

# **Lisa Nelson Memorial Scholarship 2017**

## **Background**

Good evening. My name is Paul Nelson, this is my daughter Whitney, my son Tyler, my daughter-in-law Kelsey, my sister Kristine, and my niece Hannah and we are here to acknowledge the recipients of the fifth annual Lisa Nelson Memorial Scholarship. It gives us great pleasure to introduce the male and female recipients who will receive a \$5000.00 college scholarship this fall in memory of Coach Nelson.

For those who are not familiar with Coach Nelson, she was a P.E. teacher and the head volleyball coach here at Ralston Valley from 2000-2013. She loved her position as an educator and a coach and she genuinely and deeply cared for her students, her athletes and her colleagues. Over the span of her career, she positively impacted so many people here at Ralston Valley. Tragically on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013, she passed away after a courageous battle with cervical cancer. She was 43.

To commemorate her life and to ensure that she continues to influence the lives of Ralston Valley students the Lisa Nelson Memorial Scholarship was established. The fund got its start when our family requested contributions in lieu of flowers at Lisa's services. Since its inception the Ralston Valley students, faculty and staff in conjunction with the surrounding community and many generous sponsors have contributed to ensure the stability and longevity of the fund.

So many people have helped the fund grow by participating in annual fundraising events. I want to extend a special thank you to Mrs. Braketa and the members of Student Government who annually organize and run the "Lisa Nelson Mustang Stampede" a school sponsored 5K that directly benefits the scholarship fund. Thank you Stugo for all of your efforts! I also want to thank all of those students, parents, teachers and staff members who participated in last fall's 5K. There were over 250 participants in last year's event.

Together we have created a scholarship we can be proud of. Together we are fulfilling the mission of the scholarship board, which reads...**We want to remember and honor Lisa's legacy and Pay It Forward... through college scholarships for Ralston Valley High School Student Athletes.**

Selecting two recipients was not an easy task; as you can imagine there are some amazing student athletes in this building. Narrowing it down was very difficult due to the quality of the applications. Thank you to all of those that applied and to the teachers and staff that assisted them.

Both of tonight's recipients possess qualities respected by Coach Nelson. They are tremendous students, have experienced athletic achievement and have

demonstrated leadership, good character, citizenship, sportsmanship and community involvement.

### **Elyse Smiley**

Our female recipient will be attending Regis University this fall where she will begin work on her bachelors. She is a National Honor Society member carrying a 4.3 GPA. She has received an academic letter every semester during her time at Ralston Valley while taking a very full load of high level AP and honors courses. She is also a member of the National Art Honor Society and the pre-med club.

Athletically, she has been a member of the tennis team for four years the last two on varsity. She was named second team all-conference her junior and senior year. In her essay to the scholarship board, she explained in detail what it means to be a "student athlete". As a student, she recognized that student athletes have the responsibility of balancing schoolwork and sports. She stated that student athletes should be able to work independently, manage their time wisely, and approach assignments with diligence and hard work. Coach Greason stated in her recommendation letter "She manages the stress of a heavy school load phenomenally and unlike any others I've coached". As an athlete, she identified the importance of working well with others and to be encouraging to the members of your team. She described her tennis team as not just a team but also a family! Coach Greason described her as "the kind of person you can depend on to be on time, put the team first and keep in mind the spirit of the game." Coach Greason also goes on to say, "Her level of sportsmanship is unmatched. You can often find her on the sidelines cheering on her teammates or being a great support to her doubles partner on the court." As far as what she learned from her student athlete experience at Ralston Valley our recipient stated that "With only a few weeks until graduation, I could not feel more prepared to step out into the world than I do right now, and that is all due to my rewarding experience as both a tennis player and student."

She has been active in the community. Since the middle of her sophomore year, she has been volunteering at Children's Hospital Colorado. As a volunteer, she has been placed in many different roles such as working in the Creative Play Center, and helping with craft parties, but her favorite responsibility was visiting patients in their rooms. She wrote, "I love to see the patients faces light up with excitement as they realized that I am there to play with them and not there to ask them more questions about how they feel or give them more medicine. Because of her experiences at Children's she has decided after completing her undergraduate studies to further her education and become a physician's assistant. She explained that because of those pediatric patients she is driven to complete her education. She also firmly believes that her volunteer experience has made her a more caring and understanding individual and without it she would not be the same person she is today.

I am proud to introduce Elyse Smiley as the female recipient of the Lisa Nelson Memorial Scholarship.

### **Logan Piz**

Our male recipient will be attending Colorado State University in the fall. Academically he is carrying a 3.3 GPA, which is a remarkable testimony to his ability to persevere through difficult circumstances. Peter Kalius wrote in his recommendation letter to the board about his academic strengths saying, "He continues to overcome the impacts of chemotherapy on his cognitive processing through his hard work, dedication and self-advocacy." Mr. Kalius went on to say "that he is an exceptional young man who has a proven history of overcoming challenges, and he has demonstrated that he is passionate, motivated, and dedicated to his pursuits.

In 2012, our recipient was diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma in the heart of his Bantam AA hockey season. He spent months in the hospital undergoing countless procedures, three major surgeries and what he described as "the chemical warfare of chemotherapy that left him with little to no muscles in his body, one less rib and the loss of part of his lung." His cancer fight went on for two years and he questioned if he would ever play hockey again. Throughout his battle, he had what he called his 24 brothers beside him. After they all shaved their heads in support of him he said he knew he was part of a bond that could never be separated or broken. He said he knew he was not alone in his fight and he described it this way "just like a battle in front of the net, I was hit from behind by a giant cross check, and there were 24 of the toughest boys in the league with their fists cocked back ready to back me up". In his essay to the scholarship board, our recipient explains what ultimately motivated him to return to the ice. In his words he stated "It was time to get back to work. I needed to get back to the game I loved. Hockey is my escape, the ice is my home, and my team is my family it's where I belong. With the help of my friends and coaches I was back on the ice within a year of cancer treatment something doctors said to be impossible. I was driven to get back on the ice by the love of the game and my teammates but most of all I was pushed by something much bigger than that. His name was Ian Tuthill, at the age of 13 he was diagnosed with Osteosarcoma Bone Cancer and he pushed me to be a better person everyday. Ian quickly became my inspiration and hero but devastatingly passed away in April of 2013. In his honor, I told myself I would return to the ice to live out his passion for hockey wearing his number 64. He told 9 news that if "I played for myself I would have been done a while ago." Unbelievably, during his time here at Ralston Valley he played four years of ice hockey. His freshman year he played in the Arvada Hockey Association. Two years after his last cancer treatment his dream of playing for Ralston Valley Mustangs came true when he made varsity as a sophomore. He also played varsity as a junior and a senior and he proudly wore #64 on his jersey his senior season in honor and remembrance of Ian Tuthill.

Our recipient has also been active in the community. During his time in the hospital, he created his own organization whose mission is to help the people, organizations and cancer patients who helped him during his battle with cancer. He formed the Love, Hope, Fight Organization. This organizations' proudest event is the annual Ian Tuthill Memorial Hockey Tournament and Blood Drive. The first year of the tournament the organization collaborated with the Colorado Avalanche and raised \$2000.00 auctioning off signed hockey memorabilia, proceeds from this auction went to the Make a Wish Foundation. His organization also formed a Teen Volunteer Program at Presbyterian St. Luke's Hospital. Every Sunday for a year he visited patients and helped visitors so that he could continue the Love, Hope, Fight legacy. In the future he has vowed to continue build his Love, Hope, Fight organization and his goal moving forward is to find a career in which he can help as many people as he can.

For overcoming many challenges to persevere in the classroom. For fighting your way back to the ice and dedicating your hockey seasons to a fallen friend. For giving back to those who helped you in a time of need and as Ian would say for "showing cancer who is boss and having a great story to back it up." I tap my stick on this stage three times 1, 2, 3, for #64 the male recipient of the Lisa Nelson Memorial Scholarship Logan Piz!