

Eli Wesner - Saint Gabriel Consolidated School - Badin High School

“At the end of the day it’s not about what you have or even what you’ve accomplished. It is about who you lifted up, who you’ve made better. It’s about what you have given back.” -Denzel Washington. In January of 2020, I had just come back from a less than desirable holiday. My grandfather had passed away, and we held his funeral a couple days before Thanksgiving. A week later, I was admitted into the hospital and was diagnosed with Crohn's disease. Not too long after, an obstruction formed in my small intestine, and I needed surgery to repair it. I underwent surgery on December 25, 2019.

After such an awful holiday break, words could not express how happy I was to return to school of all places. I was practically bouncing off the walls. On my third day back, I presented a charity idea to my Student Council. I wanted to do a toy drive to donate to Children’s Life. Children’s Life is a group that works at the Children’s Hospitals, and strive to make life in the hospital easier for kids. They bring toys, and even therapy dogs around to every child’s room. They really make a difference and I wanted to give back to them. I organized a toy drive, but sadly COVID got in the way.

I was asked by a friend one time, “How do you have so much energy?” He assumed I would be sluggish and angry after I got home from the hospital. No. The hospital never brought me down, it lifted me up. I work harder now than I ever had before, I now have a newfound respect for others, and I try day after day to help brighten someone's day. I have also realized a new goal I want to achieve. I want to be like my grandpa. He is the greatest man I ever knew. He spent his whole life helping others, and all he got in return was a messed up medical history. He never stopped his quest though, and I deeply admire that. My goal to be like him started in school where I

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organize charity drives. Those charity drives were my first major project to help others, and it was definitely my favorite. Although my toy drive for Children's was cancelled, we have put it back on the schedule for spring of 2021. This is my way of helping those who are in dire situations like I was. I know what they are going through, and I hope every little bit of encouragement helps them in the long run.

School isn't the only place I help others. When I outgrow clothing, I never throw it away, instead I donate it to Saint Vincent de Paul, a group who donates anything they are given to the poor. At Church, I participate in a Christmas basket with my family. We buy a lot of food and other essentials and pack them up. Then, my siblings and I volunteer to help load boxes into a truck that people drop off. All of the Christmas baskets are given to local homeless shelters to be passed along to the needy. I know that may not be the most impressive way of giving, but every little bit counts. No act of good is unappreciated.

One thing I have learned from my own experience is that everyone has a sad story to tell. I also learned that it is not about who's dog died or how sad the experience; it is about what we *learn* from the experience. That is why I admire Aubrey's story. Even though she was not around long, she brought a lot of good to others. Her family inspires me as well because they were strong through the hard times, and they now use Aubrey's name to give to others, allowing Aubrey to continue shining her light.