

The Community Page



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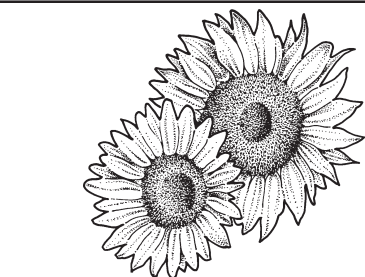


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Six Goodland High School students entered the Voice of Democracy contest: Front row: the top three with plaques: Janet VanDonge, third; Alyssa Mason, first; and Amanda Jolly, second. Back row: Emily Langness, Amy Anderson and Josef Felver.

Students earn money with speeches on freedom

Alyssa Mason, a Goodland High School student, is this year's winner of the Goodland Voice of Democracy speaking contest, sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliary.

Mason read her first-place speech during the Veteran's Day service at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall on Monday. The second- and third-place winners also attended, along with other students who entered speeches in the annual contest.

The theme of this year's contest was "Freedom's Obligation," and students were asked to write a speech explaining what that topic means to them.

Mason won \$75 for first place, Amanda Jolly \$50 for second and Janet VanDonge \$25 for third. Mason's speech will be entered in the district competition, and if she wins that she'll compete at the state level and then possibly go on to nationals, where the top prize is a \$25,000 scholarship.

Goodland students have dominated the contest in Kansas for the past two years, with Amanda Hoffman winning district and state last year and Jason Showalter doing the same this year before.

Showalter placed 8th at the national level, winning a \$4,000 scholarship, and Hoffman received a \$1,500 scholarship for her 21st finish. Both students received \$1,000 for winning state, plus a free week-long trip to Washington, where the national winners are announced.

Here are the top three speeches this year:

First place, Alyssa Mason
Rows and rows of names and names. That's all they were to me. Random, white, lifeless names ingrained in the black, sinister, cold marble. I just stood in awe and stared at the Traveling Vietnam Memorial Wall. A scale model of the original, it made a strange impression on my thirteen-year-old mind.

As I ran my fingers over the dark marble, I sensed the many, lifeless, brave names that

had been permanently engraved in history. These once living, laughing, smiling, crying, hurting, breathing people had given everything they had because of the binding power of the vow they made to protect their country.

Webster gives the definition of obligation as "the binding power of a vow, promise, or sense of duty." The seemingly endless wall of names is a huge symbol of freedom's obligation.

Pure names on a captivating canvas create a timeless reminder of those who acted upon the vow and sense of duty they held for freedom. That binding power does not have to come from a contract signed, sealed and delivered. It can come from that promise to ourselves.

Freedom's obligation is to live out our promises to share ourselves. An obligation doesn't have to be something you don't want to do. It can be something you do out of duty or something you volunteer to do. Freedom's obligation is more than memorizing the Pledge of Allegiance. It's more than standing to salute the American Flag as the Star Spangled Banner is being sung. Freedom's obligation is more than treasuring the great life we have in America. It's even more than loving our country. Freedom's obligation is the binding power of a sense of duty, a promise to our future to keep the freedom that we cherish.

We can chisel our names in these walls by acting upon our sense of duty. Every citizen of the United States can do something. As children, our obligation to freedom is to go to school and learn everything we can. Our responsibility is to serve our country as children who will be the future of our great nation. We learn how to be fine, upstanding citizens from the older people in our lives.

By the time we become teen-agers, the values and ideals that have been instilled within us begin to show. We also begin to exhibit traits

of adults. As teens, it is our duty to further our education. Our obligations to our country is to transition into leadership roles in our communities. In this way, we can give back by contributing to the lives of children.

When we become young adults, we get our first taste of the "real world" we've been constantly told about. As young adults, our duty is to practice our new freedoms responsibly.

We acquire the right to vote. This is one of freedom's greatest obligations. It is our responsibility as young adults to actively participate in the events of our communities. We get the opportunity to do this in new leadership roles. By doing this, we can live out our promises to share ourselves with children and teens.

When we grow into adults and full-fledged members of society, our careers reflect our promise to our country. Any career we choose will benefit our country in one way or another.

As adults, we continue to practice our freedoms responsibly. It is our duty to be citizens that can be looked up to. We continue to exhibit leadership in our communities. By the time we reach adulthood, we should become the fine, upstanding citizens we have been raised to be. As role models in our community and our country, we should strive to give back by taking part in the lives of children, teens, and adults.

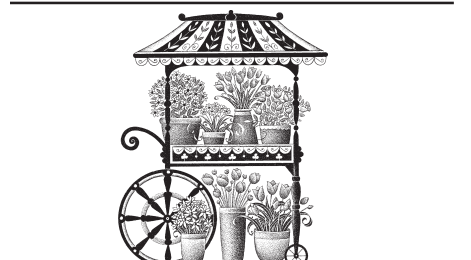
The long list of names on the Vietnam Memorial Wall contains people who lost their lives in the attempt to share the values of freedom. Not everybody can obey freedom's obligation by becoming a soldier who dies for his or her country. However, each person can find their name written on a wall somewhere. Those walls can be made of marble or flesh. By acting on the binding power of a sense of duty, by keeping your promise to the future to keep the freedom that we cherish, we engrave our names on walls.

When we carry out freedom's obligation, we are handed our tools. Where will you name be carved? Will it be on a heart? In a smile? On a wall? Only you hold the hammer and chisel.

Second place, Amanda Jolly

Musket balls flew everywhere, finding their targets in the opposing ranks. Troops had difficulty hearing the shouted commands of, "Reload! fire!" over the thundering roar of the artillery. It was 1775, the first year of the American Revolution. Many of the enlisted men on the American side were farmers or businessmen who had picked up arms against

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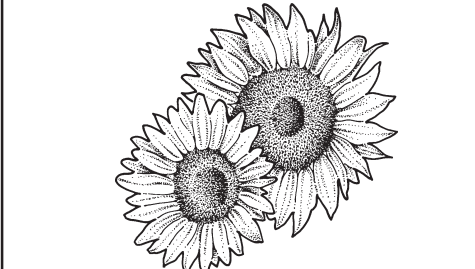
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