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Project Hope

### “Big Mike” Orbany

Last May, we at St. Edward High School lost someone very dear to us. This young boy suffered years of cancer and all of the treatment that went along with it. The cancer went into remission twice, only to come back twice, spread throughout his body, and eventually take his life away. This boy was named Michael Orbany, but all of us at St. Ed’s referred to him as “Big Mike” because he was facing something that most of us couldn’t even imagine dealing with. The Orbany’s were and still are regular mass attendees at St. Bernadette Parish in Westlake, Ohio. That just so happens to be where I went to grade school and where I currently attend mass. Because of this, my family and I knew the Orbany’s and their story on a deeper level. I felt called to be a help to the Orbany family in any way that I could in their battle with cancer. Throughout their battle, my family and I did whatever we could to help. That included going to Michael’s door and singing Christmas carols, or preparing dinner for the family. During the holiday season, things began to look better as far as Michael’s health was concerned. The cancer was in remission for the second time and many felt that Michael would be okay at the end. Then, just like that, the cancer came back as strong as ever. I will never forget parking my car at St. Edward before school and hearing my phone ring as I was walked into the building. The person on the phone was my mom, informing me that Michael had just passed early that morning. Although I was devastated, I felt as if I learned of Michael’s death at the perfect place, right at the doors of St. Edward High School. I saw my next opportunity to support the Orbany family right here at St. Ed’s. “Big Mike’s” wake was held in the St. Edward chapel. I spent a lot of time there handing out tissues and helping people with whatever they needed with my sports coat on and my St. Edward lapel pin attached to it. My family then came into the wake a little later in the

afternoon and I proceeded to break into tears as I knelt before Michael with my whole family. I asked myself: Why is it that I am so blessed with a healthy family and Michael's life was stripped of him so early? It was amazing to see how many people came out to show their support for the family as the day went on.

My family left after offering their sincerest condolences, but I stayed for the entirety of the wake. I watched as Mr. and Mrs. Orbany and their son Matt kissed Michael goodbye for the night as they exited the chapel. Through St. Ed's, I was able to help coordinate an overnight vigil for Michael. A few of my fellow classmates and I were given the privilege of watching over Michael as he laid in peace for the whole night. We rotated in shifts. Two people stood on each side of the casket for two hours as the others sat and reflected. Then we would switch. This was the greatest and most powerful act of mercy I have ever performed, but I felt called to be a part of that atmosphere. I had never felt closer to God ever in my life before those several hours I spent with Michael. The next morning was the funeral mass, procession, and burial. As the body was carried out of the chapel and put into the hearse, the students of St. Edward lined Detroit road and watched as Michael's body was carried away to his final place of rest. I will never forget how appreciative the Orbany's were for our services. This is a memory that will last with me until the day I die and will serve as something that I can always turn to when I feel distant from God for any reason.

Today, St. Edward continues to carry out the mission that Mike left behind. The Orbany's family motto was N.E.G.U., "Never Ever Give Up". Every year we host "Clips for Cancer". A huge amount of St. Edward students shave their heads to raise awareness of childhood cancer. We

continue to do whatever we can to support anyone in our community, but we remember our brother, “Big Mike” Orbany, in a very special way. We will “Never Ever Give Up”.