

Personal Essay – First Place

A Dark Walk

[Author requested anonymity]

I walked towards the dark parking lot, wringing my hands. Then, I heard what sounded like children's laughter, and a voice that was all too familiar. It wasn't just any voice, though: it was my Dad's voice. I whipped around in shock. I saw a memory of my Dad and I from when I was younger. It was like a flashback in a movie. I stood there in tears while my Dad and I laughed. I realized that was the first time I had felt happy since his death eight months ago. I missed him, and I missed the fun, bittersweet times we had. I then quickly dried up my tears because I knew he hated it when I would cry. When he saw me cry, it made him feel guilty, because he knew he had done wrong and was a failure as a father. His and my mother's divorce was tearing me apart in more ways than one.

I remember when he took me fishing at Key Dam. We called it out "daddy daughter day." We called it that because mostly it was just him and I. It was a chance for us to get away from my stepmom and her kids. I loved spending one on one time with my Dad. I enjoyed all the time I got with him, but it was different when it was just him and I. That was our time, and it was incredibly special. We also had a lot of difficult times, when the bad memories seeped through. The memory of him punching me in the face and throwing me to the floor, where I hit the corner of my Mamaw's metal bed frame, and it overwhelmed me. Or the time when we were cutting wood. We began arguing over the abusive relationship I was in at the time. He was probably high on pills again, but it still wasn't an excuse for pinning me on the ground and hitting me. He was never really abusive unless he was high. I didn't go see him very often, because I had attachment issues with my Mamaw Kassy, since she raised me and showed me unconditional love.

Those awful memories flooded my skull and gave me a pounding headache. The good memories that hung in the sky faded. Then, I saw my Dad when he was in the hospital before he died. He was lying in the hospital bed, and he seemed to dwarf his body. He wrote a note that said, "You could have saved me" in blood.

I started to cry as I watched him die yet again. Tears filled my eyes, and I broke apart. I wasn't in the desolate parking lot anymore. I was suddenly on my knees next to my Dad's hospital bed. Everything went black, and my Dad appeared and grabbed my shoulders, shaking me back and forth as he yelled for me to wake up. I was dazed and in shock. I had no idea what was happening around me, and I was paralyzed by confusion. He looked me in the eyes and said, "It's time to let go, you have to wake up." I opened my eyes and my Mom was standing over me. I had been in a coma for 26 days.

Second Place

Where do you want to go?

Jasmin Mullins, Richlands High School

There's one big question in life that I think we all face: "where do you want to go in life". This is rather a very hard decision to make. Since I can remember I've always had somewhat of an idea of where I want to go. Making this decision is not easy, I have to take so many things into consideration such as; do I want kids? Where do I want to live? What career do I want to pursue? Where do I want to go to college? It's hard to make all these demanding decisions, but it's a part of being an adolescent.

As a high school student, I am trying to find the field that interests me. It's not easy since each specific career cluster branches out into a variety of different jobs in that field. There's a huge scale of medical careers from a phlebotomist to a surgeon. Since I have started high school I have been focused on the medical field. I started out studying all about phlebotomy, I thought it was cool how they get to take blood and run tests and do all these lab exams on it. Then I realized that I wanted to do more than just take someone's blood.

I looked into nursing and I'm still looking into it. I've studied a great deal of research on the different types of nurses and their different jobs. Nursing definitely isn't an easy job; they have so many different jobs that have to be done along with so many tasks. I have looked into becoming a surgeon mostly because my main fascination is with the lungs and heart, they are such complex organs and without them we can't live. I look forward to doing more study on the hearts and lungs. A pulmonologist

is the physician who specializes in the lungs. Furthermore, Cystic Fibrosis is a big part of the study of lungs. It's a genetically inherited disease, it's a very devastating disease.

Cystic Fibrosis is a disorder that affects the cells that produce mucus, sweat and digestive juices and makes it sticky and thick. I want to increase the survival rate of cystic fibrosis patients, as most don't live to be into their twenties. This is sad, and although cystic fibrosis can't be cured, we can help figure out a way to help the survival rate, as well as how bad it affects the patient. However, an issue with cystic fibrosis is that no two cystic fibrosis patients have the same kind of bacteria. This makes it hard because for each patient the criteria and regime is different. A big thing about cystic fibrosis patients is that they are on a long list of lung transplant lists. There isn't always a good chance that the patient will get new lungs in time and even if they do the lungs will only last them 5 or so years before they begin to fail again.

Part of the medical science field is trying until success. The only sad part of that is the patients that will be lost along the way. It's very swaying at heart, but I feel like it might be a great field to pursue. If not that then I might pursue cardiothoracic, as it has to do with the heart and chest cavity. The heart is very complex. It has so many chambers and complex valves and it's the organ that pumps most of the blood in the body. Medical science is so fascinating from the special organs to the blood flow and functions. I will pursue one of these specialties as my future career.