



Maria Ignas (219) 433-4058

"Downtown Highland"

Age 17

Grade: 12

I love Downtown Highland. I love walking through the alleys, past the murals, and into Main Square Park. My friends and I walk through Downtown so often we have a whole route planned out. First, no matter who I'm spending the day with, we always go to Sip first. And who can blame us? The shop always smells so pleasant when we walk inside, like fresh coffee beans and caramel. The workers are effortlessly personable and kind. I've never had a negative experience with any worker or meal. The artwork is gorgeous and thought-provoking. No two pieces are ever the same. Some of it I understand easily, and some of it I don't. There are many pieces out of which I try to wrestle meaning whenever I see them. I myself hope to draw something beautiful for them to hang up and sell one day. My favorite drink is the Zebra Latte, which is made with white and dark chocolate. I always order this with oat or almond milk. And it's *good*. Sip is cozy and inviting. The warm lighting and the beautiful decorations welcome you back each time you return. It's like you never left.

After Sip, my company and I step inside Miles Books. I've been visiting the shop for so long that the owner, Jim, always recognizes me. He

always asks how I'm doing, how school's going. I always answer truthfully. The first time I remember visiting Miles Books was a little more than two years ago. I was going into my sophomore year and needed some books my English class required at Highland. When I walked in, I was nearly overwhelmed by the sheer amount of books the store carried. And *that* was before I realized there was a whole other room in the back. I remember wondering how anyone could possibly choose what to buy and read when there were so many possibilities. As much as I'd like to look through every single book they carry, I know it's just not possible. I bought the books I needed and left, but promised to myself I'd return sooner or later. More recently, last year, I bought an abridged version of The Count of Monte Cristo. I needed a good book to read while my family and I were going to be out of town. It was a phenomenal read. The book is on my bookshelf to this day. The owner and his wife are so kind. I remember one time over the summer my friend and I were set to meet at Sip, but we had gotten the times mixed up, so I arrived half an hour early. Since I hadn't had my driver's license at that time and couldn't make it back home, I asked Jim if I could wait in his shop until my friend arrived. He graciously agreed, and I spent half an hour in the back reading an old book I had found hidden in



the back of a bookshelf. To say thanks, I bought the book I had been reading and went on to spend a wonderful day with my friend.

Lastly, I'd be remiss if I didn't discuss the library. The Highland Library has carried so much meaning for me throughout my whole life. I remember being a young child and begging my mom to let me check out eleven or twelve books at a time. She always made me put a few back, but I still left carrying a pile in my arms. I especially appreciated the extensive collection of Encyclopedia Brown books they kept. The Highland Library is quiet, but not solemn. It's bright and optimistic, especially when the sun streams through the decorated windows. I've never been able to focus on my schoolwork better than when I'm studying in the library. The access to so many resources and information enriches my life, and the lives of everyone else who lives in Highland. I hope the building remains there forever. In fact, I hope Downtown Highland as a whole remains where it is, as it is, forever, changing only in generation as young and old walk through its streets.