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THE FOUNTAIN HILLS
TIMES

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THE FOUNTAIN HILLS
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Brent's Corner

Fountain Hills, Arizona, is a place where everyone knows your name. The town gives you that vibe, like when you walk into a local bar similar to the old TV show, Cheers. It's a place we've grown to love with the views and a small town feel. It's a place we all call home.

I moved to Fountain Hills when this was a place with nothing but a Fountain, a few homes, a few restaurants and a small shopping center. The drive into the Valley seemed like an eternity, as there was nothing between here and Pima and Shea. Growing up in a town like that, I could only dream of leaving.

Then one year, my parents took my sister on vacation to New York City and I immediately fell in love with it. One night my dad came into the room and I was sitting by the window, taking in all the sights below. He asked me what I was doing, and I told him how much I loved the city and that I was going to move there some day.

That "someday" happened after graduating from high school. I moved in with my sister, Holly, who was working as a Broadway dancer in the production of Hello Dolly. Straight from high school to the bright lights of Manhattan. It was a dream I had since I was in fifth grade and now it had become a reality. I was 19 at the time and, coming from a small town, I felt living in Manhattan helped me mature and open up to the culture of the world, as New York is a mecca for all cultures.

There was never a dull moment living in the city (I was robbed on the way home from the video store my third day there), but I could never see myself coming back to Arizona. I started to mature more living there so, of course, I started thinking differently. My thoughts turned to what my future would hold.

New York is a very expensive place to live, so I made the choice to return and finish school in Arizona. But I still wanted to make it back to New York, eventually.

I started classes at SCC and served tables at Tonto Verde Clubhouse when it first opened. I fell in love with the restaurant business, so I changed my major to Restaurant Management and Hospitality. I would then find my way to working part-time which turned into full time with the *Fountain Hills Times* in 1997.

I loved selling advertising because of all the people I was meeting on a daily basis. In addition to working at the paper, I worked nights at Phil's Filling Station since I missed the restaurant business, so it was the best of both worlds for me. Phil has been such an amazing boss. He has been there for me since the first day I met him back in 1999.

I feel working at Phil's and selling ads has helped me reach another level of maturity. Plus, as you all know from my last column, Phil's also gave me the opportunity to meet my amazing wife, Gina.

The point of this column is to share how, over the years, I only dreamed about getting out of here or returning to New York as soon as possible. But that has all changed. The people I have grown close to, like all my advertising clients, Phil and my wife, Gina. I couldn't see myself calling anywhere else home. Fountain Hills has grown so much over the years that I now love returning to this town after going to the Valley.

The hiking, restaurants, shopping, people and that small town vibe makes this a place that I love to call home.

(cont. on page 14B)



The winners of the 2017 Essay Contest celebrated during a special luncheon provided by The Hills' Pizza & Desserts. Seated in the front row are this year's three top winners including Mikayla Anderson (second place), Noah Ohnsorg (first place) and Laura Anderson (third place).

And the winners are...

Valentine's Day was especially sweet for 17 local students, as the Fountain Hills Coalition brought together winners of the 2017 Essay Contest for a luncheon hosted out of the Community Learning Center.

Essay contest winners were joined by their families, friends, Coalition members and representatives of the community as excerpts from 14 honorable mention essays were read aloud, followed by complete readings of the three winning essays.

For the contest, students were given three topics to choose from, and then write an essay sharing their thoughts on questions that ranged from friendship, to conflict resolution and ideas for better preparing young adults for the future.

While all 225 students who took part in this year's Essay Contest received a free Frosty from Wendy's, the 17 top placers also took home cash prizes.

This year's first place winner of the \$1,000 prize was Noah Ohnsorg. See related story for his full essay. The second place \$300 prize went to Mikayla Anderson, with the \$100 third place prize going to Laura Anderson.

A total of 14 students received \$50 for their honorable mention essays, including Lauryn Becher, Noelle Derksen, Amara Feyrer-Melk, Hannah Johnson, Eri Koroli, Rachael Mahoney, Sherifa Momoh, Olga Nussbaum, Kaitlyn Pinegar, Jenna Rodriguez, Ciara Schaefer, Davis Smith, Christian Stein and Jakalinne Rogle Velasco.

Coalition Essay Contest

The winning entry from FHHS student Noah Ohnsorg

Following is the winning entry from the 2017 Fountain Hills Coalition Essay Contest, written by Fountain Hills High School junior Noah Ohnsorg.

What key element is necessary to create a strong friendship?

On the three year anniversary of the heart-wrenching highway collision that nearly took my sister's life, I acknowledge how blessed I am to still see her every week; to watch as she nurtures a family of her own; to bask in the radiant joy that I somehow kept my greatest friend.

But the tortuous journey to our shared bliss engraved mental scars into our lives; even today, those lesions sting with past pain and tribulation. How, then, did my sister and I manage to make it this far?

Looking back, our relationship buckled under the immense pressure of a grim reality. I was fourteen years old, holding back the boredom of the final months of a middle-school Algebra class, when a phone call from the office announced to me that an ambulance was rushing my sister to the hospital.

The following silence stuck to the air in a perpetual prison. Screeching

sirens ringing within my head, I learned through my mother that a double rollover nearly crushed my sister's spine. I trembled at the thought of her beloved green truck darting off the road and plummeting into a ditch, smoke and fumes clogging the air with a sinister finality. Then a silver lining pierced the darkness: my sister survived, barely, but there was hope.

Standing beside my sister's unconscious body, a doctor explained how her spine twisted and compressed during the accident; how glass shards bore deep into her back, straight through her tattoo of an angel's wing.

My family understood well that she was lucky to be alive. Due to her critical condition and the traumatic impact of the situation, my sister grew distant, distorted like her spine, and the months following her recovery proved strenuous on our relationship.

Of course, even with doctor's approval, she never truly recovered mentally. Unexpectedly, like the burst of a lightbulb, she disappeared, presumably to escape her own mental torture; however, she only spread her torment to me.

Ending what the fam-

ily saw as a loss, my mother instructed me to sever all ties to my sister, to possibly help her with tough love. The idea of losing someone so close, so loved, so vitally pertinent to my happiness was foreign to my mind; never before had my closest friend been so utterly ripped out of existence.

First days, then weeks, months, and years trudged by without a sign of my sister. Though I felt the cold sting of solitude without her, I refused to believe that she abandoned me altogether. As an ultimate gesture of loyalty, I never ceded the token of faith that she would one day return and mend our emotional tears with love. Through her independent struggle, she deserved at least this devotion, a blind ambition of the future.

Then, after more than a year of waiting, she came home.

Her arrival was unexpected and carried the burden of a heartbroken family and bitter welcome, but I graciously traded a year's worth of suffering for another moment enclosed in her warm embrace.

Along with her arrived the announcement of a new baby, my own nephew, and a new beginning. She earned a part-time job

close to home and sought to settle down in the hearty fashion of peace that the entire family desired. For the moment, I didn't want to know about the dismal life she faced or about the immense toil that brought her to my doorstep once more.

I waited over a year to see her again; the only thing that mattered was that my best friend was alive. Still, to see her rosy cheeks and buoyant smile once again did not surprise me. Somehow, I knew she would return, even when everybody else gave up. Somehow, I held on to hope.

Hope exists in every human, but is lost easier in some than in others; it waits patiently inside the subconscious before rising to challenge fear; it persuades us to dispel anxiety and summon courage instead; it condenses into a fine fabric, imperceptible, yet unbreakable, that catches the weight of failure and gives the desperate mind a sanctuary to rest.

Perhaps this is why my sister and I now fasten a matching set of silver angels to the visors in our cars—a humble reminder that even when it seems we have nothing else, we always have each other.

We always have hope.

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