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## How Charlestown Has Influenced My Life

# scholarship essays 2008-2009

CPS Scholarship Winner

Owen McDonald

St. Clement High School

In 2004 my parents told me that my father had been diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma, a cancer of the blood. We needed to be closer to Boston's hospitals, and moving to Charlestown with my grandmother would mean that my sister and I wouldn't be left home alone during his frequent hospitalizations.

The move was not easy for me. My hometown was Weymouth, a suburb south of Boston. I grew up on a dead-end street surrounded by woods where a walk to the neighbor's house was really a walk. The move to Charlestown was a bit of a culture shock. I had to leave behind my friends, my school and a room of my own, and move into a house where four people from my extended family already lived. And to make matters worse, I was set to begin my first year of high school.

I didn't really fit in at school. I had come from a large public school to a small private school where most of my classmates had been together since kindergarten. I found it hard to make friends. I was the only weird suburbanite in a school full of city kids.

That's where the negative side of this story ends. I spent a month wallowing in self-pity, then got my act together and started getting involved. The first thing I did was join the Boys and Girls Club and the Charlestown Working Theater. The Working Theater was a lot of fun, and I actually earned a decent role in their production of *The Music Man*. It was through that program that I made my first real friend in Charlestown.

But it was the Boys and Girls Club that changed my life. I am the man I am today because of the Club. I got involved in the many programs they offer. I joined everything from the Videogame Programming Club to the Community Action Club, one of my all-time favorites. The highlight of my freshman year was the week-long trip we took to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. We spent our days gutting houses, cleaning up streets and caring for homeless pets in shelters.

Before I knew it I was always busy, always active and always surrounded with people I liked and talked to and socialized with. I get involved in everything I can now. I join clubs, I go out and make friends, and I've even been honored with the Youth of the Year Award at the Boys and Girls Club and the Charlestown Community Appreciation Award. I find myself wanting to give something to Charlestown to repay it for what it gave me: the confidence to make something of myself and a place to belong.

Writing this essay, I had some trouble with the second paragraph. The line reads, "My hometown was Weymouth." I couldn't make up my mind whether I should use the present or past tense: can a hometown cease to be a hometown? After changing my mind back and forth, I came to a conclusion. A hometown is the place where a person grows up. And although I spent my earliest years in Weymouth, it was in Charlestown that I grew into the person I am today. Weymouth was the place I was born, but Charlestown is now and always will be my hometown.



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CPS Scholarship Winner  
Travis White  
Charlestown High School

Life has not been an easy road for me. My parents divorced when I was six years old, and going from having two parents to being raised in a one-parent home was difficult. My mother raised me alone without financial help or emotional support. She worked two full-time jobs but soon had to let one job go because I started to act out in school.

Having one job did not provide enough money to keep everything running smoothly. I remember the gas being cut off and having to boil water on a hot plate to take a bath. Many nights my mother went without eating anything but bread so I could eat. I watched her get up each day and go to work and tell me it was going to be OK.

As I got older things got better, but I still watched my mother and said this is not ever going to happen to me. I wanted to quit school to help out, but my mother said, "God has blessed me to have you, and no matter what I have to endure you are going to finish school. With education no one can ever make you feel inferior."

At that time her words had no meaning in my life, but when I got to middle school they hit home. I remember being at a new school and trying to fit in. I started hanging with the wrong crowd and became the class clown. A teacher and a guidance counselor told me that I would not amount to anything. I said to them both, "I'm going to make it, and when I do I'm going to thank you for pushing me to prove you wrong."

When I first came to Charlestown High School the whole middle school saga kept playing in my head. But I soon found out that words like those would never again be spoken to me. Since I've been here my teachers have done nothing but encourage, motivate and reach out to me. It took me some time to allow myself to trust others, but they kept opening themselves to me.

I can recall when my mother came to open house and my teachers spoke of me with affection. They let her and me know that they were behind me 100%, that I had smarts, and that with the proper direction and mentors I could further my education.

I began playing football because it was something I loved, and it helped me discipline my mind, work together as a team and think about strategies. I'm good at football and have had scouts look at me from different prep schools and colleges.

But it was my teachers and my mother who told me it is great to play ball, but I need a back-up plan. I took that to heart and realized that no matter how I got into college I needed a plan because playing ball alone is not enough. My education is what will take me where I want to go in life along with my dedication and determination.

I will be attending Mount Ida College in the fall, and I plan on finishing with a major in Business and a minor in Sociology. This means so much to me and my family as I am the first in my family to have the opportunity to finish college.