



# Student rises above behavioral struggles and redefines stereotypes

**Audrey Marvin, News Section Editor**

After getting expelled from Bentonville schools for beating up a student who threatened him with a desk, junior Andrew Drindak switched to homeschooling then moved over to Southwest junior high his freshman year. According to Drindak, when he first moved to Springdale schools, he tried to be nice to others, but people still viewed him as someone only looking to start a fight. Now, he is stopped in the hallway daily by teachers for not wearing his lanyard and his name is well-known among administrators as he frequents ISS. Yet, despite his reputation for being a troublemaker, there is a lot more to Drindak than what meets the eye.

“I’ve lived a lot harder of a life than what most people think,” Drindak said. “Most people go home, and they still have both their parents. They don’t have to worry about anything, but that’s not the case for me.”

When Drindak was twelve years old, his mother, who’s relationship with him was far from perfect, passed away in a car crash. Most of the details of her death remain a mystery to him.

“My mom was a lot like me but just a bigger felon. She was a violent person, a very violent person,” Drindak said. “She’s done stuff I can never forgive her for.”

Now, Drindak lives with his dad and his younger brother. According to Drindak, his father once told him, “No matter where you go, trouble always follows,” which Drindak believes is an accurate statement.

“[My relationship with my dad] is kind of iffy. Some days he hates me. Some day he loves me. It’s complicated,” Drindak said. “He’s always mad at me because I’m doing something stupid.”

The brothers didn’t get along in their younger years, sometimes even fighting physically, but as they’ve gotten older, they’ve become closer; the younger boy even looks up to his brother.

“Now that he’s going through the same stuff I did when I was a kid,” Drindak said, “He’s starting to see my side of things.”

At his brother’s age, Drindak was constantly street fighting. Once, he fought a six foot sixteen year old as a 4’11 ten year old.



Aila Cashatt

“I don’t think there was a reason [for fighting him],” Drindak said. “All of it was out of anger. I was a very angry kid, like all the time.”

According to Drindak, his brother’s behavior is much better than his own back then. Yet, he hopes that in the future, the younger boy will be able to live without some of the worries that plague Drindak when he’s at school.

“I want him to go to school without worrying about walking in the hallways and getting targeted for something,” Drindak said. “He’s already [on the way to avoiding that when he’s older] because he’s only nine and my brother’s the nicest person you’ll ever meet. He’s the complete opposite of me.”

Outside of school, when he’s not taking care of his brother, who’s not old enough to stay home alone, Drindak spends his time working for his uncle, boxing, and playing basketball.

For a long time, Drindak’s activity of choice was video games, but at the beginning of the school year, after he realized the toll it was taking on his sleep schedule, he decided to focus his energy on sports. He plays basketball with his friends and has a good record in boxing at the new Youth Center. Although he doesn’t necessarily use boxing as a way to take out his anger, it can be an outlet for him.

“I have really bad anger problems on me,” Drindak said. “Finding some way to deal with it really helps.”

Yet, Drindak is most motivated to work and make money. His uncle owns 36 acres of land where Drindak drives a tractor, breaks up, and pours concrete. He feels like he gets a lot more out of his job than he does out of the traditional learning experience. At work, he learns one specific skill before he has the opportunity to learn something new while school involves going from one subject to a completely different one in the span of 45 minutes, which makes it difficult for him to learn. If he was given more time to understand the material, Drindak believes his grades would increase a few letter grades and start to reflect his intelligence.

“I have a little bit of a different attitude when it comes to work than being inside the school,” Drindak said. “School has never been easy for me, but It’s different when I’m given a set task, I’m getting paid to do it, and it’s actually worth my time”

Although Drindak has rocky relationships with many teachers and administrators, math teacher Sandra Temple has positively impacted the student. She has given him the tools he needs to improve at what he thinks is his weakest subject and has provided him with grace when he makes a mistake or isn’t having his best day.

“Even when I walk in a minute late, she’s not already yelling at me,” Drindak said. “She’s nice all around and makes math, which I already suck at, easier.”

Temple doesn’t think she’s doing anything special when it comes to Drindak and treats him like any other student. Her philosophy when it comes to him is to get a glimpse at his attitude and act accordingly.

“I choose my battles wisely because there are days when he comes in, and I can tell his attitude is going to be confrontational if I do something, so I just kind of let him ease into working,” Temple said. “There’s a lot of days where it’s just a phone distraction, and it’s easy to bring him back from that.”

According to Temple, he could have a bright future ahead of him if he puts in the effort to obtain it. For Drindak, this bright future includes enlisting in the military after high school to be a mechanic, which will allow him to get his trade school paid for. Then, he plans to open his own shop. He’s learned everything he knows about mechanics from his dad, his own experience, and Youtube and has enjoyed fixing cars ever since he repaired a blown up engine in an old beat up garage with only three tools.

Drindak also wants to receive a high school diploma because of a promise he made to his aunt, who’s the primary mother figure in his life. His aunt is one of the people in his life who keeps him grounded. She is always there to bail him out of jail and will give Drindak anything he needs with just a text or call. In addition, she offers a different approach to life and discipline than his dad.

“She looks at me somewhat like a troublemaker but a really good kid,” Drindak said. “My dad is more of a reality type of person, like what is going on in the present is what he is focusing on.”

Most of the time Drindak gets violent when someone puts hands on him. Even if the person isn't looking for a fight, he reacts quickly, going straight to defense mode.

“I've kind of built a reputation around, not necessarily being feared,” Drindak said, “but if you put hands on me, consequences happen.”

The soft spot in Drindak's heart belongs to his pitbull, Rue. The name came to him while he was watching Hunger Games, and the dog jumped into bed and started watching the movie with him. His dad had been nagging him about naming her for weeks, so it was obvious to him to christen her after one of the movie's most loved characters.

“I'm not a monster like everyone really thinks I am,” Drindak said, “but I can be.”