

## Alzheimer's Scholarship Information

Alzheimer's disease doesn't just affect the people who have been diagnosed with it; it also affects their loved ones, caregivers and people of all ages, including children.

Each year, AFA holds a scholarship essay contest which asks students to describe how Alzheimer's disease changed or impacted their lives. Whether they've had a loved one with the disease, volunteered or worked as a caretaker or are just passionate about the cause, the next generation of leaders in the fight against Alzheimer's have a story tell. We want to hear it! All high school seniors who are US citizens or permanent residents and plan to enter a four year college/university in 2018 are invited to take part in the 2018 contest.

In 2017, AFA awarded \$25,000 in college scholarships to students across the country through the program. In addition to the scholarships, the grand prize winner and runners up had their essays featured in AFA's Care Quarterly magazine, which has a national readership of approximately 250,000 people.

**BIO** Please provide a brief autobiography (200 words or less) in an essay format. 190

I have lived in the same brick house in the small town of Evansville, Indiana my whole life. I am currently a senior at a high school where everyone knows each other and the hallways are filled with tradition and pride. At school, I have been a member of various groups, including German Club, Student Council, Prom Committee, and Link Leaders. I have played volleyball and softball my entire life, staying active nearly all times of the year. In the community I have been involved with a mentoring group called Peers Project for two years, a student volunteer coordinator for the local St. Jude 5K, and a seasonal volunteer at a local independent living facility. I have two hard working, supportive parents who have always given my brother and I just what we need to be successful. I have always been fascinated by the human body and have dreamed of pursuing a career in medicine since I was four years old, when I sat on Santa's lap and asked him for a stethoscope for Christmas.

**REVISED** In 1500 words or less, please write an essay answering these following questions:

(Please note: Essays less than 1000 words will not be considered)

1. How has Alzheimer's disease changed or impacted your life?

2. What have you learned about yourself, your family, and/or your community in the face of coping with Alzheimer's disease?

3. What are your plans to raise awareness in regards to Alzheimer's disease and dementia? 1074

I was lucky enough to know and still remember 2 of my great-grandparents. My fondest memories include playing Go Fish with my great-grandmother and winning every time when we both pretended I had the most pairs and my great-grandfather pushing me on the swing set he had set up for me because it resembled the one I had loved so much at my daycare and then him smuggling me an ice cream cone before dinner when my mother was not looking. Their love for me was true and deep and it sometimes felt like I was at their houses more than I was at my own. The one day I remember more clearly than any other though is the day I rode my bicycle over to see my great-grandmother and showed her I could finally ride without the training wheels. When I walked into her home, her face was unusually blank. I greeted her with a big, warm hug like usual, and her expression changed to almost nervousness. She did not recognize me. Being the confused, naive 6-year old that I was, I ran home and told my father what had just happened. Filled with questions, I could not stop crying. What had changed since I saw her last? Was it my fault? Had I done something wrong? That was when my parents sat me down and I first heard the word that I would come to resent for taking my loved ones away from me: Alzheimer's.

Over the next year, our world changed. My great-grandmother was moved out of her home and into a more-secure memory care unit, where she soon passed away. She left behind a loving husband who would never recover from all of the times he walked into her room and had to introduce himself to her as if they had never met. She also left behind children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who will choose to remember her "good" days, but will never be able to forget her "bad" days. This battle she hopelessly fought has since made me consider how fast things can change once horrible diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia set in. The effects and their severity are unpredictable, as I learned by visiting my great-grandmother regularly.

Just months later, tragedy struck yet again. My great-grandfather on the other side of the family was found at a liquor store on the wrong side of town in the wee hours of the night after he had gotten confused and driven himself there. Luckily, the store owner called his son, my grandfather, to come get him. It was known that he had dementia, but this was the final straw. He was packed up and admitted to a memory care unit within the week. It seemed like this was a never-ending cycle for my family. However, this time was different. My mother never let me go see him at his facility. She made it clear that she wanted me to remember him at his best and avoid seeing him in this pathetic state. So, I never got to say goodbye to him. He passed away

after just 2 months in his memory care unit. I did not know the last time I saw him in his home that it really was the last time I would ever get to visit him. At this point, I felt hopeless. I hated Alzheimer's disease and how it affected my family.

However, after going through these disheartening events with my family, I understood that the person who was the prisoner of this condition was still the same soul as before. Since this event in my early childhood, I have had a love for elderly people and Alzheimer's and dementia patients, which I now acknowledge was probably started out of sympathy. My mother works at an independent living facility and I will regularly eat lunch with and participate in activities with the residents. Many of them have early to mid-stage dementia. It can sometimes be difficult to engage in conversation because many of them are dismissive and sometimes they treat me as if they have never met me before, even though I am there quite frequently. I thought I understood much about Alzheimer's and dementia and how to interact with those patients with my great-grandmother, but the hands-on experience I have gotten by getting to know the residents allows me to appreciate its true effects.

In November, a local university hosted Dr. Bill Thomas, author and international authority on geriatric medicine, and his ChangingAging tour. I attended a segment titled "Disrupt Dementia," where Dr. Thomas' staff presented a video of them interacting with real dementia patients at a team-building camp, where the goal was to further understand the true identity of the person behind the cognitive decline. The video showed the patients up dancing with the staff, looking happy and worry-free. When interviewed, many of them mentioned that their dementia does not define them and that they wish they were viewed as normal people. This really spoke to me. Treating someone sympathetically just because they have early stages of a disease is not fair. The patients want to continue to live life to the fullest until it is not an option anymore, without feeling the pity of those around them. This became the focal point of the presentation. After leaving, my perspective totally changed. I should not feel bad for those affected by Alzheimer's disease and dementia and therefore treat them differently, but admire their courage and respect who they truly are.

Going forward, I plan to turn my fascination of medicine and especially dementia into a career. Seeing the devastating effects this disease had on my family, I plan to work in a setting where I can be of assistance to those suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's and be empathetic to their families. In my undergraduate study, I plan to seize every opportunity possible that pertains to Alzheimer's research. My ultimate goal would be to serve on a team of professionals who can one day cure this condition, but providing more in-depth treatment to minimize the effects after developing a further understanding of the process of the disease would be a step in the right direction. In my undergraduate study, I plan to major in Biology or Human Health Sciences, where I will acquire the basic knowledge I will need for either medical school or a Physician Assistant program. After completion, I will work in geriatric medicine. I want to be the one who brings change to Alzheimer's disease and dementia, finding a way to treat, or even cure them. After seeing the devastation in my family caused by these diseases, I want to stop their destructive effects, ensuring other families do not have to undergo the same process, which inevitably results in heartbreak.