

March 20, 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to recommend Madison Jenkins for the Randy King Memorial Scholarship. I have gotten to know Madison this year through my AP English Literature class. She is a talented student who has balanced maintaining academic success, working part-time, and volunteering in a local elementary school. Madison is active in school clubs like UNISEF, and she is involved at Southpointe Community Church. She enjoys reading and is exceptional at analyzing literature, which has made having her as a student such a delight. However, there is much more to why I believe that she is a perfect candidate for this award.

While teaching is about ensuring that students master academic content, for me, it is often more about matters of the heart. I received an email early in the year that Madison's father had passed away over the summer. I'm always grateful for this information; in my class, we read works that include the death of loved ones. There were times when I would check in on her before reading a difficult text, and as I got to know Madison better, she revealed more of the circumstances around her dad's illness and his passing to me. In fact, the more I learned, the more I was struck by her story because it was so similar to my own experience. When I was a senior in high school, my dad was also diagnosed with prostate cancer, and like Madison, I became a caregiver. When Madison told me about her experiences while caring for her dad, such as having to learn to cook, I understood. I could relate to the pressure of speaking with doctors, acclimating to changing medical needs, weighing how to spend her time outside of school, and trying to comfort others—all at seventeen years old.

Those on the outside looking in cannot fully understand the complex layers of grief that cancer brings. On one hand, we grieve for those who are sick, for the pain they are experiencing and all the things they will miss. On the other hand, we grieve for ourselves: we mourn the absence of future memories. However, when a teenager experiences something like this, there is an additional layer of loss. Childhood is supposed to be the period of life when parents care for their children—when children can learn and live without carrying the worries that eventually come with adulthood. I know all too well Madison's pain of losing part of her childhood to this disease. It's difficult to focus on school, keep friendships, and plan for the future, but she has done it all so well.

We all know that life has its highs and lows: the metaphorical mountaintop experiences, such as graduations and weddings, and the valleys, like losing a parent. Despite the pain that loss brings, I am convinced that these "valleys" are the most fertile times of life—where we grow the most. For Madison, her experience with caring for and losing her dad has shaped her into a thoughtful, resilient, and deeply empathetic human being. When she told me she plans to become a teacher, I was ecstatic but not surprised; kids need teachers who are able to meet them where they are, and she will undoubtedly be able to do that. Needless to say, I am proud of all she has become, and I am sure her dad would be too. Thank you for considering her for this award.

Sincerely,

Sara Landing
English Department Chair
Nolensville High School