

**Name: Madison Birdsall**

**Age: 17 Senior at Liberty High School**

**Phone: (415)413-9071**

**Email: [steveflyfish48@msn.com](mailto:steveflyfish48@msn.com)**

**Essay Title: My Father, My Hero**

21818 SE 249 PL.  
MAPLE VALLEY, WA 98038

## My Father, My Hero

I've endured heartbreak. I've endured pain. I've been devastated. I've been numb. I've been hollow. And I've been lost. I believe that I am the luckiest person alive.

Growing up, I believed that I was invincible. Nothing bad could ever approach me. I walked with my head held high in the clouds and my feet crushing any being that were unsuitable to my taste. I was number one in my book. Nothing mattered but me. Until I received the news that a tragic illness had seeped into the mind of my dad.

This malady was diagnosed as Parkinson's Disease. My heart went numb and I blocked out the world. I could not fathom what the future would hold. I became cruel, and unappreciative, with no desire to do anything with my life. I wallowed in self pity and released my anger on the one's I cared for the most. I was confused and in denial of what was happening. As this selfishness excelled, my father's health declined.

Two years later my family received news that no one ever thinks they will have to hear, news that was incapable of grasping, news that changed my life forever. My dad was diagnosed with this fatal disease Multiple Systems Atrophy. When my dad faced me with this news I just looked at him blankly, emotionless, and completely numb. I had no idea how to act or what to think. It was at this time that my dad explained to my brother and me about the Death With Dignity Act and that his ultimate plan was to die peacefully before the disease could take him from us. At first I was angry and wanted him to try and stay alive as long as he could. Especially since my graduation was this coming June. I wanted him to see me graduate! I wanted him to see me walk down the aisle with my cap and gown beaming with excitement. Besides feelings of anger, I was scared. Even though

my dad had been confined to a chair and wheelchair these last few months, he still was a major physical presence in our home. I spent every evening sitting on the arm of his reclining chair and talking to him about my events of the day, asking him for advice and talking about the future. He was my rock, my advisor, my hero, my dad. I looked up to him in every way, starving for his approval in all that I did. He supported me in all of my activities. He came to every Cross Country meet, Basketball game, and Track meet that I had during my high school career. He never judged me nor put pressure on me to "win." I just could not imagine life without my dad. I was scared for my mom and brother too. My emotions were raw and I felt numb all over. Watching my dad suffer with this horrible disease for four years was unbearable. He could no longer walk, his speech was slurred, swallowing was difficult, and just small tasks became monumental.

Days went on and my numbness seemed to fade. I started to feel the pain. Yet the pain made me appreciate even the littlest things. I started to understand why he wanted to do Death With Dignity. He did not want us to watch him suffer any longer. He wanted us to have memories of him when he was strong and healthy and not sick and helpless. He wanted my mom to not have to be a caretaker in her forties, but to be a vibrant person and involved parent. He wanted my graduation to be a happy time and full of excitement for the future. He knew if he were to come to the ceremony that I would be worried about him and focusing on his discomfort and illness. My dad did not come to this decision lightly. He thought about all the consequences. Of course he wanted to see his children grow up and become adults, but he knew the seriousness of this awful disease. He knew that it was only a matter of time before he could no longer eat or breathe on his own. There was little time left to where he had his dignity and independence. I finally realized

