

Military Family Appreciation Month: Carlisle Barracks teen honored at White House

Month of Military Family: Poems earn teen recognition, honors

Last year, a 16-year-old Carlisle Barracks teenager won a gold medal in the national Scholastic Arts competition for a personal memoir that was selected for publication. The memoir was about **Michaela Coplen's** thoughts about her mother's deployment to Iraq:

"For the first six months, you pray every night. It's not until month seven that you realize no one is listening."

"You wonder why war exists. You can't fathom why a human being would seek to hurt another human being, to push a button or pull a trigger and kill without honor. At month eight you discover the horrible, selfish, animal blackness within your soul when you realize that you could care less who wins and who suffers and who is hurt and who dies, as long as your mom comes home."

"... You hate your mom for leaving you alone and you hate yourself for hating her. So you blame the Army that has pulled you around like a marionette since before you were born. Your path was chosen for you, and you are helpless to change it. You can either adapt to this life, or end it."

Michaela is now a year older, has added yet another substantial bullet to her writing resume and met the First Lady, **Michelle Obama**. In September, the National Student Poets Program selected Michaela, along with four other students, for a year of service as national poetry ambassadors. They travelled to Washington D.C. and met in the Diplomatic Reception Room in the White House September 20.



First Lady Michelle Obama with the 2013 National Student Poets (from left: Michaela Coplen; Sojourner Ahebee, Nathan Cummings, Louis Lafair, and Aline Dolinh) in the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House, Sept. 20, 2013. (Official White House Photo by Lawrence Jackson).

According to the Scholastic Arts and Writing Awards website:

"The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Alliance for

Young Artists & Writers partner to present the National Student Poets Program, the country's highest honor for youth poets presenting original work."

“National Student Poets are chosen from among the national medalists in the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards by a jury of literary luminaries and leaders in education and the arts. Student Poets receive college scholarships and opportunities to present their work at writing and poetry events throughout their term.”

This recognition is a rare honor for her and her poet peers, said Michaela’s mother, **Col. Lorelei Coplen**, Army War College operations officer. “I wonder how she finds the time to do it all,” she said. “She is unafraid of telling me when my opinion doesn’t matter or when I have missed the point of her poem!”

The Scholastic Art and Writing Awards website features six of Michaela poems, including:

Cassandra breaks the speed limit

I told you what I was.

I told you I was a series of boxes.

I told you I was nine homes

that never showed me where the heart is

And seven schools that defined “love”

but never taught its application.

I told you I was a child of war who never learned to be at peace.

I told you that when they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up,

I said “gone.”

I told you I saw life through a burgundy kaleidoscope.

I told you there were things I couldn’t tell you.

I told you the truth.

So why am I contemplating the fractal patterns of a broken windshield

and the texture of a telephone pole

and the way that rumble strips seem to sing *goodbye*?

I told you it would come to this,

And you didn’t believe me.

For more of Michaela’s poems, visit <http://www.artandwriting.org/media/132480/>.