

# 2017 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner

### Three

By Allyson Rychlak

August.

I awoke to the hum of my parents' Honda passing over the Claiborne Pell Bridge that connected Jamestown to Newport, Rhode Island. The late summer sun, set deep into the afternoon that Sunday, blinded me briefly as I turned in the car. My neck cramped as I realized I had been asleep for close to three hours.

It was our annual family vacation, and as we pulled up to the Newport Hyatt I saw our family friend's car parked by the valet. For years, we had vacationed with my mother's best friend, her husband, and their two children, Michael and Christina. They were family, to say the least.

Our trip in Newport was uneventful, minus the usual bickering as my parents made us walk two miles into town and my brother complained of blisters. It was calm, relaxing; everything a vacation in New England at the turn of the summer should be.

When I look back on it, I see the small things. His lack of appetite. His carefulness in certain activities. How he decided to stay on the mainland as we planned to bike Block Island on Wednesday afternoon. When I look back on it, I feel selfish.

September.

My mother's mood suddenly changed. Her daily talks with my 'aunt' – her best friend – seemed somber. I didn't think to put two and two together. Not until she told me.

"Uncle Gino is sick," she whispered one day before dinner.

"I know," I replied, unfazed. My aunt's husband had been diagnosed with colon cancer when I was in third grade. I can recall the memory as if it were yesterday. My mother hung up the phone with my aunt as I stood by the island in our kitchen. She looked at my father. "On a scale from one to three on how bad it is, it's a three."

But it wasn't a three, not since third grade. He lived with the disease, continued to fly planes for Delta Airlines, played guitar in his basement with his son, took photographs of his children. Michael and Christina never knew he had it; they did not see the need to worry them at such a young age.

"No, Uncle Gino is sick again," she repeated, her eyes watering. "It's not good."

Over the next few months, my uncle started chemotherapy again. He left work – his passion – and my mother swore she saw him deteriorate after that. Michael and Christina were informed, finally. We prayed.

November.

The three was back. Over Thanksgiving break, he was hospitalized. The Broadway tickets my mother had bought for my aunt were sold, as my aunt could not leave his bedside. For the first time ever, I believed he would not survive.

December.

It was one of those things that they call a Christmas miracle. Uncle Gino came home from the hospital, watched his children open gifts under the tree in their Abington home, spent the time with his family. It was a lulled period of several weeks where everything was looking up. My mother was happy again, my aunt smiled the way she used to.

March.

The golden era never lasts forever, or at least that's what they say. My uncle was put on hospice. The cancer in his colon had spread to his prostate, and eventually his bones. They asked him what he wanted done, and he answered, "Everything." But sooner or later, everything became nothing.

It was a Tuesday morning, March 22<sup>nd</sup>. I woke up with a heavy feeling in my chest and presumed it was due to my exam in AP U.S. History later that day. When I came home at three, I paused before entering the door to my kitchen. In that moment, somehow I knew.

My mother had tears in her eyes as I walked through the door. She did not have to say anything for me to understand. I hugged her as she placed down the bowl she was drying from the dishwasher as her sobs erupted on my shoulder. Once my father came home from work, I grabbed the keys to my little Honda from the cup holder in the dining room and drove to the parking lot of the YMCA. Instead of hopping on a treadmill as I usually would, I found myself staring at the lights from the stadium CB West game across the way, unable to go inside.

Over the next few days, I felt numb to whatever came my way. I hardly recall the funeral, for I was trying to block out every memory of the event. Hundreds of people came, from my cousin's entire grade at LaSalle High School to the pilots of Delta Airlines. As I walked down the aisle early that morning for the viewing in the church, I stared blankly at the man in the casket who was not my uncle. He was glossy, done up with artificial makeup and chemicals that made him almost unrecognizable to those who knew him well. I thumbed the plastic set of wings that I had pinned on my blouse, nearly similar to Uncle Gino's real set.

At the cemetery, the sun peeked from behind the clouds as the priest called the Our Father to the small crowd of family and friends that had gathered. The little things, such as the sun coming out that instance, are the signs that his family look for.

April.

The weeks that passed were not easy. Uncharted territory, no matter the situation, is a journey for us all. Signs, like the sun, kept occurring. My aunt bought tickets for a show in New York, and found herself in row GG – my uncle's initials. When my mother told me of that occurrence, she also informed me of prior to the funeral, when my aunt was not sure if she should include the "third" after his formal name, since he never officially used it. Later that day, she found three hundred dollar bills in a drawer, untouched. For the mass card, "the third" was placed after his name.

Present.

It has been over a year since my uncle has passed. It has taught me the importance of cherishing those you love, of not taking them for granted. It has taught me the power and potency of three – my aunt, and my two cousins. There are times when it is still as difficult as it was the day it happened, but there are also the good days. The golden eras. And although they don't last forever, the people around us can make them feel as though they just might.