Dear Mr. Rolin Erickson and Washington Foundation,

I am writing to you to thank you for the gift cards you gave me. The money was very helpful with travel and food expenses during our trip to Washington D.C. I can’t begin to explain how grateful I am for the gift cards, not only because of the help with the cost of the trip, but also because this gift has helped me realize how big of an honor winning this essay contest is.

As you know, I had the privilege to represent Montana as the boy ambassador for the “Do The Write Thing” essay contest. The essay I wrote was about how violence has affected my life. I have included a copy of my essay in case you wish to read it. This year there were 46 students that were selected from over 71,000 essays throughout the United States. The trip to Washington D.C. is called recognition week, and includes having all the winning essays published in a book and submitted to the Library of Congress, attending some meetings on being leaders against violence, meeting several people, as well as getting to learn about and tour some of Washington D.C. I was one of three students selected to read their essay in the Library of Congress, when the book of essays was officially submitted to the Library of Congress. My friend, Deryn Ferguson was the girl ambassador from Montana. Deryn was one of four students selected to read her essay in the Supreme Court. I also had the privilege of meeting Montana’s Senators Tester and Baucus as well as Congressman Daines.

My favorite part of the trip was when Congressman Daines gave us a tour of the Capital Building and took Deryn and me onto the house floor and let us cast a vote for him and another congressman. This trip was not only exciting because I got to represent Montana and visit Washington D.C., but I also learned some of the history of Washington D.C., and the United States.

Thank you again for helping me enjoy my experience in Washington D.C. with your thoughtful gift.

Nathan Steilman
2013 Montana Ambassador
“Do The Write Thing Challenge”
How Violence Has Affected My Life

By: Nathan Steilman
3660 Hancock Avenue
Butte, MT  59701
(406) 494-4941
Pete and Eileen Steilman

East Middle School
8th Grade
Teacher: Mrs. Pickett
My first thought was violence has not affected my life. I am lucky, I have a fun family. There are six of us, mom, dad, my older brother, younger brother, little sister, and me. We are really busy, always doing different activities and on the go, but there is no violence in our lives. At first, I did not think that violence had anything to do with my family. Then I remembered something important. Let me tell you a little story.

About seven years ago, and young single gal found out she was pregnant. This young gal had a tough life. She had been in trouble with the law, she had been sent to a juvenile facility, she dropped out of high school, and had to give up one child already to Child Protective Services. This gal had a big problem with addiction and violent behavior. Child Protective Services learned that she was pregnant and still had addiction problems. This young gal had promised that she had changed and that she was not abusing alcohol or drugs. She had a baby girl on December 18, 2006. She agreed to work with protective services so she could keep her baby. Well, that lasted for about six weeks. On January 30, 2007, a meeting was held at the Child Protective Services office with the case worker, this gal, and her mother. Her mother was concerned that she was not behaving appropriately and had not changed. The young gal became angry and took her 6 week old baby girl into a room, locked everyone out, and threatened to do harm and commit suicide.

In 2006, I was 7 years old. I remember asking my parents to have another baby. I had a big brother and a little brother, and I really wanted a baby sister. My mom couldn’t have any more children, but my parents liked the idea of adopting a baby girl. In December 2006 and January 2007 my parents took classes to become licensed foster parents. On January 30, 2007 we got a phone call from Child Protective Services asking if we were ready to welcome a foster child. We were told that it was an emergency situation and three families had been contacted about this child. My mom and dad had to make an instant decision. We were the first family to call back. My grandparents came over and my mom and dad left. About two hours later, they came home with a baby girl. She had not been taken care of very well, and was sick. She never cried like most babies do. The people from protective services told us that she didn’t cry because at 6 weeks old she had already learned that crying did not help her get any positive attention. We did not know for sure if she was just neglected or if she had been punished for crying, but she never cried. Two weeks after living with us, she learned that crying got her lots of attention and love. It wasn’t long before she was healthy and happy.

From January 2007 to July 2008, we were a foster family and had to take my little sister to visits with her birth family. We heard stories of her birth mom being arrested for breaking windows out of a neighbor’s house because they disagreed about something. We also heard
about her birth mom fighting in a bar, getting hurt, assaulting medical staff at the hospital, and assaulting a cop while being arrested. In July 2008 the judge decided that her birth family did not prove that they could take care of my little sister and the judge asked my mom and dad if we wanted to adopt her. On December 12, 2008, I got to go to the judge with my family and sit in the court room while the judge made my little sister an official member of my family.

I think the violence that occurred in my sister’s birth family was mostly caused by drug and alcohol addiction. I also think that they didn’t know any better. They believed that there was nothing wrong with their behavior. I think that violent behavior is unacceptable. Violence towards a child does not seem normal and it should never happen.

Writing this paper has made me think about what life would be like for my sister if she was still with her birth family. She is my closest sibling, and it is hard for me to think about her being in that other life. I think it would be one of the worst things that a girl her age could go through. Being exposed to drugs, alcohol, and violence from parents would be a terrible way to live.

I think that we should be taught more about violence against kids. Most people don’t realize how many families have violence in their home. I think I would be able to help another kid if they were being abused. I wouldn’t be shy or pretend I didn’t know anything. I would ask them if they were ok, and see if I could help them in any way. I also would try to get them to talk to an adult that could help them. If they were afraid to do that, I would talk to an adult for them because no kid should have to go through any violence. My family has helped by giving a safe and loving home to my sister. Sometimes the best way to help might be to give a person a new life free from violence.

I have not been directly exposed to violence, but violence has affected my life. Violence in another family gave me the little sister that I always wanted. My little sister is lucky now too, because she is loved very much and she doesn’t have to grow up with violence in her life.