



# THE TOMMY TRANCHIN AWARD

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## MEET THE 2019 RECIPIENTS OF THE TOMMY TRANCHIN AWARD!

### JONATHAN SIMMONS



When he was a little boy, **Jonathan Simmons** had a favorite TV show, an animated series called *Bob the Builder*. "I liked how the machines talked," Jon told us. "My family liked the show for

a different reason. The first words I said were when I repeated what I heard on *Bob the Builder*. *Bob the Builder* taught me how to speak."

What makes Jon's story unusual is that he didn't speak those first words until he was four years old.

Jon was born with learning differences, but he has grown up to be someone his teacher says is "an exceptionally gifted student who faces many challenges with steadfast determination."

Jon now credits *Bob the Builder* with a passion for making stop motion animated movies, and he says his dream is to work someday for Pixar Animation Studios. "Lots of my schoolmates say that I see things differently than they do," Jon says, "I think that I can share what I see, think and feel through my stop motion."

Jon used his award to attend a class in character animation at the Digital Media Academy in Austin, where he developed "Jonny Galaxy," a hero who sees things other people cannot and then steps in to help. Jon told us that his experience at camp allowed him "to see not only what I could do professionally, but also encouraged me and gave me hope. Knowing there is help for kids like me to pursue our dreams makes things seem more possible."

### ZACHARY THIBODEAUX

"In my life, I always dreamed of serving my country," **Zachary Thibodeaux** wrote, "However, when I was diagnosed with cone rod dystrophy, a condition in which the central and later the remaining vision of a person deteriorates, I lost faith in the idea."

"Nonetheless," Zach continued, "I began to notice that I had a deep interest in current events as well as historical political scenarios." At school, Zach developed



into a standout student and became president of the Model UN Club. "Zach knows more about foreign governments and policies," his teacher says, "than any 10th grader I have met."

Zach used his award to become the first blind person ever to attend the National Student Leadership Conference on National Security and Intelligence at American University in Washington, D.C., where high school students are introduced to the workings of national security agencies.

In a role-playing session, Zach served as CIA director. The experience "gave me the opportunity to better understand myself and to also stay true to myself. I was surprised at the leading role I played, and I thrived in the fast-paced stress of the situation," he said.

"I cannot express to you how much this program changed my life and my own leadership style," Zach wrote, "Thank you for allowing me to explore a path in which I can be able to serve my country."

## EMMA SUTHERLAND



**Emma Sutherland** is a dancer whose dreams of a professional career have been challenged by Hashimoto's Disease, an autoimmune disorder that attacks the thyroid and causes fatigue, joint pain, and

other symptoms. "To learn that my body was basically sabotaging itself after all I do to care for it as part of my dedication to dance was incredibly disheartening," Emma told us. "As a dancer, I recognize my body is my instrument and my vehicle to share what I express through dance."

A few years ago, the Texas Commission on the Arts named Emma a Texas Young Master, and despite the challenges she now faces, Emma continues to dance at a very high level. The Dance Conservatory Director at Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts called her "easily one of the top dancers I have seen in my teaching career."

"Confronting my disease and its impact on my life has been a mix of trial and error," Emma admitted. "As a result, I recognize more than ever the power of knowledge, persistence and self-advocacy and the importance of positivity and a hopeful outlook when faced with adversity."

Emma used her award to attend Orsolina28, a prestigious international dance program in Moncalvo, Italy, where she concentrated on works created by the choreographers Crystal Pite and William Forsythe. After returning home, Emma reported that the seminar was "a transformational experience for me as an artist... a dream come true."

## ASHWIN MENEZES

When he was twelve years old, **Ashwin Menezes** suffered a serious concussion while playing football. During the treatment and recovery process, Ashwin was diagnosed with epilepsy.

The discovery shook his self-confidence. "Epilepsy is a neurologic condition that can be incredibly debilitating," he told us. "My condition requires medication twice a day to prevent recurring seizures. The medicine makes me tired and causes me not



to perform at my highest peak sometimes which can be disappointing and frustrating."

But Ashwin has become an accomplished athlete through his passion for soccer and futsal, a sport similar to soccer but played with five-member teams on a hard court using a smaller, no-bounce ball. Futsal "improves my reaction time," Ashwin said, adding that the sport "continues to strengthen me physically, mentally and emotionally."

Ashwin is a National Honor Society student and was a finalist in the 2019 Calculus Bowl competition at the University of Texas at Arlington. "Ashwin credits his father as his inspiration," his school counselor wrote, telling us that Ashwin's father is a first generation immigrant who "worked hard to earn his degree and have the career he has now."

Ashwin used his award to help pay for tournament expenses, uniforms and required equipment. Recently, he wrote to tell us that he was the top scorer for his high school soccer team this year and was chosen as the team's most valuable player. He now attends the University of Texas at Arlington, where he majors in Engineering.

**TOMMY  
TRANCHIN  
AWARD**  
History  
How to Apply  
Deadline

The Tommy Tranchin Award was established to support students with physical, emotional or intellectual disabilities who have shown promise or passion in a chosen field of interest. Tommy's family wants to recognize his creativity and his refusal to allow his disability to limit his personal growth by helping others develop their own talents. Starting in 2018, the Award was expanded to consider North Texas applicants in eighth grade through high school. **The application deadline for the 2020 Awards is March 27, 2020.** For further information, please contact The Dallas Foundation at 214-741-9898 or at [scholarships@dallasfoundation.org](mailto:scholarships@dallasfoundation.org).

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