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## Golden Apple Scholar dreams of being a teacher and helping others in Cabrini, public housing



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Dawn Turner Trice  
*April 11, 2011*

For high school, Golden Apple Scholar Will Haley, 17, moved to Evanston from Chicago's Cabrini-Green housing project. He will be the first in his family to go college. He plans to attend Concordia University Chicago and become a teacher. (Brian Cassella, Chicago Tribune / April 11, 2011)

**Dawn Turner Trice**



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How Will Haley, 17, made it out of the Cabrini-Green housing project is a good-luck story. But he hopes that by becoming a teacher, he can help kids in similar communities rely on much more than luck.

Until last year, when Haley's family had to leave its high-rise building because it was slated for demolition, he had lived there all of his life. And many of his relatives had a long history in Cabrini. His mother and her three siblings were born and raised there. So were his father and his 11 siblings. His grandmothers also had spent decades there.

For years, Haley believed it was his destiny to always live there. And it didn't matter that the physical structures were being torn down. He felt bound less by place than by a mindset and way of life.

So it's quite an achievement that Haley will graduate from Wilmette's Loyola Academy next month and begin his

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freshman year at [Concordia University Chicago](#), in River Forest, next fall. It is icing on the cake that the Golden Apple Foundation recently awarded him (and 109 other aspiring teachers in [Illinois](#)) a \$23,000 scholarship for college.

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Haley was inducted as a Golden Apple Scholar of Illinois over the weekend.

"Statistically, most people in Cabrini don't do what I've done," said Haley, who will be the first in his family to attend college. "Most people don't live beyond what they were born into. But, I guess, sometimes if you're born at the bottom, you don't have anywhere else to go but up."

Here's where the luck comes in: When Haley was 12, his little brother had a relationship with a nonprofit called Urban Initiatives, which promotes health education and tries to build character through soccer. Haley's brother was on the team; Haley was too old to join.

Jim Dower, the executive director of Urban Initiatives, saw Haley standing on the periphery, watching. So he asked Haley to carry shin guards, help with snacks and serve as a mentor. Haley never complained. He arrived every day as though it were a paying job.

"He's a tall, cool guy who could have gone in a different direction," said Dower, a former [Chicago Public Schools](#) substitute teacher. "When you're an alpha male in a rough neighborhood, you can run with a different crowd. And Will had family and support mechanisms that were engaged in conversations about opportunities for his future. His mother and father were fantastic, and they would help out on field trips."

By the eighth grade, Dower encouraged Haley to get involved with Boys Hope Girls Hope of Illinois, whose mission is to identify children who lack the means to attend private schools such as Loyola Academy but have the promise. Because the school is in Wilmette, Haley would likely be best served living nearby.

Boys Hope Girls Hope provided housing at its Evanston home near campus. But Dower wondered whether Haley's family would allow him to go.

"I think when you have strong family in a tough neighborhood, that's your fortress," Dower said. "It's how you survive, and to lose a link of that can be scary."

Haley had never lived outside his community. His mother, Catina Haley, told me that other than field trips with Urban Initiatives, her son really hadn't travelled far outside the community. Sometimes, they would take walks to nearby [Lincoln Park Zoo](#) or to Oz Park.

"It was extremely difficult for me to let him go away to high school," said Catina Haley, whose family now lives in the Albany Park neighborhood. "I wouldn't even let him spend the night at his cousins' house; only his grandmother's house. But at the time, William was getting tall and the gang-bangers were after him. The only reason I let him (attend Loyola Academy) was because I had no other way for him to be safe."

She said it was important "to think outside the box, especially the box that was those buildings in Cabrini."

Will Haley has thrived. He's been a B student and active in sports, the school choir and youth groups, including one for Hispanics, which he joined because "I just wanted to learn what other races go through."

This year, when Haley applied for the scholarship — which is contingent upon scholars spending several years after college teaching in needy Illinois schools — he wrote that Dower and his family supported him even when he lost focus. Education has been his ticket out of a tough community, he said, and becoming a teacher will give him a ticket back into a similar one to help others.

"I am very grateful for (Dower), but I feel like I found him out of luck," he wrote. "I don't think students should rely on luck to obtain a good education."

Haley said there are students like him who are willing to work hard to change their circumstances but just don't know the path out.

"Jim helped me find the way out," Haley said. "I've always wanted to leave and not be a part of that (limiting) mindset. As a teacher, I'll be able to return to help others because a chance at life shouldn't just be about luck."

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kilpatrick at 12:48 PM April 11, 2011

Great story! Good Luck Will!

desktopedit at 10:38 AM April 11, 2011

You fixed the first incorrect reference to the location of Loyola Academy, but not the second. Keep trying.

Factual errors aside, this is a great story. Best of luck to Will Haley.

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