

# 2026

# GIRL POWER CONTEST WINNING ENTRIES

**Congratulations to the 2025 Girl Power Contest Winners!  
First Place and Honorable Mention winners were selected in the  
following categories:**

**Elementary School**

**Middle School**

**High School**

**Adult**

**This year's contest invited residents to reflect on the women—past and present—  
—who have demonstrated extraordinary real-life “superpowers.” Who inspires  
you—whether a historical figure, family member, neighbor, or advocate—and  
how did she use her strengths to make a meaningful difference?**



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***Erica Fleisig: My local hero***  
**By: Ada Ahuja-VanTassel**  
First Place, Elementary School Category

### MY FICTIONAL STORY

Once upon a time there lived a girl named Erica Fleisig who lived in Maryland. One day she wanted to go fishing in the Chesapeake Bay but it was too dirty and she had heard of the Legend of the sturgeon. The legend of the sturgeon said he wouldn't be able to breathe if the water wasn't good and he needed a place to live where it would be safe for people to go fishing but also safe for people to swim in and also safe for all the ocean animals. Sturgeons have a purplish scaly rainbowish body and it looks really ancient. So Erica Fleisig went to the Chesapeake Bay and she saw a sturgeon. Splish Splash came the sturgeon going through the Chesapeake Bay. She screamed because it looks scary but then she just realized it was not going to harm her but it was having trouble breathing and that's when she dedicated her life to saving ocean animals and the Chesapeake Bay. A couple years later she went to work in the department of Water at the Environmental Protection Agency. And her superpower was that even though she didn't have to save the Chesapeake Bay yet, she did, and she didn't complain at all. She just did what she wanted and that is one of my favorite superpowers. The end.

### THE REAL STORY

I chose my Aunt Erica because she is the lead biologist and branch chief in the office of water at the environmental protection agency. When she was young she knew she wanted to help animals and nature somehow. Erica is most proud of the large amount of laws she has written to help fish and

water animals. She feels this way “because nature brings us happiness” at least that's what she told me.

She helped the Chesapeake Bay because it's very important to the country and Maryland. It gives us a safe place to play, nice water to swim in, and tasty crabs to eat. And when she helps save the Chesapeake Bay she saves millions of sea creatures that live there. It also helps make a lot of jobs for Maryland and its counties. The bay has a lot of seafood like oysters, blue crabs, rockfish and plenty more.

In conclusion, I chose Erica because she inspires me to save nature and help the world. In my opinion, it's not kind to throw trash and dump all the stuff into the sea creatures' homes and then they will die. I don't feel like it's fair if we get a longer life than the sea creatures. I like how the law states that the bay should be clean for swimming and fishing and that we can do those safely. And this is how Erica Fleisig inspired me to help the world and make it a better place.

***Marian Anderson***

**By Eldana Tilahun**

Honorable Mention, Elementary School Category

Denied to sing at Constitution hall

But wait! They called.

This wasn't right at all

Eleanor Roosevelt stood above the crowd and wouldn't stand for this at all!

To right a wrong and let Marian Anderson sing

Eleanor invited Marian Anderson to sing on the steps at Lincoln memorial

75,000 people gathered and let her sing

Her full and rich voice captivated the crowd

Denied to sing at Constitution hall

But with supporters who won't let her fall

Rare and fair

The light in the night

A Nightingale spreading its wings upon

History.

## *Fallen Gravity*

**By: Kalyani Mishra**

First Place, Middle School Category

It was always there.  
A delicate light twinkling-  
Through the LED illuminated room  
They said it had to be “clearly impossible”  
It never was, only  
Backs were purposely turned.  
Yet someone “below” men  
Turned her curiosity-ridden eyes,  
Darting over seemingly truthful  
Delusions.

The universe rewritten-  
Stars of “non-iron hearts-”  
Was simply an idea floating  
In the abyss of endless waters.  
Waiting to be opened.  
One by the name of Cecilia Payne-Gaposkin,  
Flourished what is now a basic fact.  
Hydrogen and Helium contrast stars-  
With purity,  
Brightening our dim souls.

The existence of misogyny in astronomy,  
Simply gravity gatekeeping questions.  
She drove a submarine in the desert,  
Until it reached the ocean.  
After endless start-ups,  
Later discredited for such a feat.  
Yet persistence should never be messed with-  
It always creeps up, a quiet stab in the back.  
Now she inspires others with her wit.  
A tortoise against the hare.

Oppression and the oppressed coexist-  
Industrialisation vs nature.  
Yet us as women, are taught to fight,  
Through strength, notably intelligence.  
Because she taught us wisdom.

***Fallen Gravity***

**By: Kalyani Mishra**

First Place, Middle School Category

We stare at the sky as she once did.  
Yes, believe fallen gravity is present, for  
“Nonsense will fall of its own weight...”

Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin was a British astronomer who discovered stars were made up of mainly Hydrogen and Helium instead of Earth-like elements in 1925. Discovering this, she told her professor of her findings, which was deemed “impossible,” and that no one would believe her as a woman. Yet upon discovering her same outcome. Henry Norris Russel, a well-known astronomer, took credit for her work. Hearing this, although Cecilia was quite regretful of not sharing her findings to the media sooner, she was not discouraged. She didn’t initially try to correct him, she instead waited and even submitted her thesis about what was believed before her discovery. It was only 40 years later that it was found she was the primary contributor in 1962, what she calls “dogged persistence.” Her story inspires others around the world for her patience and intelligence.

***A Silent Hero***  
**By: Jeevika Prabu**  
Honorable Mention, Middle School Category

A beacon of light,  
Guiding the way,  
A hope that never fades,  
One that will stay bright,  
During the darkest day,  
She says, "I'm here, no reason to be afraid"

Often unseen,  
Hidden by more celebrated names,  
A person who does her work quietly,  
Her kindness, growing like evergreens,  
With only the truest aims,  
A superhero, with a hidden identity.

Her eternal flame of love,  
Showering us with warmth and care,  
A figure like Hestia, keeping the hearth alive,  
Always placing family first,  
That's my mom - my own hero.

## **“Freedom”**

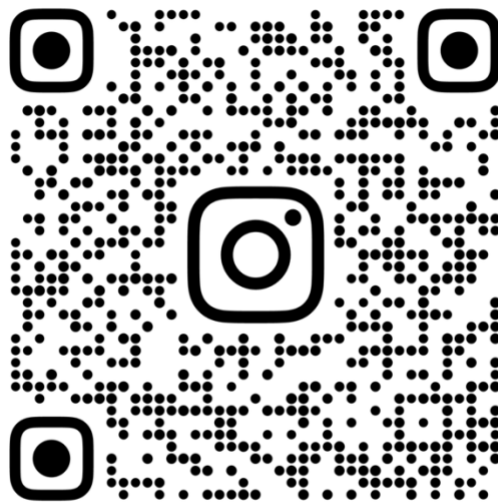
**By: Eliana Cortez**

First Place, High School

With Women’s History Month around the corner, I was inspired to create a video celebrating various women’s rights leaders across the world. While listening to the song “Freedom” by Pharrell Williams, I knew I found the perfect anthem to exhibit all of the incredible work that women have done to foster and strengthen women’s rights in our society. I did not know where to start, but when I came across this year’s girl power contest theme, it made me think and research about influential women that have made a difference in our society and who inspire me to make a change. From Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to Malala Yousafzai to America Ferrera, I knew it would be impossible to choose just one exceptional woman to feature. So, I decided to include multiple women who have made impacts among various sectors such as women’s voting rights, education, and sports. After sifting through various speeches, I decided to include soundbites from Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama, and Angela Bassett; all of whose speeches made me feel empowered to continue building upon the work these women have accomplished. It was also important to me to feature women leaders from different generations who have influenced our current leaders. From Aretha Franklin to SZA, and Billie Jean King to Serena Williams, I am inspired by how these women stood against the status quo and fought for women’s voices. They truly have real-life superpowers.

**View Eliana’s Video On Her Instagram Account @\_emc.art\_ :**

<https://bit.ly/4echb2o>



**\_EMC.ART\_**

***The Power She Never Lost***  
**By: Ishita Singh**  
Honorable Mention, High School Category

Superheroes are often known for having one special power. The woman who inspires me the most, my mom, has never had just one. Her greatest strength is how she combines many: the ability to teach, adapt, persevere, and, above all, keep learning, passing that on to others.

In India, my mom was a history lecturer. She didn't just teach facts; she taught her students how to think. While many people remember one thing from their teachers, my mom left her students with lasting life skills. Teaching wasn't just a job; it was a reflection of who she is.

When she moved to the United States, that part of her life was suddenly gone. She left behind her career, which she had spent years building. In a new country, she had to start over, figuring out how to navigate a new life, adjust to a new culture, and rebuild her identity.

But she didn't let starting over stop her. She approached everything in the same way she approached learning, with patience and persistence. Working through uncertainty with grace and skill, she became the example my sister and I grew up with. Whilst working long hours and raising two kids, she kept pushing herself, going back to school and earning her second master's degree. It wasn't something she had to; it's just who she is: someone fearlessly moving forward.

I remember when she would sit next to me in bed, doing her own work in the dark so she wouldn't wake me as I slept. Sometimes I'd wake up in the middle of the night and see her books open, laptop lighting up her face. If she noticed I was awake, she'd stop what she was doing just to make sure I went back to sleep.

I've always viewed education as something that's constantly a part of my life. I credit that to my mother. She always taught us that education is a life-long journey, which she continuously demonstrates. She also never forced that mindset onto us, encouraging us to pave our own path and discover our own interests. She has always stood by my sister and me, allowing us to trust her completely. Whenever I need help, she's the first person I ask, because she is one of the only people I can rely on to give me constructive criticism, challenging my thinking.

Even with everything she does, she never takes credit or seeks praise, staying humble and grounded. She consistently puts others first, which can be frustrating. Truthfully, I wish she'd focus more on herself, but that's just who she is.

Most people fear change. My mom runs towards it. Even as she rebuilt her own world, she built one for her family. Because of her, I don't fear starting over; I welcome it. I have heard and seen all the hardships she's gone through and how she persevered through them all. My mother's story shows me that real power, and her power, is the courage to keep becoming.

***Born to Lead***  
**By: Natalie Jean**  
First Place, Adult Category

***Women past and present have shown incredible, real-life superpowers. Who inspires you—whether a historical figure, family member, neighbor, or advocate—and how did she use her powers to make a difference?***

Listen to Natalie's song, *Born to Lead*, here: <https://bit.ly/4nYLo3s>

Listen to more of Natalie's music on her YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/@NatalieJean>



I don't have just one woman who inspires me—because the kind of strength that moves me most is not found in a single story, but in a collective rising.

I am deeply inspired by the women—past and present—who have come forward to speak their truth after being silenced, especially those who have stood up against powerful men. In particular, the courage shown by survivors connected to the Epstein case represents a kind of real-life superpower that cannot be ignored. These women faced unimaginable pressure, fear, and scrutiny, yet they chose to speak. That choice alone has shifted narratives, challenged systems of power, and opened doors for others to come forward.

Their superpower is courage. Not the absence of fear, but the decision to stand in truth despite it.

What inspires me most is that these women didn't just tell their stories—they disrupted a culture of silence. They forced the world to listen. They reminded us that power is not just held by those in positions of authority, but by those willing to reclaim their voice.

This collective bravery directly connects to my song, *"Born To Lead."* The song is about recognizing that leadership doesn't always look like a title or position—it looks like standing firm in who you are, even when the world tries to diminish you. It's about knowing that we come from a lineage of strength, resilience, and truth-tellers.

The women who have come forward are leaders. They are not following the line—they are redefining it.

Through my music and my work, I aim to honor that same spirit: to encourage others to speak, to stand, and to lead—no matter the cost.

# **She Had Real Superpowers**

*The Story of Julia Anderson*

*By Catherine Zaranis, MA, NBC-HWC*

*Honorable Mention, Adult Category*

***Not all superpowers come with a cape. Some come with a cupcake.***

Julia Anderson was my boss, my mentor, and one of the most quietly powerful women I have ever known. She did not make headlines, yet every day she made the people around her feel seen, valued, and capable of more than they believed possible. That is a superpower. And Julia had several.

## **Superpower #1: The Power to See Potential**

During my job interview, Julia handed me a copy of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and said, “These are the principles I use to lead.” Then she gave me a St. Patrick’s Day cupcake. I had not even been hired, and she was already investing in me. She set a standard of “100 percent excellence, 100 percent of the time” not as a threat, but as a belief in what her team could achieve.

Early on, I asked how long she planned to stay. Without hesitation, she said, “I am going to develop you to the point where you leapfrog up and over me.” She meant it. She saw the best version of you before you saw it yourself, and she expected you to grow into it.

## **Superpower #2: The Power of Integration**

While many people separate work and life, Julia practiced “integration.” She hosted team gatherings at her home, where her sons helped prepare and serve meals. She intentionally nurtured relationships across every part of her life, family, colleagues, neighbors, with small, consistent acts: a handwritten note, a phone call, a simple message saying, “I am thinking of you.”

Her faith, family, and work were equally sacred. She lived as a whole person and helped others do the same.

## **Superpower #3: Unstoppable Energy**

Julia’s three-hour daily commute would have drained most people. She turned it into her personal classroom, filling every mile with audiobooks. On the hardest nights, she would pull

into a parking lot, step out into the cold, do jumping jacks until she felt alive again, and keep going.

That image captures her: a woman who refused to surrender to circumstances and found ways to thrive where others might simply endure.

### **Her Legacy Lives On**

Julia passed away unexpectedly from a heart attack, leaving behind five sons, a community that adored her, and a team who still gathers every year to honor her memory. She never sought the spotlight, simply lived in a way that made others better: more capable, more connected, more whole.

Because of her, I end each week by telling someone specifically what I appreciate about them. I use her “I pick, you pick” approach to balance passion and need. When things do not go as planned, I ask her question: “Will this matter in 100 years?” and let go.

**Her superpowers live on in everyone she touched. That’s how real power works, it multiplies.**

