

NHHS student wins provincial award

By Tony Pearson

Nick Boudreau, a Grade 10 North Hastings High School student, is now a provincial student achievement award winner. Each year for more than a quarter century, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) has honoured the artistic and academic creations of students in public high schools. In the fall, the annual theme is announced, and schools across Ontario have students submitting essays, short stories, poems, paintings, sculptures, and videos. This year's theme was Mirror, Mirror. NHHS science teacher Leaf Worsley is a member of the OSSTF district committee for excellence in education, and so put out an announcement to the school about putting in submissions. In many schools, such projects become English and art class assignments. But Nick's mother, who is NHHS office supervisor, heard the announcement, and asked Nick about writing something on his own. He did so, and gave it to Ms. Worsley. She offered suggestions, and he re-worked it. After a couple of edits, it was ready to go to the district.

The submission grew out of a terrifying experience Nick has as a two-year-old, when he was attacked by a dog who badly tore his scalp ? in fact, ripped off a big part of it. He had to be airlifted to Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto, where he spent many weeks enduring multiple surgeries. In the end, as he described the experience, ?the hair on the top of my head was gone, never to grow again.? But he then drew on new reflections: ?When my mom looked at me, she didn't see anything abnormal; neither did my dad. So when I looked in the mirror, what did I see? I was me, happy and content ... I was a little boy with a big bald spot. Did it change my reflection? Did it make me feel different? No.?

Nick took hope at every step. At six years old, he was approved for a hairpiece fitted for him through the Hair Club for Kids. As he wrote: ?The reflection I saw in the fitter's eyes was understanding of another story. What did I see? The reflection of a handsome six-year-old, not really any different.?

At nine, he faced a new ordeal when he had tissue extenders inserted into his scalp. In effect, he looked like he was growing two grapefruits in his head. It looked strange, but as he wrote. ?I also saw a reflection of the person I would become in my friends' eyes.?

The fact that he could make them glow in the dark and freak out his friends helped him cope.

Then it was time for more surgery. A three hour operation removed the expanders so that the bald spot could be covered by the new hair which had grown on them. ?My Mom handed me a mirror ? How many times did I look? I'm not sure, but it was lots. Mirror, mirror ? you made me smile! In my eyes was confidence, not from my new hair, but from the reflection of the journey which had brought me this far.?

After that, he grew his hair long enough to make a donation back to Hair Club for Kids, where it could make a wig for someone else, perhaps someone battling cancer with chemo. Nick sums up the experience: ?What do I see in the mirror now? The new reflection of an independent, confident, caring individual who never saw anything but who I am ? Mirror, mirror: never did you reflect anything but me.?

The win was also accompanied by a cash prize, and a video of his accomplishment, which was played for all the delegates to the OSSTF convention, and can now be seen on their website.

Needless to say, his mother is very proud indeed; ?It's not everyone who gets to share in the experience of winning a provincial contest.? Ms. Worsley noted that it was the first such win for the school, and indeed for the whole district, within anyone's memory. In the video prepared by OSSTF to honour the winners, Nick notes that although he had doubts when he entered high school about making the grade, he feels he has grown in both ability and confidence at North Hastings.

Principal Ken Dostaler expressed the pride that the entire school feels for Nick's achievement. ?It shows that students in a variety of different pathways are succeeding here; I couldn't be more pleased to see Nick's work recognized.?

Interestingly enough, given how he suffered his injury, Nick now hopes to become a veterinary tech or assistant.