

Sophie Meinhardt Memorial Scholarship 2013

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St. Jude

As I think about my life, I can immediately think of two ways that God has strengthened me. This is through the life experiences that my family and I have gone through with my Godfather and Grandma Rose. My Godfather has Crohn's Disease and three years ago he faced his biggest battle that almost took his life. I witnessed him lose almost seventy pounds and watched what was once a very active strong man become a weak and fragile man. My mom and her family were a constant support for my Uncle during this time in his life. After multiple surgeries, and our faith in God, our prayers were answered. It has taken him 2 years to recover and his life has changed drastically but he is living his life in a way that inspires me every day.

My Grandma Rose was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease right before I was born. In the beginning, she only had small tremors, but as the years passed, she had to have two brain surgeries. When I was born, with the help of my Grandpa she babysat me a few days a week. I was very little and do not remember much about those times when she was able to take me to the park and play with me. I can look at pictures of her making a fort with me out of pillows or building skyscrapers out of Lego's. I can see from these pictures and from what my mom and dad tell me that she was so happy to be able to help take care of me and that taking care of me helped her to not concentrate on her disease. Later, it was hard for me to see her eventually not be able to do anything on her own without the help of my Grandpa, mom or dad. I was young and did not understand why my Grandma didn't live at home with Grandpa and why she couldn't come to my school for Grandparents day or take me to the park anymore. Although my Grandma had a disease that debilitated her, she was always a positive role model in my life and others. My Grandma Rose's faith was everything to her. We would go to Bayley place to attend mass with her. She loved mass and it made her happy when we were there with her. She was a distributor of the Host at mass and to the elderly before she had Parkinson's. In fact, my Grandma Rose's love for mass was one of the reasons I became a server. I wanted to participate in the mass she loved so much. She was so proud of me when I told her I was going to be a server and it made me happy to make her happy. Serving mass makes me feel like I am doing something to give back to my community and my faith. Now when I serve I always think of her and believe she is with me by my side. My Grandma always had the biggest smile for us whenever we saw her no matter how bad a day she was having. Over the years, we visited my Grandma most every week at the nursing home and everyone there that took care of her loved her and would always tell me how great a person she was. The past few years my Grandma was unable to communicate with us but when my brother and I would read to her or make her pictures she would give us the biggest smiles. I always felt so helpless when I would leave her and I know my dad felt the same way but that one smile she would give us would lift our hearts and make it okay to leave. Thankfully, friends and family were always visiting and would tell me stories about my Grandma. They would say how generous she was with her time, always helping anyone in need or brightening up any room with her smile. It made me feel good that everyone knew she was such a good person. Through the years visiting my Grandma, I could see her strength and her strength gave me strength in my life. I always would think, look what Grandma Rose is going through when I am going through a tough time and it would make me stronger.

In seeing both my Godfather and Grandmother's challenges in their lives, I have learned how strong they both are and how much their faith helped them get through their hardest times. I learned how important

family and friends are in our lives. How strong my family is and how through tough times they pull together to help each other. My Godfather couldn't have gotten through the past three years without faith and the love and support from his family. He taught me that no matter how hard things in your life get you could find the strength to turn it around. Both of them have taught me that you don't give up. My Uncle had to get a colostomy bag. I know most kids my age probably don't even know what that is but I do. I remember over hearing my parents saying that my Uncle said he would rather end his life than wear that bag for the rest of his. When I overheard them, it scared me. My parents talked to me about it and told me that my Uncle was just scared and how everyone is scared when they face a new challenge in their life but that we were going to help him get through this as a family. Our love and trust in God that he never gives us more than we can handle would help my Uncle to overcome his fear. My Uncle has now gained almost all his weight back and is doing all his normal activities again. He even went on vacation with us last summer to the beach and went in the ocean. With God, all things are possible! I have also learned how much our faith and prayer helps us get through the tough times in life. Before my Uncle got sick, he was going through a divorce and a tough time in his life. He was not practicing his faith like he use too. This was a life changing experience for him that I believe brought him closer to God. My Grandmother always had her faith in God and she was always there for anyone in need. Before she was sick, she volunteered at Bayley Place only to find herself living there years later. When she realized that she had to go into the nursing home my dad told me that her only hesitation was what God's plan would be for her now, since she wouldn't be able to volunteer anymore. It didn't take long for her to realize that she could still affect those around her with her friendship and smile. That small thing made a difference in the workers and friends that she made at Bayley place.

I have a young brother and I am not sure if he realizes everything that was going on. I know it is hard for me to understand. I saw how my family was coming together and how important prayer became. It had a big affect on how I saw things and I wanted to make God a bigger part of my life. That is when I started leading our family in prayer at dinnertime. We would occasionally say prayer at dinner or on Holidays but if we were in a hurry, it was forgotten. I started making sure my family stopped to say prayer at every dinner and then we offer up a prayer for anyone who is going through a tough time. When my brother saw me doing this, I think it made him realize how important it is to make God a priority in your life. I believe this was a positive influence on him and he recently told us that he wanted to lead prayer at dinner. Now we take turns leading prayer each night. When my brother asked to do this, it made me feel good like I was doing something right as a big brother. It might only be a small thing but with that and serving mass for our church, I believe I am influencing him in a positive way and in return, it makes me a better person. My mom and dad say that I have made our family better and brought us closer through prayer. I want to be a good role model for my brother so he can learn from me what I have learned through the experiences I have seen with Grandma Rose and my Uncle Bob. I want my Grandma Rose to look down from heaven and be proud of me.