



KARYANNE CASTLE
BARBARA PALO FOSTER MEMORIAL AWARD RECIPIENT

Essay Question: "Describe an important personal relationship and how it influenced you throughout your cancer experience."

For many, there is one person in life who is steadfastly dependable. For me, that person is my mother. Through good times and bad, she has helped and guided me. When I was younger, she was a stay-at-home mom. However, when I was eight, my dad left, and Mom was forced to return to work. My dad stayed close for the first year, but then moved away. Soon my little sister, Rachel, was born, and money was tight. Adding to the trouble, Rachel's dad struggled with alcoholism. He became violent and controlling, but my mother refused to be defeated. With the safety of her two young daughters as her priority, Mom left Rachel's dad and our "team" was on our own again. Though she worked at a minimum wage job, my mother made sure that we never went without. Since my dad had basically disappeared from my life, Grandpa became my male role model and close companion. He taught me the meaning of hard work and respect, to love with all my heart and to be a leader. Watching him, I discovered where my mother's strength came from.

Just as the clouds seemed to part, it began to rain again. Grandpa was diagnosed with lung cancer. He showed remarkable courage throughout his treatments and was determined to not let his illness get in the way of his enjoyment of life and family. Nine months after his diagnosis he passed away, but he kept his sense of humor and his love of humanity until the end. The loss of her father strengthened my mother's desire to improve our lives and she began nursing school. She excelled in all areas and graduated in the top of her class. In July, she began working as a registered nurse at Ashland Samaritan Hospital. For a while, things were great. However, too soon, the clouds returned. Only two months after beginning her new career, Mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. My greatest fear had been realized, my mother, my idol, my strength, had developed the same disease that had just killed her father. I was devastated; could I raise my little sister alone? How would I provide the life she deserves? How could I live with out my "partner in crime"? In spite of Mom's reassurances, I worried. With a positive attitude, she breezed through chemotherapy. On March 6th she had a bilateral mastectomy. Our already tight budget was strained further as Mom was forced to take time off work for recovery and the hospital bills started coming in.

I'm glad to report that Mom is doing well and has returned to work. These experiences have shown me how strong I am. The determination of my mother and grandfather has been passed down to me. I will follow in my mom's footsteps by attending MedCentral College of Nursing in the fall of 2006. My goal is to be an empathetic caregiver for patients and families like mine whose lives have been changed by illness.