

WHAT IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU HAVE OVERCOME?

Convincing myself that my voice matters. As a young person, it is easy to doubt yourself and think you're not good enough, especially when you're still finding yourself. It was hard to believe that my perspective held value. But as I started to create work that I was proud of—especially through my films—my mindset began to change. Seeing something I created come to life gave me structure as well as a sense of ownership. To then receive recognition and see its impact on others gave me a new kind of confidence in my work. That's when I began to realize the power of my voice and celebrated it. I've come to understand just how much the stories we tell truly matter.

WORDS TO LIVE BY?

"Asking for help isn't giving up. It's refusing to give up."

— Charlie Mackesy

WHAT WOULD YOU TELL YOUR FRESHMAN SELF?

Be brave enough to be bad at something new.

WHICH TEACHER HAD THE BIGGEST IMPACT ON YOU?

Dr. Baptista, my junior-year American Literature teacher, pushed me in every way with my writing. That year, I saw a lot of growth. I could actually track my progress and feel myself getting stronger as a writer. That was the first time I took my creative writing seriously. She encouraged me to submit poetry for national awards, and I ended up applying to attend a writing camp in Brooklyn. I found confidence in the creative voice that I had previously thought of as private, playful or a hobby at best. I joined *Perspectives*, the school literary magazine, which she led. She continued to encourage me to submit my work to competitions and celebrated my accomplishments. She gave me a new perspective on what my work can be.



SACRED HEART GREENWICH

NATASHA ARAKAL

Old Greenwich teen Natasha Arakal is a gifted writer and filmmaker. They say: Write what you know. This Sacred Heart Greenwich grad has plenty of topics to choose from.

Sasha was treasurer of her senior class, a Peer Leader, a Eucharist minister, co-chair of the Sacred Heart Greenwich Film Festival, co-head of the Lunchtime Service Club, a social ambassador for The Social Institute, as well as part of the Leadership Academy, You've Got Mail Club, Neighbor to Neighbor club, Speech and Debate Team, Fashion Club, Advanced Writing Seminar, *Perspectives* literary magazine and the varsity cross country team.

Of her many extracurriculars, Natasha says, "Filmmaking is most important to me. I started taking film classes as a freshman, and it evolved into a focus point in my life." She has produced creative films as well as PSAs.

"One I'm really proud of is a PSA I made for the League of Women Voters of Greenwich, as part of a contest. There is a statistic that one in three people in the U.S. don't vote, and we wanted to encourage specifically women to vote and use their voice. We researched the topic and interviewed real women," she explains. "It was really inspiring as we won runner-up. It made me realize the power of filmmaking."

Natasha also worked with Impact Fairfield County. "It was

the ten-year anniversary, and they wanted to give the under-resourced nonprofits they work with videos to represent them and share their work with the world," she explains. "Our real-world film class created videos for each non-profit, which was exciting. I could really see the impact these videos were creating for these organizations that needed a way to share their message." Natasha also mentors young filmmakers.

Natasha found her time at King Street Rehabilitation Center very rewarding. "We worked one-on-one with residents, playing games with them and singing carols during the holidays." She says. "I love working directly with people and hearing their stories."

This fall, Natasha will attend Fordham and major in communications. "I can't pinpoint exactly what career I will pursue, but I think it will involve the skills I've learned in my filmmaking classes," she says. "I love telling stories, connecting with people and also learning how to present myself. I think the future will have me sharing others' voices and amplifying my own." 