



### **2011 HCM Foundation College Scholarship Essay by Lauren Fischer**

2011 is becoming the year where cancer is continuously touching upon those who are special in my life. My mother's best friend died in March from breast cancer, a classmate has been out of school for months receiving treatments and my art teacher, who is my mentor, was recently diagnosed with terminal cancer. The most special and closest person to me was my PopPop. On February 14, 2011, PopPop passed away from prostate cancer. When people ask me how old he was, and I tell them 79, I get a look from them that implies I should not be so sad because he lived a long life. Yes, he did live a long life but not long enough for me. Our family has many family gatherings throughout the year and PopPop has been at each one always asking about my activities and always so pleased with my accomplishments. He treated all of his grandchildren in a special way by attending their sporting events and activities. If it were not for the fact that he could not come to my Confirmation in 2007 because he had to have a test to determine the extent of his cancer, he would not have told his children what he was going through because he never wanted to be a burden. However, as soon as everyone found out, they were at his side to help without question because PopPop could never be a burden.

When I go to family gatherings now, it feels awkward and so different without him. I expect to see him sitting at the head of table or think he will walk through the door to join us. It also makes me feel sad to see how sad my dad appears at times because it was so natural for dad to pick up the phone to check in with PopPop – whether we were on vacation, at school events or just sitting at home. Calling PopPop and sharing what was going on in our lives was an important part of our routine and life. Recently, I thought it would have been better if I did not have him in my life for 18 years then I would not miss him so much. However, I soon realized that way of thinking was wrong. His presence in my life and the love he had for his family are wonderful memories to hold onto and think back upon – especially all the times he insisted I eat more of his candy so he wouldn't be tempted to eat too much. Even when I visited him a week before he died, he was telling me where all the "goodies" were stashed! In a few weeks, I will be graduating. I will miss him so much. My heart is broken but remembering the strength of his spirit over the past several years will give me the strength to move forward.

Through the last couple of years and especially the last several months of PopPop's life, I watched my dad, aunts and uncles help him. I learned that when someone is going through a cancer process, just having others there for them is so very important. The person needs to know there is always someone they can rely on to get to and from appointments, to help with food preparation or to bring that person comfort by keeping them company. I learned that time spent talking, laughing, sharing, or watching a favorite show together is precious. This knowledge has shown me that I can volunteer to help adults and children in this way through hospitals, hospice



units or other cancer support programs by giving my time of companionship. I always thought I was not qualified to lend a helping hand until I personally experienced and paid attention to how much PopPop cherished just having us visit so he could spend time with all of us.

While others may be extremely book smart with higher SAT scores, I have had numerous opportunities to grow and become a well rounded person. I learn from every situation I come across, whether positive or negative, because people can only learn if they are willing to look objectively upon their actions. My past is part of who I am, but my future will allow me to continue to learn and grow. When I attend college, I will major in biology then attend graduate school to become a Physician's Assistant. With this degree, I will be able to help others and positively influence their life which is what I wish to do. Receiving the HCM Foundation College Scholarship will allow me to follow that dream.