



Bill Anttila, John Miller, and Jack Kinsey of VFW Post 8138 presented Sydney Wilkins with her award.

**ESSAY:** Middle school student plans military service as adult

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everyone, not just in certain places, people, races, and religions," Wilkins wrote.

Wilkins told *The Nugget* that she developed her writing skills under the tutelage of Carol Dixon at Black Butte School. The topic of the Patriot Pen essay motivated her to jump in to the competition.

"If you're going to do an essay, it might as well be something important," she said. "I like to write; it's fun."

And freedom and patriotism — and the will to defend it — are very important to the Sisters youth.

"I want to go into the military when I grow up," she explained. "My dad's family has almost kind of a legacy."

Her father, Jay Wilkins, served in the U.S. Army as an Apache helicopter pilot. And the legacy goes way back, at least to George Wilkins who, Sydney says, "was in the Civil War. He was a general and he died fighting."

Now that combat roles are opening up to women, Sydney has a big ambition:

"I want to be the first woman Navy SEAL," she said.

She's inspired by the example of Shay Haver and Kristen Griest, who completed the grueling and prestigious U.S. Army Ranger School (as did her father).

"A Ranger is a high point in the military, and soldiers have to go through a grueling 62-day course, sometimes more," Sydney wrote. "These two extraordinary women did just as well as their 94 male classmates."

Determination is key to fulfilling ambitions, and it is apparent that Sydney Wilkins

has plenty of it. It's reflected in her essay, where she knew just what she wanted to accomplish.

"I knew I wanted to say something about Shay Haver and Kristen Griest, and I knew I wanted to say something about the Syrian refugees — and my dad," she said.

She said it well, earning honors and the \$100 check. She noted with some chagrin that she was unaware that she had been tapped as the winner, despite the fact that her parents showed up at the presentation ceremony, and her teacher Becky Aylor told her to be ready.

"I (didn't) put any of that together," she said.

Sydney has plans for at least a portion of her prize money.

"I promised my friends milkshakes," she said. "They ate my lunch while I was up there, so they owe me a lunch."

# What Freedom Means to Me

By Sydney Wilkins  
Patriot Pen Essay

Freedom. That single word triggers so many different emotions. Some people might be overjoyed, knowing they can be whoever they choose in religion and career. Others, in countries or religions that prohibit some types of freedom, might be saddened that being free is not for them. When I hear the word freedom I am proud because my father was in the military and I want to be a soldier myself some day. When I hear "freedom" I am happy, reenergized, and hopeful. Freedom is powerful.

While freedom brings joy and happiness it can also bring negative emotions. Many people have lost their lives for freedom. Soldiers fought and died in the revolutionary war for America to have freedom from Great Britain. Many black men, women, and children died trying to earn their freedom from slavery. In total, 2,144 American soldiers have given their lives fighting in and around Afghanistan because of the Operation Enduring Freedom. Freedom has a price.

I believe freedom is a force that should be for everyone, not just in certain

places, people, races, and religions. One great example of this is the Syrian Refugees. They are citizens from the Syrian Civil War who don't believe in the strict rule of their Muslim government. They fled the country going to many of the regions bordering Syria, mainly Turkey. These people are men women and children, some my age, and it made me think about how lucky I am to be in one of the places that enjoys the rights of freedom. Freedom should be for everyone.

I think that one of the biggest fights for freedom today is that of women's rights. While this is not a life risking concept, I do not think that it is any less important than any other issues. This summer women had a important breakthrough. Two women, Shay Haver and Kristen Griest became America's first women rangers. A ranger is a high point in the military and soldiers have to go through a grueling 62-day course, sometimes more. These two extraordinary women did just as well as their 94 male classmates. While women are still not thought of as equals to men, they are fighting. To me, freedom means everything.



Photo by Kathy Krause

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