



Abigail Hackbardt

South Lyon East High School

2019 Perseverance Award Winner

It takes a special kind of courage to recover from a devastating loss, especially when it happens to someone so young.

Abigail Hackbardt spent years helping to care for her sick father, Thomas, and tried to pitch in whenever, however she could. While other students her age were going to parties and football games, she put everything else to the side to focus on her father and what her family needed. After fighting a long, tiring battle with cancer, her father died during her junior year at South Lyon East High School—and for Abigail, learning to cope with that loss was the hardest thing she’s ever had to do.

“The worst part of it all was watching my sisters and mother struggle with grief . . . We struggled every day to merely survive, each new activity a reminder that I would never share in that moment with my dad ever again,” she said.

Though it was a dark and difficult time, small bits of light started to shine through. Her family unit became closer than they ever had before. She developed a different perspective on things that she used to worry about that she now realized weren’t quite as important. And she felt a tremendous amount of love and support that helped her through the toughest days—from her mother, whom she called her “#1 supporter and best friend,” and others.

One SLCS teacher in particular, Mrs. Sepulveda, helped Abigail throughout middle school and high school. Her father received his cancer diagnosis during her 8th-grade year, when Mrs. Sepulveda was her Spanish teacher, and Abigail was able to study Spanish with her as a 9th-grader, as well, helping to ease the transition from middle to high school.

“Since the beginning of my dad’s diagnosis, she has supported me, knowing that I would achieve greatness even in such unfortunate circumstances,” Abigail said. “Even after I no longer had her as a teacher, she would always take time out of her day to talk to me in the halls and check in on me. By knowing Mrs.

Sepulveda was in the building, I knew that there was always someone around that supported me. Following the passing of my father, there were many dark days, but Mrs. Sepulveda helped me to realize that life without my father, though seemingly horrible, was still a great life to have. She helped me to see that I am more than my circumstances. She helped me to realize that if she believed in me, I could believe in myself, too.”

And believe in herself Abigail did. While acting as a caregiver and coping with her father’s illness and death, she still managed to achieve a 4.193 GPA and participate in both theatre and dance. She has been admitted to the University of Michigan’s College of Literature, Sciences & the Arts in the fall, and is a recipient of the university’s prestigious HAIL scholarship. She wants to study to be a teacher.

“I realized that I could not mourn forever. I had to learn to let go so that my family and I could live joyfully once again ... Through (my dad’s) passing, I learned that I did not have to rely on others for my success, nor my happiness. With enough determination I could overcome any obstacle; I learned that the only one blocking my path is myself.”

The South Lyon Educational Foundation is proud to recognize Abigail’s strength and perseverance in the face of so many challenges and is honored to present her with our 2019 Perseverance Award. Congratulations, Abigail!