his outlook toward school and life in general. “I did not know at the time but this teacher changed my outlook on school forever.” Cameron wrote. “Mrs. Sandra never considered anyone not teachable. If we did not get something she would try a new way to teach it.”

### Middle Tennessee-2nd Place Winner

Delaney Oldham, a student at Trousdale County High School was the second place Regional Winner for Middle Tennessee. “There were numerous obstacles in my life, and she was always there for me with a kind, encouraging word or maybe just a fact of life I needed to hear. I had never before opened up to anyone like I seemed to open up to Ms. Glover,” Delaney wrote. “When I don’t feel like holding my head up and fighting another day, she encourages me to be the best person I can be and to respect myself. Through the terrible trials of my life, I have learned to never take anything for granted and to be ready for the ups and downs that life throws at me. I never know what is going to happen, so I live life to the fullest. I am happy to say I have someone in my life like Ms. Glover that I can open up to and get guidance and inspiration from. She makes my life worth living each and every day.”



Joshua Mandzak



Cooper and Paschall



Oldham and Glover



# Writing Competition Winners-Adult Division



Sturgill and Ford

**Megan Sturgill**, Surgoinsville Elementary Counselor, wrote about Kay Ford, a special education teacher at Surgoinsville Elementary School. Her [essay](#) earned her the \$1000 prize as the first place winner for the statewide adult division. When Sturgill received the cash award, she turned to Ford and said, "I just won \$1000. I told you if I won any money, I'd give you half of it. So, you just won \$500."

Mrs. Kay, as she is known to the students, works with children who have very demanding and unique needs and she finds ways to make everyone feel good about themselves. "Mrs. Kay embodies

what educators are supposed to be about-loving these children and giving them our all every day in every way we can," Sturgill said. "Mrs. Kay doesn't limit her encouragement to the children in her care. She always has a ready word of encouragement for anyone who needs it."

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**Anita Christian**, Principal of Watertown Elementary School has written a prize-winning [essay](#) in the annual statewide Utrust Writing Competition.

Her essay, "Making a Difference Every Day" was written to honor Jim Cox, school custodian. In her essay she says: "Not only does Mr. Jim assure a clean school supervising three buildings, he makes that special bond and connection with the students. He helps daily during K-3 breakfast and lunch talking and interacting with the children. He loves the children, and they love him too. He attends ballgames often transporting the grill, food, and supplies up the road to the high school where the games are played. Students witness his pride in his



Cox and Christian



Hudson

**Karen Hudson**, a school system employee in Benton County, has won prizes for their essays in the Utrust make a Difference Writing Competition this week. Karen Hudson, was awarded a prize of \$250 as the third place winner in the statewide adult division for her [essay](#) honoring secretary Patricia Douglas.

Hudson wrote in depth about the example Douglas is of a person who goes above and beyond in reaching out and caring for those in need. She quotes Douglas as saying "Children are a gift so take every moment you have and make a child feel special." Douglas is known for the phrase "Let's help" when it comes to children who are in need. She is willing to do what it takes to make a difference.

# \$100 Winners

## Utrust Writing Competition



**Tori Simmons**, a student at Trousdale Elementary wrote about [Betsy Rhea Jennings](#), her fourth grade teacher. In it Tori said, “There are over twenty students in our classroom. Mrs. Jennings makes each one of us feel like we are her own children. She takes time to explain, time to listen, and time to care about all of our problems.”



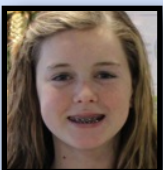
**Rebecca Story**, a student at Trousdale County High School won \$100 for her [essay](#), Penny’s Story,” about her mother, who is a Spanish teacher at the High School. She wrote, “She is very happy as a teacher as her smiles grow brighter each day. Every kid matters to her because she treats them like her own.”



**Jasmine Crawford** from Wilson Central High School wrote an [essay](#) to honor Brian Howard, a coach at Wilson Central who inspired her to set goals and standards to help students succeed. “Science was great in his class. I could not believe that when we started learning about life cycles that we also got to watch some. We had real caterpillars that turned into real butterflies and real eggs that turned into real chicks. Wow! I had no idea school could be so cool.”



**Ashley Delph** credits [Ron Coffey](#) with bringing her out of her shell and teaching her to communicate better. She praised Mr. Coffey for his encouragement and for his influence that extended beyond the classroom. “Because of him I became a more friendly and confident person,” Ashley wrote. “I took what he had given to me, and I gave it to others. He inspired me to teach kids younger than me history and grammar.”



**Karlie Hudson**, a student at Camden Jr. High School, wrote her [essay](#) about special education teacher Melissa Totty. She describes Miss Totty as “never making anyone feel different even though they might have had some learning disabilities.” Karlie expressed appreciation to Miss Totty and other special education teachers for “showing her the true meaning of compassion and how to accept others for who they are.”



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**Mikayla Still**, a student at Meadowview Middle School in Hamblen County, chose Debbie Killion to honor with her winning [essay](#). She credits Killion with helping her to develop the confidence she now has to use her imagination and to write stories. She described how Mrs. Killion made a difference in, not only her life, but the lives of her mother and brother. Mikayla wishes that everyone had the opportunity to experience Mrs. Killion as a teacher.



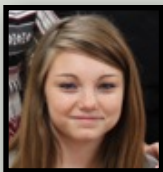
**Ryan Engel**, a student at Wilson Central High School, wrote his winning [essay](#) about Heath Springer a football coach at Wilson Central. Engel expressed appreciation for things such as the values and responsible behaviors that Coach Springer is known for promoting.



**Sarah Smith**, a student at Meadowview Middle School who wrote about [Mrs. Donna Noe](#), her fourth and fifth grade teacher. "She's not just a teacher to her students. She's a friend, counselor and to some, a mother figure," Sarah said. "I feel exceedingly grateful to have had a teacher that made such an impact on my life. She'll never know how much I admire and look up to her." Sarah dreams of becoming a teacher due to the inspiration of Mrs. Noe.



**Julia Gregg**, a student at Meadowview Middle School in Hamblen County, wrote about her second grade teacher [Mrs. Fishburn](#). "If you needed help, she would drop whatever she was working on and greet you with a smile on her face" Julia wrote. "Mrs. Fishburn always made us feel good about ourselves at school... if every teacher was like her our school systems would improve rapidly."



**Kenzie Rader**, a student at Jim B. Satterfield. Kenzie's essay, entitled "[Ms. Ramona Welch](#)", was about how her guidance counselor made a difference in her life. "She always believed me and believed in me when no one else did," Kenzie said about Welch.