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AP Literature and Composition

Mrs. Rutan

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### A Will To Fight

February 2016

**7:33 AM**

The cold, windy, air was like a thousand tiny needles touching my face. There was a fresh blanket of snow all across the school's parking lot. The weather nearly foreshadowed the petrifying news I would receive later that night.

I reached the school doors and sighed as I prepared for another school day; at least it's Friday. As of right now I didn't have any plans (there's not too much to do in Battle Creek). Living in Battle Creek is like living in a bubble-- not very many people leave and not very many people come in. I mean, why would they? I tried to make the most of my freshman year which is why I went to most of our athletic events. I figured I would mosey around through the school day and attend our school's basketball game later that night. Very exciting, right?

**2:51 PM**

The last bell rang and I was proud of myself for getting through the day having done minimal work: just like I said I would. In my first two blocks I just layed my head on the desk and pretended to pay attention to my teacher's monotonous lecture. The second half of the day I just stared at the clock and watched the digital numbers increase. It was a very unproductive day, but I was just happy that I got through it. I approached the school doors and pushed the ice-cold

handle. The smell of the brisk air and the sight of students pouring out of the front doors made me happier than anything else could in that moment. To my surprise, it was still snowing, yet, it was coming down even harder. I reached my car and grabbed the snow-caked car door handle. I rushed home and pleaded to my dad to let me go to the game later that night; I explained to him that going out and doing something is much better than being lonely on a Friday night. He let me know he didn't care, as long as I could find a ride; he had other plans that night. That was the last time I spoke to my dad until I received the paralyzing phone call later that night.

### **6:58 PM**

The aroma of freshly popped popcorn and gym wax stung my nose as soon as I walked through the gym doors. *The smell of the fresh wax on the court nearly made me sick; I could never stand the smell of it back when I played. It was an almost acidic smell, the way it burns your nose the same way chlorine would.* I was one of the last few people to show up for the game which resulted in greetings from many people. The only thing that stuck out across the gym was my best friend Sam screaming, "Hey Big Al! Up Here!" I shook my head as a grin formed on my face and I walked up the bleachers. When I reached where Sam was standing I turned around and scanned the gym. There were basketballs flying, loud music playing and anxious fans ready for the game to start. The game tipped off and I was already bored, however, I would take being bored anyday rather than receive the news that was forthcoming.

### **8:13 PM**

Over the loud buzzing of the crowd, I felt a something vibrating in my right pocket. I had no idea why anyone would be calling me, but I reached for my phone and grabbed it out of my pocket. The Caller ID read "Dad" with a little cop emoji next to it. I regretfully rolled my eyes

and stormed out of the gym. I answered with an annoyed “Hello?” My dad responded with a worried tone, “Alex, are you still at the basketball game?”

“Yeah, why wouldn’t I be?” I asked.

“There’s something wrong with your Grandfather.”

I immediately became frozen. I paused and tried to think of something to say. This was the last thing I was expecting to hear from my dad; I figured he was calling me to tell me the horrible chores I had to do when I got home. I would take chores over this terrible news any day.

I asked, “What do you mean? What happened?”

“He hasn’t been feeling well or eating very much so we’re taking him to the hospital.”

“Well, is he going to be alright?”

“I don’t know. I have never seen him like this. He’s pale in the face and he doesn’t look good at all.”

I choked on my next words--I had no idea what to say. My face was like the color of the snow on the ground. My heart was beating so fast I thought it may come out of my chest. My mind was a whirlpool of thoughts; I thought about the best case scenario, and obviously, the worst. Sadly, illness in my family isn’t a stranger to me. I’ve seen death and illness pass through my family. Too often. I tried again to speak--nothing came out. For being an outgoing, talkative person, it’s rather odd for me to be speechless, but I was.

I heaved a deep breath. I brought the phone back to my ear--it was shaking.

I managed to get out a worried, “Is there anything I can do? Do I need to come home? I want to help.”

I could hear him sigh through the phone and he replied, “There’s nothing you can do Alex. They think there is a lump on one of his lungs and there might be a tumor in his brain.”

I wanted to break down and start crying. Tears rushed to my eyes but I quickly wiped them away--I hate crying in front of people. I’m not a super emotional person, especially out in public. I tend to keep things to myself which may not be a good thing but it’s just the way I am: and I can live with it. I managed to make it through the rest of the game with the fakest smile I could put on. As soon as as I walked out of those gym doors, the smile vanished.

### **One Week Later, 11:38 PM**

I layed in bed, gazing around my room. My tv standing on my dresser just past the end of the bed was off. It was so dark I couldn’t see my hand if put it in front of my face. The darkness in my room nearly represented how I felt inside.

It was just a few hours earlier when my dad had looked me in the eyes, my face as pale as a ghost, and said “Your grandfather has cancer.”

I closed my eyes. *Why is this happening to me and my family? Have we, or I, done something to deserve this?* Questions were roaming around in the back of my head like an itch you couldn’t get rid of. I didn’t know what to think, or do. There’s no worse feeling than witnessing someone suffer when the only thing you can do is **WATCH**.

I could hear footsteps coming up the stairs, approaching my room. I felt my chest rise, then fall, as someone knocked on my door. I blinked, long and hard, until I finally managed to get out a helpless “Come in.” The door opened and I realized it was my dad. He came to the end of my bed and sat.

We layed there in silence, for a few moments, until my dad interrupted the hushed mood by asking, “What’s on your mind?”

I layed there, staring into my hands, tongue-tied and not knowing how to respond.

I let out a muffled “I don’t know.”

My dad sighed and said “If you want to get somethin’ of your mind, you can tell me.”

I looked away and uttered “No, I’m fine.”

*I really wasn’t fine, though. In fact, I had not been that sad in a while. Actually, I wasn’t sad. I was more angry than anything. I was angry at the fact this was happening to my family and I. We had already went through enough illnesses and/or deaths--we didn’t need anymore.* “Alright” my dad mumbled as he walked towards my door. Before he left the room he turned around and said “Lemme know if you need anything...” he shut the door.

### **November 2017**

Nearly two years since I received that life-changing phone call and I’m still constantly reminded of it. The first cold day still takes me back to that moment. When the first snow falls, the conversation I had with my dad plays over and over in my head like a broken cassette tape. It’s been over 500 days since I received the news of my grandpa having cancer, and he’s still battling. This unfortunate hiccup in my life has taught me lessons I think my naive self needed to learn. I’ve learned to never take anything for granted: cherish every moment you have with someone because you never know if it will be your last moment with them.

I placed my calloused hand on my freezing window. The cold temperature sent chills down my arm. I look up and I see little tiny snow flakes fall to the ground and almost immediately melt. The memories come back like a flood; There’s nothing I could do to prevent

it. I walked back over to my bed, laid down and stared at the ceiling. It was in this moment the nostalgic words from my grandpa resurfaced in my head. I could remember him looking me in the eye and saying “Don’t worry, everything will be alright.” With that, I closed my eyes because I knew, everything was going to be okay.