

Spotlight on Student Writer Neha Shabeer

By CYNTHIA WHITTY

This year *Ashland Local Town Pages* had the privilege of working with two talented student writers: Freshman Neha Shabeer and Sophomore Olivia White. Each month, through their thoughtful reporting, the students provided the Ashland community with a unique view into their world at Ashland High School.

This interview introduces readers to Shabeer, who wrote seven articles, beginning with the December issue and continuing through June. Her topics, which she chose each month, ranged from the welcoming of French exchange students to participating in Junior Statesmen of America to exploring the heavy workload seniors face. Shabeer writes with passion and deep personal and factual insight. To read her articles, visit archived issues on the *Local Town Pages* website, www.ashlandtownnews.com.

What inspires you to write each month? Why do you like to write? What do you like least about writing?

Personally, I believe writing is about passion and getting your voice heard. There is something beautiful about getting the thoughts swirling around in your head down on paper and making a difference or influencing others that read it. Writing is a forum where I can get my opinion heard without feeling like I am just screaming into the void. It's a drug, like performing—seeing your work in print is the best feeling in the world. The only thing I don't like about writing is getting a block. Penning an article or story has to have a flow or emotion behind it and, at times, you can't find it. It can often be frustrating to have an idea in your brain or sometimes lack of it, which leads you to feel powerless looking at the blank page in front of you. Although, there is always a hurricane before a rainbow. Once you reach an epiphany and the words start flowing, writing captures its magical touch once again.

How do you decide on your topics?

I look back on my calendar

and think about the significant events that have happened in my life in the past month. It is no grandiose process; I pick whatever I feel has the most impact or I can tie to a bigger picture element. Then I brainstorm in my head for a little bit and once I feel confident about the direction I'm taking, I spread my fingers over the keyboard and begin typing!

What is your process for writing an article? How do you approach the topic? Do you keep a list of topics you'd like to write about, for example? Do you read about the subject before writing?

I don't believe in a specific process for writing an article. It varies depending on the topic, whether it is a personal account or an event, opinion piece, or simply an interview. Writing is an art and the way an artist strokes their brush on the canvas always changes. I am the same way. I get some points down on my subject and decide how I want to conclude the article, but after that, I let it take its own direction. That is one of my favorite things about writing; it is very free and liberating.

Tell us about yourself: what are your personal interests, what do you want to do when you graduate? How will this writing experience help you?

The only way I can seem to describe myself is as the most rebellious good girl you will ever know. I sound like some sort of cliché or a '90s boy band song, but hear me out. I have always been a very independent person, which is very hard when you have just turned 14 years old. I love the confidence from being in control, which is why I love writing and dancing. I like to push the boundaries on what "a



Ninth-grader Neha Shabeer shared her innermost thoughts and views on Ashland student life this year as a *Local Town Pages* student writer.

kid can do" because I believe the future is now. Kids can make just as much of an impact as adults. That is why involvement is my most important mantra. I am involved in many school clubs and activities and enjoy taking active leadership roles.

For example, I am currently the president of the STAND club, which is a positive social norms campaign to encourage kids to make healthy choices in Ashland. Being part of these clubs, I get the privilege of going to conferences, which I have written about in my articles, but I also love travelling to experience cultures. I have been curious since the moment I left

the womb and embrace authenticity, differences, passion and uniqueness between individuals. Diversity and different people's infatuations are what truly inspire me.

This drive makes me imagine my future in New York City

once I graduate from Ashland High School. There, I would like to study to be a surgeon. I love the sciences, caring for others and hearing their stories so I believe it will be the perfect profession for me. I also want to continue the tradition and be a third-generation doctor!

All in all, I believe this writing experience helps me by allowing me to have an outlet and not feel like a kid whose opinions don't matter. So thank you for this opportunity and thank you to the readers who read my rants and babble. My absolute favorite moments are when I get stopped in the supermarket or some other obscure place and hear compliments about my writing from people I don't know. It still blows my mind that the innermost workings of my mind are shared with you all, but maybe this vulnerability is the most valuable part of it all. I hope my writing rings raw and true like my personality and future ahead of me.

Do you want to add anything?

Multiply the size of an elephant by three-hundred-thirty-nine and a half and that will be how thankful I am to the wonderful editor of this newspaper, Ms. Cynthia Whitty. Thank you for taking me on, editing my work, responding to my questions and publishing my work! It means the world to me.

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