

## Resilience Embodied

by Cara Chandler

*Congratulations to eighth grade Francis W. Parker Montessori 56 student Raniya Carter, winner of the IPS District Spelling Bee. Raniya advances to the regional round on March 24.*

Raniya Carter is an amazing young lady. She hasn't let the tough things in her life define her, which is remarkable for an eighth grader – or anyone, for that matter. In fact, she's clearly flourished in spite of (or maybe even because of) them. She embodies everything we want our students in Indianapolis Public Schools to be: resilient, gritty, driven, full of integrity and character, and, perhaps most importantly, in possession of a wonderful sense of humor. Oh, and she has excellent spelling skills, of course.

I didn't know Raniya at all before I interviewed her, but now we are buddies. I fired question after question at her, and she responded with alacrity and a healthy dose of self-confidence. At one point about three quarters of the way through, I asked her, "How is this interview for you? Are you doing okay with all these questions?" She fired right back, "I like it! I like answering all your questions. Ask me some more!"

I get the sense that that is pretty much how Raniya goes through life: passionate, direct, and enthusiastic about everything that captures her interest. She is clear-eyed, well-spoken, witty – and intense. She is unusually self-possessed for an eighth grader, which captured *my* interest. As I continued with my questions, it became clear where her poise comes from. Raniya has had more than her share of obstacles in her life – ones that would have a significantly adverse effect on anyone. She has had to grow up way sooner than most of us; the tough things in her life showed up early on and haven't gone away. It's hard to explain her grit and resilience without putting her business out there, but it almost doesn't matter what the tough things are. Raniya has chosen to thrive in the midst of them, and the person she is becoming is truly remarkable.

By the time I was done talking to Raniya, it was not at all shocking that she won our IPS District Spelling Bee. She said she's always been a good speller, but that last year she didn't make it. She didn't like that feeling, so she decided that this year she *would* make it – and, obviously she did just what she set out to do. I suspect, however, that her winning the spelling bee is less about her spelling ability (although clearly it's tremendous) and more about her determination. When Raniya wants something or decides something, I'm not sure there's anything out there that could stop her.

After the Bee Granny wanted to take the trophy home, so Principal Rembert allowed them to treat it like the Stanley Cup and keep it for a bit. I can easily imagine Raniya parading around her house with the trophy, her infectious smile and eyes full of mischievous sparkle delighting everyone, pride billowing off her in waves. A few generations of Raniya's family have attended Parker 56, so for her to round out a family legacy with a huge District Spelling Bee trophy is nothing less than perfectly fitting.

Raniya dives right in to whatever is in front of her with passion, enthusiasm, and her whole heart: softball, school, poetry, and, obviously, spelling. She thinks she might want to be an OB/GYN – but she's also open to changing her mind. For now she just embraces with world with all that it brings, and she allows her tenacity and resolve to guide her. Raniya reminded me over and over again about how it is not the tough things in life that make us who we are; it's how we decide to face them. Raniya calls us all to meet life with resiliency and determination – and a sense of humor. May we all be like (and spell like) Raniya.