

2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner  
Senior High Division  
Austin James Maher  
Laws of Life

### Ana-lutions

Life is a precious gift. It's a gift that can be taken away at any unexpected moment, on any unexpected day, in any unexpected way. God gives each of us the gift of life. During our lifetime we are challenged to be the best person we can be, preparing to enter the kingdom of God. Each day should be lived as if it could be your last day on earth. Each day we should treat others with kindness and respect, whether it's a family member, friend or stranger. Anyone who knew my cousin, Andrea, would agree that this is how she lived her life. Her life, short as it was, affected many people. She changed their outlook on life.

On December 15, 2005, we received a phone call that Andrea had delivered a healthy baby boy, but that she wasn't doing so well. The baby was delivered by cesarean section. Shortly afterwards, as she held the baby in her arms, she and her husband, John, named their son Wesley James. She wasn't feeling well so John took Wesley to the nursery. He went back to Andrea's room to find she had fallen asleep. She never woke up.

Life is full of unexplainable events, some good, some bad, some awful. Her death was an awful thing to accept. It was unreal. Here was a husband and wife who were supposed to be bringing their baby home from the hospital. Instead, John and his son, Wesley, went home to a quiet house, with no wife, no mother. Where's the fairness in that?

The large funeral home was overflowing with family and friends. The receiving line twisted and turned, trailing out the door into the parking lot. I was amazed that so many people would stand out in the freezing cold that December evening to pay their respects to my cousin. As I listened to people share their memories of Andrea, I learned a lot about life.

I knew that Andrea was thoughtful and kind. She would travel six hours to visit our grandparents, not many young people would do that, but she did. That impressed me. What I didn't know about her is how much her kindness and caring extended out to others. There were many individuals at the funeral that her twin brother and parents didn't know. As the strangers introduced themselves, they'd share how Andrea touched their lives. There were a few people there that we thought were at the wrong. Some were somewhat intimidating, including a warehouse worker for the company where Andrea worked. He explained that she was about the only person who smiled at him each day and said hello to him as she passed by. That had meant a lot to him. Her friends shared what they called their "Ana-lutions"...New Years was just a few days away and instead of resolutions, they were doing "Ana-lutions." They were resolving to try to live their lives like Andrea did by spreading kindness, having positive attitudes, and encouraging others to see the good in

everything. She always encouraged them to make positive choices and to be good people. They were going to live their lives by her example.

Andrea's life was short, but she really lived it well, impacting those around her with kindness. The interesting thing is, she didn't show off how beautiful she was; she didn't boast about how smart she was; she didn't tell everyone about the good deeds she did for others. That's what made her such a wonderful person.

Through all of this I've learned that life isn't always fair. I've learned that life is about learning to find the positive, like Andrea did. Through her passing, she gave life to her son. She was able to give her husband one last gift before leaving this earth, Wesley. She got to hold her baby in her arms and name him before she passed away. She taught her family and friends to be kinder to others, even to strangers. She lived her life the way God wanted her to, by being a good example for others. She taught us all that life is a precious gift that can be taken away at any unexpected moment, on any unexpected day, in any unexpected way. Each day of our lives is one more gift from God. Andrea taught us that each day should be lived as if it could be your last day on earth.