

Skyla Lee Elder

## Hawaii Rotary Youth Foundation Scholarship Application Personal Statement

In 2013 I was diagnosed with systemic lupus erythematosus (S.L.E.), which is an autoimmune disease. When I was diagnosed, my world crumbled beneath my feet. I remember that day so clearly and when I heard my mom say the word Lupus I went numb and my hearing faded into a high-pitched ring just like in the movies. That was at the beginning of my freshman year. In the following year, I had to be extracted from the school I loved and placed in online school because I could not be in the sun, which activates Lupus. Try living in Hawaii and not being in the sun! My grades plummeted because of my lack of energy or motivation. At that point in my life, whether it was because of the lupus or the depression, I didn't feel like there was any point to living if I was sick and so I stopped taking my medications. At the end of that school year I transferred to Honokaa High and Intermediate School mostly because they had a music program. I rarely went to school because I was in so much pain and barely managed to pass my classes. Music gave me the motivation to push myself to go to school even when I was in pain. The next year I was doing much better. I was taking my medication, going to school, and getting good grades but then I ended up in the hospital with pneumonia due to the immunosuppressants. I was in the hospital several weeks. When I was discharged, I had to learn how to give myself a subcutaneous shot and for the few months following I had to stab myself with blood thinners twice a day. Since then I have dutifully taken my medication and went through my junior year incident free. In the beginning of this journey I had a very strong aversion to wearing hats, but now I feel uncomfortable any time I am outside without one. I have adjusted to my health needs so that I can live relatively "normally", but I still have bad days where I am tired from head to toe and my joints hurt. Some days I step outside and I immediately get sunburnt. At times my condition is exceedingly annoying, but I know without it I would not have learned how to cope with difficult, and generally uncommon situations. Without this condition, I also would not have known how many people actually have autoimmune conditions, and most importantly without this condition I would not have found my career of choice, pharmacy. I would not have the passion or the drive to compel me to do research on autoimmune diseases and I would not have such a colorful life experience to draw insight from. I am thankful to my condition, although it is not always easy to handle- no, because it is not always easy to handle. Now I am forging on with my life in good health and a new quest; to cure autoimmune disease.

Much of the time I didn't know the full effects of the medication and suffered side effects of medication that was not created for the purpose of treating autoimmune diseases. My goal is to help the community understand the medications they are using and educate them about side effects and risks. Eventually I want to go into research and work on a more effective autoimmune medication or even a possible cure for autoimmune disease. Once I obtain my PhD in Pharmacy, I intend to provide care in Hawaii as a Pharmacist and educate the public about the drugs that they are using. One of the most important aspects of being a Pharmacist is the ability to educate and support people in the community, and helping others has always been something very important to me personally, I then hope to go into research to find a cure for autoimmune disease and help people who have gone through similar struggles as I have. I want to alleviate the weight of a "chronic" diagnosis many autoimmune diseases are labeled with and provide an alternative to simply controlling the disease.

If I receive this scholarship, it will help me achieve my goal of finding a cure for autoimmune disease, which will help so many people both in Hawaii and beyond.