



### **GET READY TO BE IMPRESSED:**

Autumn de Forest, 12, has painted since she was 5 and her work now commands as much as \$25,000. Hart Main, 16, started his own successful business selling candles in old soup cans. And Adora Svitak, 16, has been writing since the age of 4 and will attend the University of California at Berkeley in the fall. These kids prove that age really is nothing but a number when it comes to talent.

BY STEPHANIE ANDERSON WITMER





**Autumn's artistic ability** runs in the family. She is a descendant of an early director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Some of her work is shown at right.



**A**utumn de Forest's art career began quite by accident.

When she was just 5, her father, Doug, was staining wood in the garage, and she asked if she could try. Doug agreed and handed her a brush, some stain and a piece of wood. A short while later, he was stunned to discover Autumn had made what he describes as a "simple, profound and highly designed" painting.

After seeing what Autumn could create with a few minutes and a scrap of wood, Doug and his wife, Katherine, wondered what she might do on large canvases with real paints and brushes. They bought some the next day.

"You see a spark and you want to do everything you can to create a wind," Doug says.

Just one year later, Autumn competed against adults to win first prize in a local art show. Now her paintings, which include vibrant re-imaginings of iconic works by American

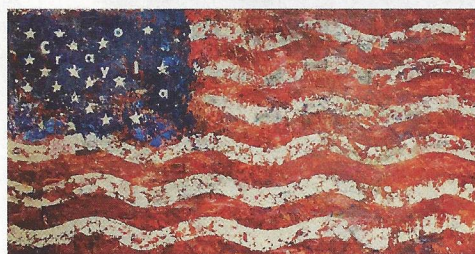
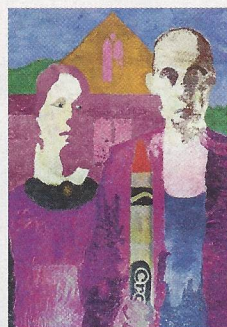
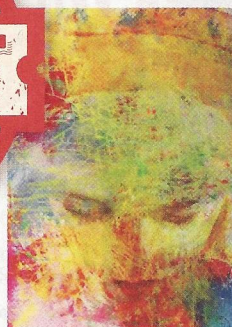
## AUTUMN DE FOREST, 12



**Hometown:**  
Las Vegas

**Parents:**  
Katherine Olsen de Forest, former actress

Doug de Forest, musician and composer



masters Grant Wood and Andy Warhol, can fetch upwards of \$25,000 at auction.

Autumn paints every day, either in hotel rooms while traveling or in her studio behind her Las Vegas home. She is home-schooled. When she paints, she can focus sometimes for hours on end. "It almost feels like bliss," she says. And she wants her art to do more than hang on a wall. She has painted and auctioned pieces to raise

money for the victims of natural disasters, including Superstorm Sandy in 2012, and for the paint company Valspar's work with Habitat for Humanity. She travels extensively, giving talks to both children and adults about the importance of art, philanthropy and a belief in oneself.

"I love showing kids that anyone can do this, no matter what you love," she says. "Don't focus on how good you are; focus on how much you love it." »



Not only does Hart have good business sense, he also has a good heart. From the start, his ManCans have supported hunger organizations.

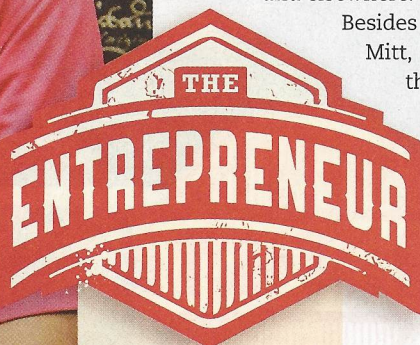
**F**our years ago, Hart Main, of New Philadelphia, Ohio, sniffed the candles his sister was selling for a fundraiser and jokingly wondered why candles didn't come in more "manly" scents. He laughed it off at first, but a month later, that spark of an idea caught fire.

To earn extra money, Hart decided to try making and selling candles with a manly fragrance inside recycled soup cans. He did some research, bought some supplies and got to work.

In November 2010, he sold his first candles to his uncle. But in four short months, the national media picked up the scent, with stories about Hart and his new company, ManCans, appearing in *Time* magazine, *The Huffington Post* and elsewhere.

Besides the fragrances, which include New Mitt, Fresh-Cut Grass and Sawdust, and the age of its CEO, another novel part of ManCans is its philanthropic focus. For the first few years of the business, Hart and his parents delivered soup to soup kitchens in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan and West Virginia and then poured the candles in the returned, cleaned cans. Now ManCans works with an Ohio government organization that employs developmentally disabled workers to make the candles in manufactured cans and donates a portion of the profits to soup kitchens. More than actual soup, "what the kitchens really needed was money to fix their sink or their van," Hart says.

Hart will start his senior year of high school this fall, but ManCans has provided the ultimate learning experience. He has seen hunger up close and become dedicated to raising awareness about it. He's started a business with zero experience and wants to teach other budding entrepreneurs. "Don't let someone tell you your idea is a joke or stupid," he says. "My idea started as a joke, but there's no such thing as a silly idea."



#### HART MAIN, 16

**Hometown:**  
New Philadelphia, Ohio

**Parents:**  
Amy Main,  
nursing professor

Craig Main,  
IT director

JAY LAPRETTE

## HOW TO INSPIRE THE EXCEPTIONAL IN YOUR CHILD

While their children's talents vary widely, the parents of Autumn de Forest, Hart Main and Adora Svitak have quite a few things in common. For one, they've all placed a premium on raising creative, independent thinkers. Here are their tips for fostering exceptionality:

### 1 KEEP AN OPEN MIND.

Hart didn't put his ManCans plan into action until a month after the notion initially popped into his head. Not every idea is a winner, but give kids space to try it, says his mother, Amy Main.

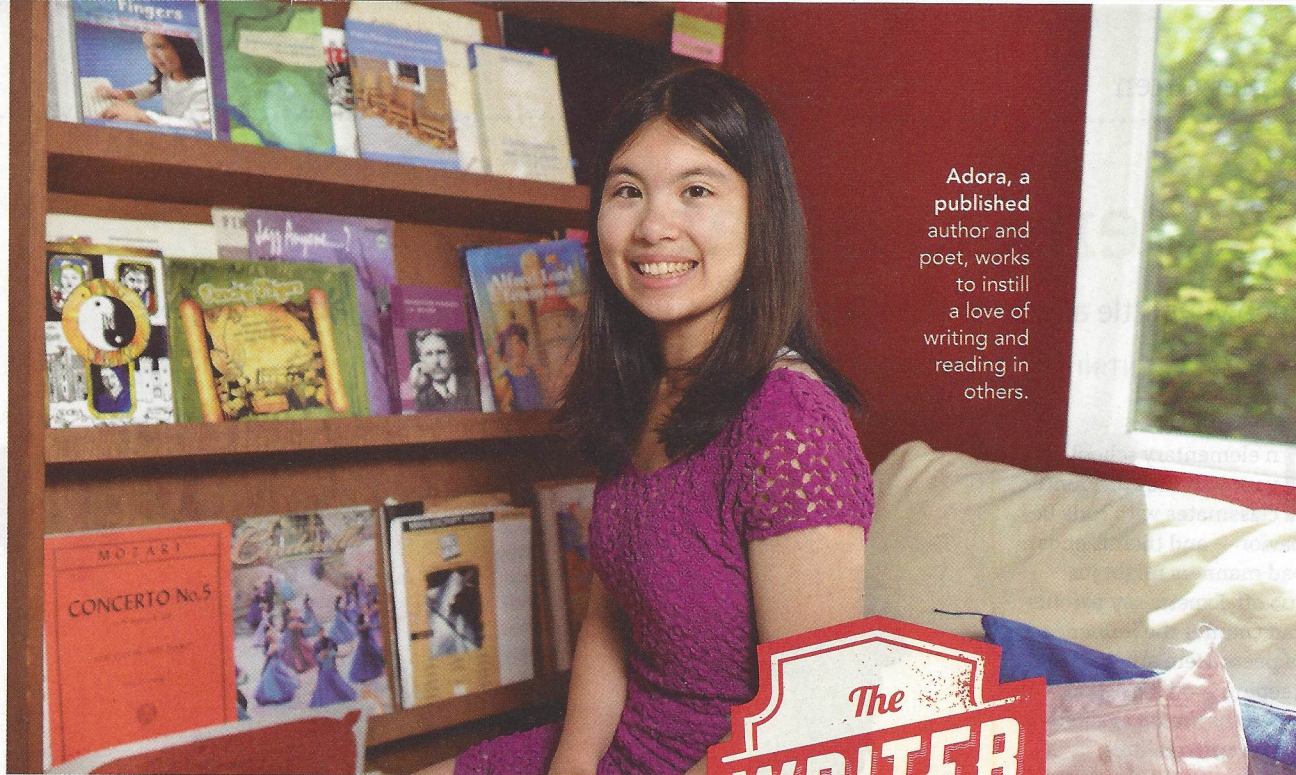
Autumn's dad, Doug de Forest, says, "Every kid loves something." Whether it's science or sports, passion will foster self-discipline. Nurture that passion, but understand that it can't be forced.

### 2 PAY ATTENTION.

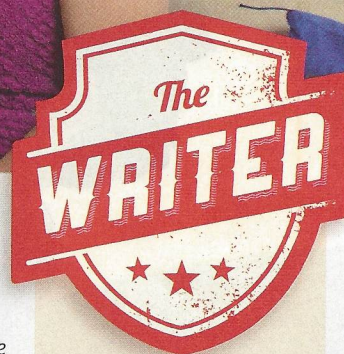
Responding to a child's single observation in the grocery store can blossom into an opportunity for connecting, learning or making an art or science project later at home, says de Forest.

Get to know your children and their interests, says Adora's mom, Joyce Svitak: "Learn about your kids constantly, because they change day by day, month by month."





Adora, a published author and poet, works to instill a love of writing and reading in others.



## ADORA SVITAK, 16

**Hometown:**  
Redmond, Wash.

**Parents:**  
Joyce Svita, education  
content producer

John Svita,  
chief technical officer

**F**or 16-year-old Adora Svita, everything started with a cheeseburger. "My first story that I can remember (writing) was something about a kid going to a restaurant to get a cheeseburger," says Adora. "It wasn't eloquent, deep or even particularly descriptive, but I felt pretty awesome about having churned out two pages of writing in my 4-year-old scrawl."

That's right: Adora was 4 when she began writing short stories. (She'd learned to read the year before.) In the dozen years that have followed, she's racked up even more accomplishments, including three published books, several TED and TEDx Talks, presentations at the National Press

Club and the United Nations Economic and Social Council and blogging gigs for *The Huffington Post*, *Mashable* and more.

Nowadays, she tackles far more weighty subjects than sandwiches with her words, writing about education reform, feminist issues and youth empowerment. While these topics may seem discrete, Adora sees them as being connected by a common goal: helping the under-represented — especially women and girls — find and use their voices through writing, public speaking or

even uploading videos to YouTube.

This fall, Adora will begin her freshman year at the University of California at Berkeley, where she plans to study political science and public policy. She'll be several years younger than her classmates, but that's nothing new to her — nor does she let it hold her back.

"The world has a lot of ways of telling you that you're too young to do X, but as long as you believe in the worth of your own ideas, you will be able to find people who take you seriously," she says. ●

## 3 GIVE KIDS CHOICES AND EXPLAIN CONSEQUENCES.

Hart is just like any other teenager, which means he's sometimes more interested in play than in work. Mom Amy will outline his options: Stay home to fill orders, or go out with friends and risk upsetting customers. "When we'd present it that way, he'd usually make the better choice," she says.

## 4 ENCOURAGE GENEROSITY.

All three kids have strong philanthropic components to their work. Doug de Forest says he and his family follow the mantra of "doing well by doing good." Joyce Svita says, "My method of encouraging Adora is very simple: If your effort to reach your goals benefits others, you should always go for it."

## 5 HELP, BUT DON'T DO THE WORK FOR THEM.

When Hart decided to start his business, his parents gave him the phone number of a family friend who'd once been in the same line of work. "We said, 'You want to do this, then you make the call, but we'll stay right here with you,'" Amy says.