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2023 High School Scholarship Essay Contest  
\$1,000 Scholarship Winner

**Untitled Essay**

**by Anna Standeven**

attending Union Mine High School in El Dorado

One of the wisest things my mom ever told me about change was inspired by a bad day at school. Driving home in the car, I complained to her about how I was wasting my life chained to a desk when I could be doing anything. I was burned out, dealing with a bad case of senioritis, and, even though I usually love school, on that particular day, I felt like quitting. However, instead of reminding me how lucky I was to be getting an education in a first-world country (or just telling me to stop complaining), my mom said something else. She told me that all the work that went into a day at school was the kind of work that made up a lifetime. A conversation with a friend, a new fun fact, a paragraph about economies in central Africa . . . that was life. All the people who ever revolutionized the world got there by doing, and having done to them, a million little things like the ones I was doing every day.

My mom's idea brought me up short. The realization that everything we do has an impact on something? That was big. Now, though, after thinking it over, I believe that she was right. Every time we act, or don't act, we create change. Just a few words can make someone's day better. A smile can turn a stranger's whole week around. A sentence written now might become the headline of an earth-shaking paper you publish next month. Conversely, all the little things the universe throws in our way are the things that shape our lives. Change isn't a one-way street. Change begets change. And in a world

where change can be explosive, I think the idea that everything we do has some sort of impact is more important than ever.

Democracy is founded on the idea that individuals have the right to wield power and to make change where change is needed. What we do becomes truly powerful when it inspires others to do the same. This is especially important today because individuals have more tools at their fingertips for instigating change than ever before. Social media is great at amplifying ideas. If a movement captures a community's heart, it can spread faster than would've been imaginable even a few decades ago, which means that one person can quickly impact not just their own community, but the world. For this reason, Americans have more responsibility than ever to make sure that the changes we make are changes for the better. The world we create is the world we have to live in. And since the world has a way of changing us, it's important to make sure that the things we do to it are things we want to see reflected in the mirror. As my mom might've said that day in the car, "Life is little things. And a billion lives are what shape the world."