

Junior Division, Prose

Caylee Smith-Stoney, St. John's

What Can I Do? (an excerpt)

There are instances in all of our lifetimes that transform our perspective. A loved one becoming ill. Overcoming personal anxiety. Hitting that homerun in baseball. The first "big" failure. A first kiss. But for me - this moment came a little over a year ago when I was walking the streets of Toronto with my Nan and Pop.

On the hustling streets of Toronto I could see that a man was crying despite the swarm of people separating us. Two crutches were resting alongside him. His demeanour and physical fragility will stay with me forever. He cried out "*Help me!*". He couldn't get back up from his fallen state. He seemed in need of immediate care - but from who? "*Help me!*" echoed along the scuffs of hurriedly moving feet. The street was silent in its response. Not one person stopped their normal hustle and bustle. No one glanced at him, not one stir from the people around him. . .

This moment forever shaped Caylee as an advocate and as a writer. Despite feeling powerless initially by the societal issues she is surrounded by, she finds her determination to make a difference. Through self-reflection and online research, a 13-year-old from St. John's, Newfoundland, discovers a newfound sense of agency.

In a heartfelt letter to government officials, Caylee highlights the urgency of addressing homelessness, drawing from personal experiences of family members affected by the issue. Through her advocacy, she amplifies the voices of the marginalized and demands action to support those in need.