

Name: Carolyn McDevitt

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Cell: 770-851-4853

School : Northgate

Duties in the School: English teacher

What the nominator said about her: At the beginning of the summer, Carolyn was diagnosed with Stage 4 Metastatic Breast Cancer. She wants to help others who have also been diagnosed with the same type of cancer she has, so she has been fundraising to present them with a check to help out with finances and anything they may need. She is also teaching 9th grade while receiving infusions and other cancer treatments.

February 2011- I was sitting in my classroom having lunch when I received the call. "Mrs. McDevitt, we need you to come in.....now please." I called the counselor in and explained my situation, and they got coverage for my last class.

I left school knowing that the appointment would be difficult, so I called my husband to go with me. He was at an eye appointment getting his eyes dilated and I found the situation so ironic and funny. I called my mom, and she went with me to take notes. I vaguely remember hearing the doctor say words like "tumor", "invasive", "radiation", "chemotherapy", and "surgery". I was in a daze and appreciated my mom taking notes for me. From that point on, it was like a roller coaster gaining speed, but this one felt like it could go off the rails at any moment. I had two sons, one in 5th grade, the other in 8th grade. They both had dances, graduations, and sports coming up. Who would take them shopping for their dance suits? Who would attend their class parties? Yes, I have the best husband in the world, but I wanted to be the one to DO IT ALL. I loved my job too- NO ONE could love my students like I could. NO ONE could teach Shakespeare to them with the passion that I could. I had 2-3 appointments a week and it dawned on me real quick that I would have to give it to a higher power. My controlling personality was challenged in the biggest way possible. Fast forward to April and I am in the hospital recovering from a double mastectomy. I had visitors from school bring me a big poster that the students signed, friends started a meal train, and teachers from school wore pink in my honor and sent me the pictures on Facebook. I felt loved and supported and recovered in time to attend the end of the year celebrations! My life was back to normal. Breast cancer was a blip on my radar, and I never considered that it would come back. I had surgery to remove the tumor. I felt healthy. I raised my children to see them graduate, go to college, join the military, and get married. I continued to teach, to travel, to live my life without worry or concern.

February 2023- I had recurring back pain and went to the doctor who ordered a CT scan. The office where I had the procedure was two minutes away. I had the scan, left and pulled into my driveway when I got the call. "Mrs. McDevitt, we need you to come back to discuss the results of your scan." I went back and was

told that I had multiple tumors on my spine. No tears. No questions. Just a nod and the drive back home knowing I would have to tell my family the news.....again.

This time was different. "Think pink" doesn't feel the same when it's stage 4 metastatic breast cancer. There is no parade, no survivor status. You know that this will kill you unless you get hit by a train. Due to my advanced state, I was put on the "fast track". I had several appointments and had radiation scheduled immediately. I was back to the same feelings.....who would teach my last class? It was April all over again and I was back in the same hospital seeing the same doctors feeling the same feelings. Now my 5th grade son is 22 years old living 5000 miles away deployed in the Army. I couldn't even tell him to his face. My 8th grade son is now 27 years old and married to his high school sweetheart. Telling them to their faces was harder than anything because as adults they understand what stage 4 means. Revisiting trauma is weird....you should be able to process the feelings easier because you are familiar with them, but strangely enough it doesn't get easier- it gets harder because you know the sadness and stress of it all. Now as an empty nester, my students and my job mean even more to me. My students are my world. My colleagues are my friends, and my school is my home away from home. Leaving my students for radiation was harder than the radiation itself. During the last week of school, I rewarded them with donuts and sidewalk chalk and bubbles. Have you ever seen 14 year olds so happy? I watched them play like children and the joy that gave me solidified that my job is indeed the best job in the world. I felt like I had made up for my absences and we had a day of celebration being happy at just being together. School ended and I went home to rest.

June 2023-Typically my summers are filled with lunches out, travels with my family, shopping with friends. This summer was different. Radiation wrecked my body and the chemo pills I started made me very sick. I spent 20 days in bed in the month of June. As my body healed, my mental state deteriorated. My husband did my laundry and cooked. Most wives would feel spoiled by this, but it made me depressed. I wanted to take care of my household chores and not being able to do them made me wonder what the rest of my life would look like. I fell into a deep depression and started to lose weight and hope. One night I couldn't sleep, so I said out loud, "God, please help me find purpose in my life again." The next morning I

woke up with an idea, and I knew that my prayers were heard. I just had to act on them.

Mr. Rogers says to look for the helpers. I was raised to do for others- hence my job as a teacher probably. My wish was granted- I woke up knowing that I had to help myself by helping others. This epiphany should have occurred to me naturally; however, I was in such a dark place that I literally needed someone to tell me what to do. In this case it was a prayer answered for me, and it turns out, for many others.

I woke up with a clear vision- I wanted to start a group for breast cancer patients and survivors, but I wanted it to be unlike any other group. I wanted this one to benefit my students. As a mom and a two time breast cancer patient, I understand the stress and the toll it takes on the family. Often children can't process scary things and high schoolers especially have enough stress on them without their mom's illness being more of a burden. I knew I wanted my group to benefit moms with breast cancer from students at my school. Last year I had a student in my class and she normally made As and always had her assignments completed for class. One day she was unprepared for class. When I asked her about it, she curtly responded, "I just have a lot going on". I did my due diligence and by talking with her coach, I found out that her mom was just diagnosed with breast cancer. This was happening simultaneously as I was going through radiation. I am sure it was just too much for her to bear. A few days passed and I spoke to her in private and let her know that I was going to be okay and that her mom would be okay as well. She started to cry and then hugged me. The reassurance I gave her helped us both; I just didn't realize it then.

Going back to my darkness. Why didn't I put two and two together? Why didn't I remember my encouraging words to this student? Well, depression has a way of making you forget the good. It was truly a miracle that I "snapped out of it" and regained my sense of purpose. When I woke up with my idea, I had a very clear vision of what I needed to do. My husband and I researched the flowers that are symbolic of the breast cancer journey. They are the pink daisy, the pink starfighter lily, the pink rose, the pink carnation, and the pink snapdragon. My husband used his skills to design a t-shirt logo and we created the name Carolyn Cares: Surviving

and Thriving Through Breast Cancer. I had t-shirts printed and I started a Facebook group to sell them. My goal was to raise \$500 to give to the mom of my student. Within a week I made \$2000. It was then that I realized that my group was going to take on a life of its own. I had 300 people join my group, the t-shirts sold out, and I had benefactors from the community reach out to me simply to just donate. Then the real miracle occurred.....

July 2023- A stranger from the community reached out to me on Facebook and asked if she could call me. I spoke with her on the phone and she said that “so many people in the community want to help me and that she was going to organize a fundraiser in my name”. After a brief hesitation (I don’t like being the center of attention, but my parents raised me to accept kindness as long as I pay it forward), I accepted. She, along with community members and business owners, put on a motorcycle rally for my group and for me to seek treatment not covered by my insurance. Hundreds of people showed up to the rally. A Harley Davidson motorcycle was donated by my daughter in law’s parents, and we raised money to help me seek the treatment.. I saw the generosity of a community and felt the love of so many friends, students, colleagues, and parents of students. I will never forget that night. As I stood on the stage and thanked the audience, I made my intentions clear. I would pay it forward and help as many people as I could. I would use the money gifted to me in an attempt to stay healthy so I could help others receive the love and support so kindly given to me.

I contacted my administrators and asked them if I could use our sporting events at school as opportunities for me to honor our breast cancer moms. Of course they agreed, and the real work began. I found four moms with breast cancer of students at my school and contacted them. I introduced myself and asked them if they would allow me to honor them with a financial gift, gift cards, and a gift bag at sporting events during the month of October. All of them agreed without hesitation. We had a meet and greet at Chick-fil-A one evening and visited and got to know each other for three hours. We all told our breast cancer story, talked about our families, and agreed that we were meant to be friends even in the saddest of circumstances. I explained that I was the recipient of a gift and that I wanted to share it with them. In the group were two single moms, a teacher, and a mom who had to stop working because of her failing health. All of them were so grateful to

be chosen. I started to feel my depression lifting and over the course of the summer, I became so busy with selling shirts, having meet and greets, and organizing events at school that I didn't have time to be sad.

August 2023- School is back in session. Teachers, students, and parents came out of the woodwork to buy my Carolyn Cares shirts. A colleague had Carolyn Cares bracelets made to sell for me. A student started a fundraiser to help me raise money. My school family rallied in so many ways- I will never be able to articulate how much their help means to my organization. My grassroots effort to help one woman has now turned into a schoolwide effort.

October 2023- I honored my student's mom at a pink out softball game just a couple of weeks ago. She was amazed at the outpouring of love she received. Each of the players gave her a pink rose, we stood together on home plate and I read her breast cancer story for her. Her daughter, my former student, gave her the gift bag I had made for her, and we stood in solidarity together for a brief moment feeling the love and compassion of complete strangers. We are now friends and communicate almost daily. We have a dinner date planned for next week and the other moms that I have chosen are joining us as well. The other ladies will be honored at a pink out trivia tournament at the end of the month. The theme is "Think Pink" and I am helping organize it with my colleague who is kind enough to use his talent as a trivia host to help me.

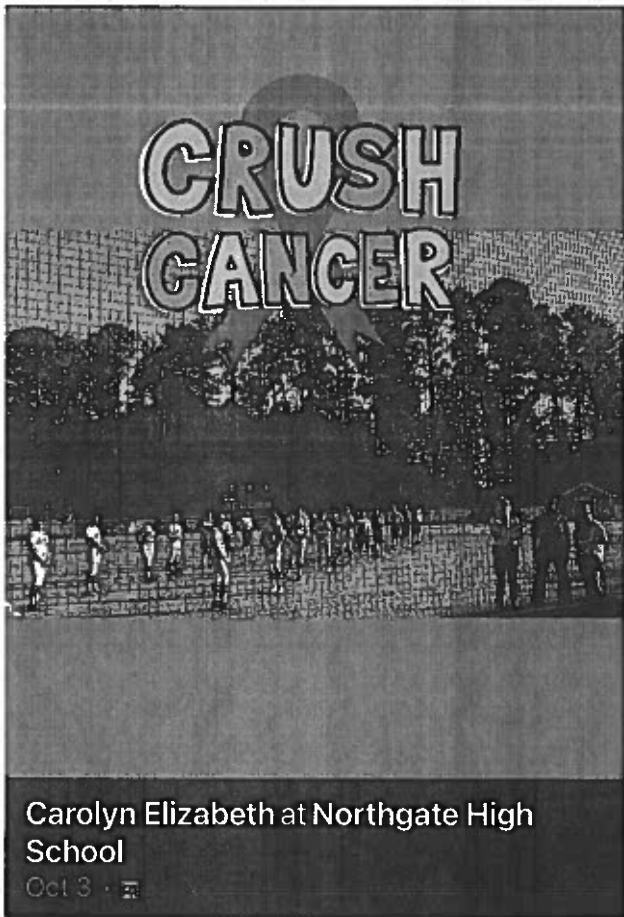
I have now raised enough money to help three more ladies for next year. They have been contacted and are all so excited to be part of the Carolyn Cares community. One of the moms has a son in my class. He pulled me aside one day after class, looked me in the eye and said, "Thank you for helping my mom". That was it, but those six words held more meaning than that. This student knows that by helping his mom, I am supporting him too. That's my goal- to show the students of my school that when you are down and out that doing something positive for someone else is so therapeutic..

In summary, I have learned that while I am alive it is my joy to help others. I seek no personal satisfaction from this other than it helps my mental state. I have a terminal illness, but my group is breathing life into me. I am seeing progress with

the treatment and medicine that I am taking, and I plan to return to school next year with Carolyn Cares in full swing. My vision is to continue to sell the t-shirts at community events and honor 3-4 moms a year.

When I was a child and dreamed of becoming a teacher, I only saw myself standing at the board teaching the material. For the last ten years of my life, I have come to the realization that the curriculum, while important, is not as important as building relationships with students and parents. When I got the call about the rally, the fundraiser in charge said, "Everyone in the community loves you and wants to help you." In 18 years of teaching at this school, I have always felt loved but this took it a whole different level. Knowing that has given me a new appreciation for my job. I look forward to coming to school. I see students wearing the pink bracelets and my Carolyn Cares shirts. Just today, a mom reached out to buy one. Strangers are becoming friends. Students are receiving support. Moms who are struggling are being honored. I am able to sleep at night. One wish coming true has blossomed into a part time hobby that is changing lives. I appreciate the nomination for this award. I know I am up against people who are doing much more than I can ever do, and that's okay. We're all in this together, and I hope that we are collectively making the world a better place. When I am gone, I want people to remember that Carolyn Cared.

Here are pictures of my events and my new friends in my Carolyn Cares group:





Carolyn Cares: Surv...   



Edit

Carolyn Cares: Surviving and Thriving with Breast Cancer

Private group · 315 members



Manage

Invite

Chats

Reels

Rooms

Featured



JULY 22, 2023 HOGS FOR A CURE

A Community Event

Please join us for a benefit ride for Mrs. Carolyn McDevitt. Carolyn has been a teacher at Northgate High School for 18 years and a loving local to our county. She is married to Mark and a fabulous Mom to 2 Sons, Miles, who is married to his High School sweetheart Jessica and Max who is currently stationed in Hawaii with the U.S. Army.

Carolyn was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2011 and had a double mastectomy at that time. This past January she was told she had spinal tumors. This later revealed to be in her jaw, clavicle, ribs, pelvis, and thighs. She has recently gone through 3 weeks of radiation to her spine and may have more to her jaw. Carolyn is also trying new experimental medicines as well. This lady is a brave and precious soul who gives her time and chose to teach many of the children that we know. We all owe a debt of gratitude to our teachers for taking on the task of guiding our children to be who they are today. It's time to give back in a very loving way.



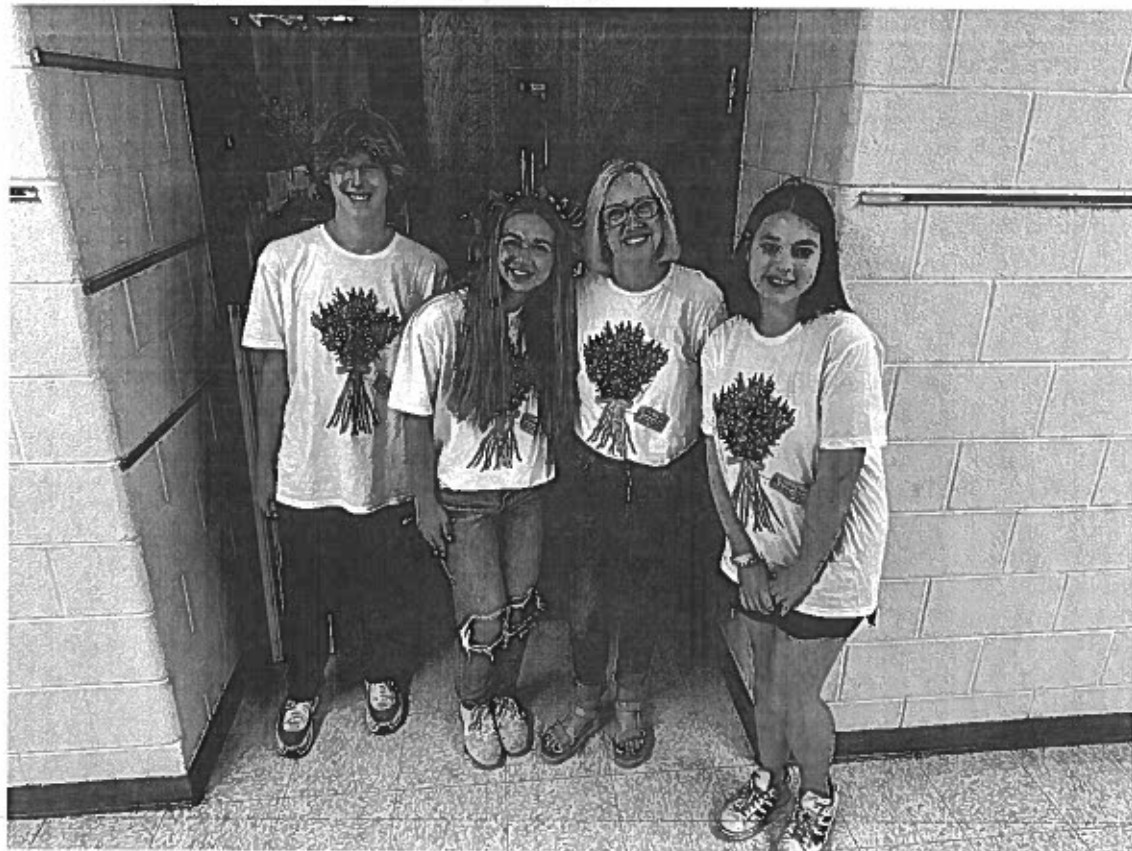
We would love to take all our Biker & Jeep riding friends to hold a Benefit to Help Carolyn and her family during this difficult time. All proceeds go to the overwhelming expenses needed for treatment of this terrible disease.

Bikers and Jeep Riders please join us on Saturday July 22nd at Gravel South Hatteras Davidson in Hatteras, On. for registration. \$20 per Biker and Jeep and \$5 per person. Registration begins at 4pm and rides starts up at 4:45pm. Our destination is 4927 Hwy 16 E, Savannah, GA. After a scenic hour ride.

If you would like to attend the event only, it will be held at THE FABULOUS FOOD TRAILER PARK, 4927 Hwy 16 E, Savannah, Ga.

(FURTHER)

Wagner Whitten
www.hilltopgeneral.com



Name: Emma Kelly

Email Address: kellyem27@bearsmail.org

Cell number: 678-367-7557

High School you attend: Holy Innocents' Episcopal School

Graduation year: 2027

Sport: Cross Country

What her nominator said:

Emma was diagnosed with a spinal cord tumor in 2020 as a 6th grader, which required her to undergo two surgical resections and chemotherapy. As a result, she has residual right leg weakness from her resections and the resultant nerve damage. After the two surgeries, Emma had to re-learn how to walk, and was unsure if she would ever be able to do more athletic options than walk. However, her determination and resilience led her to be able to not only return to walking, but running--and running quickly, at that! Even after a third follow-up spinal surgery in March 2023 (approximately 4 months prior to the start of cross-country season), Emma has jumped in to running and training with the team with 100% effort. It is impressive enough for her to make our top 12 (qualifying for the State meet) as a freshman, but it is all the more impressive when you take into account that a mere 3 years ago, she didn't know if she would be able to walk again, let alone run. Emma is a humble athlete, not bragging on herself or fighting for the limelight. She is incredibly supportive of her teammates, and her positive attitude is contagious. She is focused on bringing her best each and every day, and even as a freshman, is already a role model in terms of her attitude and commitment.

Inspiration Award Essay
Emma Kelly
November 14, 2023

On March 23, 2020, within the halls of Childrens' Healthcare of Atlanta, I exclaimed to my mom, "Look, mom, I'm walking!" I had a physical therapist carefully perched behind me and a brace on my right leg. I was 11 years old, and 18 days earlier I had undergone my first spinal cord tumor resection. When I first showed up to the hospital, I had terrible back pain. I wanted to have this surgery because I had hoped it would help me feel better.

But, when I woke up from that surgery, my right leg felt weird. It was tingly and it felt like it was floating off the bed, even though my mom assured me it was resting on the bed with my left leg. My tumor was within my spinal cord, which controls all the sensory and motor functions of our bodies. When the surgeon attempted to remove the tumor, there was some damage to my spinal cord — which was a risk we had no choice but to take. While I had hoped my back pain would disappear, I did not realize that I would have to relearn how to walk and run after the procedure.

After about three weeks in the hospital, I went home with a walker, a leg brace and a wheelchair for longer distances. I continued physical therapy, including a specialized therapy called robotics that used electrical signals to help encourage my muscles to work again. In time, I was able to walk and get around, though I continued to have weakness in my right leg. Later that year, I had to have a second tumor resection surgery. And, in July, I had to begin chemotherapy because what was left of the tumor was growing.

While my physical therapy appointments and chemotherapy infusions continued, I started training with a triathlon team in March of 2021. My right leg weakness continued to affect my running gait, and I had to put cages on my bike pedals because my foot would not stay on the pedal otherwise. I competed in a few local triathlons and even traveled to Ohio that summer to compete in the Junior Nationals race. Training and racing was a challenge due to my right leg weakness, but also because chemotherapy left me undernourished and incredibly weak.

In September of 2021, I completed my final chemotherapy treatment. I was in the middle of my first cross country season at my middle school. As my body recovered, I could feel myself getting stronger, and I ended the season as the fastest girl on my team. However, my next challenge was quickly approaching. During my initial surgeries, pieces of my back bones were removed and this caused my back to hunch over, a condition called kyphosis. Initially, we managed this with more physical therapy, but eventually I had to wear a brace for 22 hours per day to prevent further damage. During my second cross country season in eighth grade, I removed my brace for practice and races, but had to quickly put it back on afterward.

The brace helped for a period of time, but the curving of my back continued to get worse and I began to have more pain. In March of 2023, I had a spinal fusion. Unfortunately, I had some complications from my surgery and I had to be in the hospital for nearly three weeks. Following this surgery, I had a different brace that was much more cumbersome and uncomfortable. I was not allowed to run — or, really do anything for three months. This summer, though, I slowly got back into running. After some shorter summer runs, I was able to start my freshman cross country season at Holy Innocents'. I focused on building my running up again this season, and I was proud to receive a varsity letter my freshman year as one of our team's

top 12 runners. I was honored to represent my team at the state championship this year and proud that I accomplished a personal best race time that day.

Chemotherapy and surgeries are hopefully fully behind me, but my right leg weakness persists and is something I will have to manage for my whole life. There are little frustrations, like not being able to wear the shoes I want to wear to homecoming. But, there are also bigger challenges I continue to face, like learning how to drive. We've lost count of the number of nights in the hospital, chemotherapy infusions, MRIs and physical therapy appointments. My journey was not meant to be inspirational, but I never wanted to give up on the goals I had before I was diagnosed. Not showing up for triathlon training and cross country practice was never an option. Sports have given me an opportunity to set and achieve goals, meet friends who support me, and work with adults who respect my limits and challenge me appropriately. Most importantly, sports have helped me heal emotionally and physically the past few years.

Name: Shanya Washington

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Cell number: 7063133396

High School you attend: Dalton High School

Graduation year: 2026

Sports: Cheerleading and Track and Field

Shanya has triumphed over difficulty. She was in a car accident with her mother and siblings when she was 8 years old. Shanya was the sole survivor among her mother and her two small siblings. Shanya's mom instructed her to unbuckle and grab her brother's bottle. When she went to grab the bottle, they were struck head on by a vehicle. Being wedged between the seats saved her. She has battled with mental health while living with her grandmother and aunt. As outlets, she turns to cheer and track.

Friday, September 16th, 2016, exactly one month and 15 days before my 8th birthday, my life was forever changed. My mom was driving me and my siblings to her friend's house, when the car began to slow down. Something was wrong with the car, and it wouldn't crank. The lights were also off. All of a sudden, BOOM! We were hit by an 18-wheeler and the car ended up flying into a ditch.

I guess I was unconscious for a little while, but when I came to, I was being pulled out of the car by a fireman. My family was airlifted to a hospital in Atlanta. I would wake up and then fall back asleep. Every time I woke up, I would see more and more family members. First, it was my grandfather, then my grandmother. Then, I saw my dad who lives in Ohio.

Eventually, the dizziness and sleepiness went away, and I was able to stay awake and have a conversation. I could tell everyone was happy that I was okay. They were asking me questions, hugging me and talking to me about what happened. I asked about my mom and siblings. Then, everyone got really quiet. Then, the nurses and my family circled around me, saying "I'm sorry," and then someone said, "they're gone." They told the rest of my family was killed in the accident by a drunk driver. At that point, I felt lost. I was a 7-year-old with no mom, no siblings and a dad who lived hours away.

After the wreck, within one year, I lost my grandfather, my grandmother and my uncle. 2016 and 2017 were very hard years for me. I was sad, but I didn't want people to feel bad for me. Despite the tragedy, I remained positive and tried to lift up others. I got an award in elementary that year for always having a positive attitude. At that time, I had no clue what that really meant, but now, I get it. I was stronger than I realized.

Since I was younger, I have been told that I was an inspiration to a lot of people because of the way that I have handled the death of my mom and siblings. I like to think of it as just blocking out all the bad and negativity. I have just always wanted to be the light in the room. I loved to make people smile and laugh. I wanted to bring an energy that wanted people to want to be around me.

As I get older, I feel like I still have those same feelings. I feel like I have plenty to be sad and depressed about. I don't have that mother to share my secrets with. I don't have the younger siblings that can annoy me, but I do have a good support system with my aunt, coaches and friend's moms. And that is something that keeps me going.

I love to tell people my story. I like to tell others that no matter the situation, YOU can make it better. There is no need to rush into healing or talk about situations they aren't ready to talk about. Life is hard and healing takes time. But it will happen if you put your mind to it.

I love making people's day. Having a positive attitude and mindset is crucial for a healthy lifestyle. I remind my cheer team to never show or have negative energy because it pulls us apart and we don't work well together. I pray for us daily and pray aloud for our team before we take the competition mat. We all want the best for each other and strive to be the best version of ourselves.

Last week, I was awarded our team's "chain". I received the "chain" for having a positive attitude

and being optimistic. We had an injury during warmups before we took the mat, and I encouraged our team to keep up our energy and keep a positive attitude.

I have also taken the role as the person who prays for our team. I pray for us at cheer practice and I pray for us at competitions. I feel that prayers are a way to grow closer to God and it also connects and strengthens my relationship with my teammates.

Name: Callie Senn

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Cell number: 706-756-9561

High School you attend: Heard County High School

Graduation year: 2024

Sports: Volleyball

What her nominator said about her: Callie Senn has faced adversity since she was little. She has had many surgeries due to scoliosis. She has metal bars and screws still in her back, but she doesn't let it affect her ability to perform. She played a total of 16 games, then she broke her ankle. She still shows up to practices and games encouraging her teams to be the best they can be.

GHSA Inspire Award 2024

Good afternoon!

My name is Callie Senn, and I am a current senior attending Heard County High School as a member of the varsity volleyball team. I was nominated for the inspiration award and I would like to take some time to share a little about myself and my story.

From the time of my birth, I was faced with major adversity that would later come to really take a toll on my mental and physical health. At the time of birth, I was diagnosed with severe congenital scoliosis and multiple hemi-vertebrae. Not only did I have two major curvatures of my spine, but additionally I was missing numerous vertebrae that play a crucial role in the formation and development of one's spine. The doctors present at my birth later informed my parents that there was a significant chance that I would never be able to walk or possibly even talk. From the time I was two weeks old, doctors would like to operate on me every six months until my body was fully developed.

I can't imagine how my parents felt at this moment knowing that their first born was considered to have a very severe and abnormal birth defect, and there was a possibility that their child may never live what is determined to be a normal life. Through the first early stages of my life, I obviously wasn't aware of what battles I would later face that last a lifetime. From the time I was four until I was around twelve years old, I was in a hard plastic coated back brace that wrapped around my torso and ranged from under my shoulders down to my hips. This wasn't something that I was able to cover up in elementary school. I vividly remember sitting in my first grade classroom during a storytime in a chair while all of my friends and classmates were actually able to comfortably sit on the floor. It was at this time that I really let my condition affect me mentally, even at such a young age. From that point on, all I could ever seem to think were these thoughts: Why me? Why can't I just be normal like all of my friends? Why was I the kid that this happened to? I always thought that I would never get an answer to any of these questions which in life turned out to be the furthest thing from the truth.

Through many long and treacherous doctors' appointments, I finally reached the age of fourteen in 2020, where surgeons had no other option but to perform surgery on my spine. My top curve measured above 100 degrees, and my bottom curve measured around 65 degrees. The surgery that was conducted on me was a spinal fusion which is where surgeons went in and placed 2 titanium rods and 17 screws that still support my back today. For some of you that might not know how severe this is... Doctors that were seen as some of the best in the world in Australia reviewing my case and saying that this is one of the worst yet unique cases of scoliosis that they had ever seen. After my surgery in June of 2020, I really started to become concerned of what the future might hold and if I would ever get to play the sport I truly loved ever again.

Although this was the toughest battle that I've ever had to face, I can confidently say I'm so glad that I kept pushing and never gave up. In this situation it would have been so easy to give up so many years ago, but God had a greater reason and purpose. The Lord knew that one day I would share my testimony that it would encourage others to do the same and not give up. As I was pondering over the circumstances and challenges I was faced with, I finally got the answer I had always been looking for. This happened to me, so I could first hand witness how I inspire others to never give up and show how much greater the outcome can be when we just

trust in God's plan and don't give up. I undoubtedly believe that God chose me to become living proof of this because I reached and inspired more people than I could ever have imagined. I am currently facing another less challenging battle with my senior season being once again cut short due to an ankle injury. However, just as my testimony I told earlier says, I am not one to give up I will continue to push and inspire everyone around me to do the same. If you take anything away from my story today let it be these things: there is always a greater purpose even if we might not understand it now, always trust God's plan and his purpose for our life, and what doesn't kill you will make you stronger!

Sincerely, Callie Senn