

DJHS student wins Grand Prize in SuddenLink Hispanic Heritage Essay Contest

DeRidder Junior High School sixth grader Danalyn Belanger won the Grand Prize in the Hispanic Heritage Essay Contest sponsored by Altice USA through Optimum and SuddenLink. The eleven-year old wrote an essay entitled “Recognizing Bertha,” which was selected from among entries from twenty states representing the SuddenLink and Optimum serviceable areas. She was presented with a \$1,500 cash scholarship as the Middle School Grand Prize winner.

“We are excited for Danalyn and are proud of her accomplishments,” said DJHS Principal David Wentzel. “She wrote a courageous and touching personal essay that is worthy of the Grand Prize recognition.”

Students were asked to write a 500-word or less typed and double-spaced essay with the instructions: Name a Latino, past or present, with whom you would choose to spend a day and explain why. The contest was open to all students, 6th – 12th grades, who attend a school in the area covered by the companies. One Grand Prize was awarded for the middle school level and one for the high school level. In addition, six runners-up received mini tablets.

The contest was in conjunction with National Hispanic Heritage Month, celebrated annually in the fall to “pay tribute to the Hispanic Americans who have positively influenced and enriched our nation and society,” (hispanicheritagemonth.gov).

Kim LaPoint, Director of Operations, Sonya Jenkins, Retail Sales Supervisor, and Gwen Savoy, Manager of Retail Operations, for SuddenLink based in Lake Charles, presented Belanger with a check at the BPSB Central Office. Belanger read her essay to the group, and was congratulated by her former ELA teacher, Lori Boddie, who sponsored the essay writing as a class project, her principal David Wentzel, and Superintendent of Schools Timothy Cooley.

With her permission, Belanger’s essay is printed below.



Recognizing Bertha

If I had to choose someone of Hispanic decent to spend the day with, I would choose a middle aged lady living in Guatemala City, Guatemala. Her name is Bertha. Why, I assume would be your next thought. Eleven years ago, Bertha gave birth to a premature baby girl. That baby girl just so happens to be me.

February 2006, Bertha was 34 years old when she gave birth to me in a Guatemalan hospital. We have never met that I can remember. At one day old, I was placed with a foster family in hopes of being adopted. In March of 2006, what would become my forever family started the journey to get me home. About 6 months old and 21 months old, my foster mother took me to meet with Bertha so that we could have our DNA tested and make certain she was indeed my birth mother and to finalize the adoption guidelines. Of course, I have no recollection of ever seeing her. All I have are stories and one picture passed down from person to person along my adoption journey for my remembrance. I have been told that Bertha was a live-in housekeeper for a wealthy family in Guatemala City. Her monthly income was approximately thirty-four dollars per month. Obviously, on that income, she had no means to support a newborn. She made a very selfless decision by wanting a better life for me and deciding to put me up for adoption. I do not have very many other details about Bertha.

If I had the day to spend with anyone, it would be Bertha. I would start by wrapping my arms around the lady that gave me life. Without her, I would have had no start. I would ask her if I have any blood brothers or sisters and where they could be. I would want to know if she knew who my birth father was and where he is. I would ask her what are her favorite things to compare them against me to see where we are alike and different even though we have never lived together. I wonder what her dreams are deep down inside if she could have chosen a different life than that of a poor house keeper in a poverty stricken country. I would like that opportunity to tell her about my life here in the States and how amazing it has been!

I would cherish the short day we had together to cram in eleven years of being apart. I will forever be grateful for one strong Hispanic woman, Bertha.