

Kylee Fitzgerald – Our Lady of the Visitation – Mother of Mercy High School

Through several events in my life I have been able to bring happiness in a meaningful way, sometimes in the worst of circumstances.

When I was 6 years old, my MereMere (Grandma) was in hospice care after a lengthy battle with lung cancer. I had the idea to sell bottled water at my neighborhood street sale to earn money for hospice and help the families staying there. I raised \$55! When I told my MereMere about the money I raised, she smiled and said she was so proud of me. My Dad's employer heard of my fundraising efforts and they were inspired to make a donation of \$5,000 to Hospice of Cincinnati. I learned at a very young age that even the smallest amount of effort to help people can lead to bigger things. Looking back, I realize that \$55 is not the large amount it seemed to an eager 6 year old, but it sparked my desire to make others feel good.

Several years later, my Papa was in a terrible accident that left him paralyzed from the neck down and in the hospital for 6 ½ months. He kept asking to see me, but I was too afraid to see this strong man that I idolized, now hooked up to a ventilator and so many other machines. My parents would tell him that I was at one practice or another because they didn't have the heart to tell him that I was afraid to see him. After a while, I realized that he *needed* to see me. I made the decision to put his needs before my fears and go visit him. The minute I walked into his hospital room, he had the biggest smile I had ever seen in my life. At that moment, we both realized that he was the same person as before his injury. For the next 6 months, I spent countless hours at his bedside. I truly feel blessed that we had that time together, and believe that I was able to bring happiness to his last days. Sadly, he never made it out of the hospital after the accident, but the vision of his smile will never leave my mind or my heart. This tragedy made me realize the importance of doing whatever I can to bring happiness to others.

I have been fortunate enough to participate in the Aubrey Rose Foundation/American Girl Fashion Show three times. What young girl wouldn't be thrilled at this opportunity? My dream was to be my favorite doll, Kit. I was so excited when I was actually chosen to model Kit's clothing! This fundraiser has deeper meaning than just modeling clothes. You see, my little sister was born with a heart defect. Thank God she is a healthy and active 11 year old now, yet she will be under the care of her cardiologist for the rest of her life. Through the generosity of the Hollenkamp family, Aubrey Rose will never be forgotten. The work they have done has benefited so many families and children. I feel honored to have had a small part in such a wonderful foundation.

I look forward to beginning the next phase in my life, and the four years I will spend at Mother of Mercy High School. I hope to continue growing and maturing in my faith and my desire to help others in my family and community.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my essay for your consideration.