



2018 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

# 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner

Anna McDermatt

## My Superhero

As I walked around the room, I heard the monitor's slow but steady beeping. I steadied my eyes along the IV that pierced into my dad's skin. Then, I looked up and saw my dad's stale mouth and washed out eyes give me the greatest smile he could at the time, as he handed me a stuffed puppy that smelled like his cologne. I squeezed it tightly. He would be named Hugsy. He had a mixture of plush brown and white fur. His legs were short and stubby and his face was circular, but not as round as a pug's. He was perfect. At the time Hugsy was a real life metaphor for my dad, and I thought I could hug him back to health. Then the doctor came in and I had to leave.

At home things were different, my mom still kept it going for my sister and me because she was just that amazing. When I went to bed, I had to get used to only seeing my mom's tired eyes. But I was okay not seeing my dad in the beginning, because I had Hugsy. Whenever we woke up in the morning, my aunt would usually be there helping my mom make an Irish fry. I always caught them laughing, that was one of the best parts of my day, but the best was seeing my dad. Whenever I was in the car going to the hospital, I always thought about what we were

going to do that day. I thought we could read one of my Magic School Bus books, or maybe with the doctor's permission we could go to the cafeteria with my mom.

Ever since we found out my dad had head and neck cancer, my life had a consistent schedule. On the day we found out, I remember I was wearing one of his big work sweatshirts and reading a book from the Goosebumps series. My mom and he stumbled in the door and sat on the red velvet couch next to us as my mom stated those four words that will forever make me shiver, those four words that still make me want to scream, the four words that made my world collapse just like that. "Your father has cancer." I knew what this meant, I knew this meant my summer would be ruined, and I knew this meant if there was ever a time to appreciate my dad, it would be these next few months.

Walking in the hospital and then walking out were two completely different feelings. When I walked in, I had so much hope. I thought that maybe the doctors had come up with some concoction that could save my dad's life; I thought that maybe when I walked in, I would see my dad walking down the hallway to come greet me saying he was finally getting out of here. But it never ended up being that way. When I came out of the hospital it was always that seem feeling of regret. That feeling I got telling me I should have told him more or I should have hugged him a little longer. I hated the feeling of not knowing if or when I'd see him next. I hated the feeling that when I got home I only had Hugsy to hold onto, and not my dad. Leaving that hospital room and watching all the doctors crowd around him like some test subject was the most guilty feeling you could ever have. Not being able to save your dad from the pain of being poked and prodded like a frog in an 8th grade science class. Knowing he was about to undergo some of the most painful things a person can go through, and you just have to turn away and let it happen because it's being drilled into your head that it's helping him. I liked the hopeful feeling better.

As the days went by, my dad seemed to be getting paler and weaker. He fewer jokes and talked more about what the doctors were telling him when we weren't there. He stopped asking about my day and stopped asking my sister how her guitar lessons were going. The times to visit him were getting shorter and the radiation sessions were getting longer. Eventually he was in such bad form that it was decided Kathleen and I couldn't see him anymore. My mom told us the straight truth; my dad had fallen into a state of depression and wasn't coming out anytime soon. I knew my dad, I knew he was always my rock; he was always the person who was so mentally and physically strong he was like some out of this world superhero just meant to save my family and me. My superhero was gone. My superhero was being held captive by a villain that no one could stop, cancer.

The winter soon came. Those cold brisk months that I usually look forward to, considering my birthday is in winter, didn't feel the same. As a gift, my mom got the doctors to let me see my dad if I wanted to. I didn't know if he was better or worse. I could only hope. I walked into that sterile white room staring at my dad with Hugsy in my arms. I stared at the amount of wires that seemed like were choking him. I watched his cold, pale hand reach out to me as I squeezed onto it and just fell into his arms. I remember staying there until I felt the pull of my mom telling me he had to get a scan done. I stayed in a chair in my dad's room with my sister squeezing Hugsy so tightly trying to understand the charts and graphs in front me, working my ten-year-old brain so hard thinking I could help.

As the months went by, my superhero was coming back. All of this radiation and chemotherapy that caused him so much pain was actually helping. I saw the color come back in his cheeks and started to hear his jokes about being a plumber. I've never loved those corny

plumbing jokes so much. I loved seeing those doctors less, I loved seeing fewer get well soon cards in the mail, and I loved seeing the walker that helped my dad walk down the hall with me.

Every time I hear the word survivor now, I think of my dad, other cancer patients, their families, and the people who have to deal with the constant fear of that thread of life will break in a split second. I will forever applaud to anyone who has had to deal with cancer and its long term effects. My dad will continue to amaze me every day when he simply gets up to go to work because a couple of years ago work seemed out of the question. If Anthony McDermott can get through cancer twice, anyone can beat it.