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VERNON MORNING STAR

### Local youth earns Top Teen title

By Brent Mutis - Vernon Morning Star

Published: September 08, 2009 7:00 PM

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For the second straight year, a young woman from Vernon has been named the Top Teen of Canada.

**Danby Felker**, 18, took the title after a week-long competition in the Lower Mainland. **Felker** received her crown from last year's winner Meghan Price, who also happens to be her good friend.

It was Price who actually talked **Felker** into entering the contest. Earlier this year when **Felker** received an e-mail telling her she was one of the top 23 finalists, she was stunned.

"I just remember getting the e-mail and staring at it not knowing what to say," said **Felker**, who graduated with honours from Kalamalka Secondary in June.

More than 900 teens applied for the competition.

Each of the finalists went to Vancouver from Aug. 23 to 30 where they had to demonstrate why they deserved the title through a series of contests.

They had to deliver a speech, show a talent and go through an interview with the judges.

Felker's speech addressed the issue of what she calls the "I don't care" generation, the current generation of youth that she thinks doesn't put enough attention and energy into important causes.

To be able to get to the finals is an amazing thing for **Felker**. To win the top prize is even more so because of her unique life story.

Her mother died of a flesh-eating disease in 2000 when **Felker** was eight. She now rarely speaks with her father, brother or step-mom and sisters who live in Calgary. She lives on her own in a rented suite in Vernon.



Danby Felker, Top Teen of Canada for 2009, prepares an ice cream treat at Marble Slab Creamery where she's the store's longest-serving employee.

brent mutis/morning star

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She and her father's personalities began to clash in her early teen years and by the time she was 15, she was invited to move out.

Her dad wanted her to be a doctor, but she didn't agree and instead would like to get into photojournalism. Still, looking back she doesn't entirely blame her dad for their fights.

"There was some stuff I shouldn't have said," she recalls.

She began to reclaim her life only after taking a look in the mirror and deciding to make the best of what life had given her.

"I said, 'I need to change, I need to get things together.'

Her mother's death is something she is still trying to overcome and she remembers how it dragged her down in the years that followed.

"I ended up really depressed after that. I was diagnosed with clinical depression and developed an eating disorder."

**Felker** has honed her skills as a writer and performer through training from the Vernon School of Speech and Drama.

School founder Antony Stamboulieh was happy to see her succeed after preparing her for the competition.

"She's a good student with some interesting potential. We believe she'll end up being a very good writer, we're just not sure what direction whether it be novels or plays or poetry."

Noting her concern for her generation of young people, Stamboulieh said he's delighted to be able to continue to work with her.

For her talent at the Top Teen competition, she wrote and performed a poem she wrote called "A Letter to my Dad."

Her words had an obvious impact on the judges.

"Somehow by the end of it, I had people crying in the audience which I hadn't planned for."

**Felker** shared her win with the people she works with at Marble Slab Creamery.

She's worked there ever since it opened about 18 months ago.

No one has worked there longer and her co-workers and employers are like family in a way.

"After having as many employees as we've had, Danby is the most dependable and hardest working," said Marble Slab owner Aaron York.

"She's the one we task with the things we want done because we know she'll do them. She's freakishly motivated."

As someone that sees her effort almost every day, store manager Barbara Burgess echoes York's impressions.

"She works her butt off, we couldn't ask for a better one. She's an amazing story."

Felker won a \$3,000 scholarship from the Top Teen contest and will spend the next year on a nation-wide speaking tour.

She plans to do distance education during the year so she can remain on the tour.

Her immediate goal is to inspire people her own age to get involved in charity and volunteer work. In the long term, she has a few ideas too.

"I want to travel the world and see Third World countries. I want to work for National Geographic but that's a really big goal."

But certainly not impossible given her track record of achievement.

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