

FINALIST

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Snapshots of Courage

Flipping through an old family photo album, a few images catch my eye. One is of a young man in his twenties, hard-faced, and crouched in a football stance. He wears the number sixty on his chest and, even though the picture is faded due to time, the green and white of Michigan State's jersey stands out. Another photo of the same man catches my attention as well. He is in Michigan State boxing gear, preparing himself to swing at the punching bag in front of him. This man, my grandfather, seems like a courageous man, being a football player and boxer for the Spartans, who represent bravery and strength. But courage means so much more than the jersey he wore.

Born in Ashville, Pennsylvania in 1934, Dale Hollern grew up surrounded by family. He left Pennsylvania for Michigan, requiring courage to leave for a new state all alone, in order to play football and participate in boxing for MSU. There, he was a good boxer, but football was his specialty. Playing in, and winning two Rose Bowl championships, he and his teammates personified bravery and strength. It is true that football takes courage; one must willingly run towards and through the opponents waiting to take the runner down. One must also be brave enough to deal with the pain and loss that comes with sports, like my grandpa had to do. But sports do not define one's courage; rather they just show one miniscule facet of courage. These sport photos show a courage acquired by experience, through practice and hard work.

I flip the page in the album, and a picture of my grandpa with my grandma on their wedding day captures my attention. Their faces show pure joy and love for one another, making myself smile at this display of undiluted affection. Below this picture is one of my grandparents and their children, including my father. Having six children, life was very hectic and, at the beginning, very confusing. Even as a deacon, it was sometimes difficult for him to have faith to do what is right and believe what happens is for a reason beyond initial comprehension. Yet he persevered, and with faith and trust in one another, he and my grandma worked together to raise their children into brave and respectable people. This courage demonstrated by my grandfather and grandmother during this time revolved around trust. It took extensive amounts of trust in God, themselves, each other, and their children to make sure they were doing all they could to give them the best lives possible.

One last time, I turn the page and I see his smiling face in an obituary dating over two years ago, chronicling his brave battle with cancer. I still remember when he was diagnosed with cancer, but at the time I assumed he would survive if he underwent chemotherapy a few times and took some medicine. At the age of eight, I was familiar with cancer, yet it was foreign to me at the same time. I was fortunate enough that he defeated cancer then and I had more time to enjoy him recounting stories of his youth.

The following years passed and he was still free of cancer, but at the end of my seventh grade year traces of it returned and he underwent radiation. Entering eighth grade, it worsened and time with him was becoming scarcer. During this time, he never complained about his condition. Instead he searched for ways to help others to the best of his abilities. I will never forget one of his last days where he could barely speak, he said to me as audible as possible that the hand of mine he was holding was cold. He proceeded to hold my hand until it was warm out of concern for my comfort. From this one instant, I learned all I know about courage. Courage is a quality that comes from one's heart. It is never selfish, but always giving. Courage is the faith to keep going, even when all seems lost. It is not boastful, nor is it demanding. Courage is the smile he wore, despite the pain. It is the gleam in his eyes, when he looked at the loving family surrounding him. He is courage.