



2018 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

1st Place Winner

Victoria Buterbaugh

6th Times A Charm

You know how many times I've entered this same Essay Contest in total? It's now at a total of six times. Six. Different. Times. One time for each year I've been a part of Cancer Support Community. Do you really understand how hard it is to come up with different ways of telling the same story to people? Let's just say, I've decided to cut out a good majority of my story due to the fact that if I tried to write everything down, I'd be writing a novel on my life story. You know what I haven't done throughout all of these six essays though? Realize that I've done so much in these six years that I don't even remember exact details of the cancer anymore. I mean obviously, I remember the countless years of pain, but at the same time, I don't want to remember. If anything I think I'm the best example of trying to forget that cancer even happened in my family.

My mom was diagnosed with Breast Cancer in the winter of 2010 when I had just turned eleven years old and has since faced at least 15 surgeries between the actual removal of cancer and her reconstruction surgeries all together. I almost thought I was going to lose her when she underwent many complications after multiple surgeries, but thankfully I didn't. I think that feeling of almost losing my mother really put me into a shocked state. Since then, the moment I even hear one of my parents has to go to the Emergency Room, even if it's for a simple MRI or CAT scan, I start to go into a panicked state. The most I remember about how she told me, was her hysterically crying, and me sitting confused as to what Cancer even was, after all, I was only in 5th grade.

The dictionary defines cancer as "the disease caused by an uncontrolled division of abnormal cells in a part of the body". Cancer isn't something that one person undergoes by themselves though, instead, It can affect an entire family. For years, I have always stood by my mother's side when someone talks about cancer, or how she brings up her story when she has to go to a doctor's appointment, but what I realized is that no one's really ever asked me how I felt

about it. Honestly, writing all of these essays is hard because I don't even know how I felt when it happened or how I felt while it was happening.

I can't think.

I can't speak.

I can't feel.

These simple three short phrases depict everything that has ever run through my mind when I even hear the word *Cancer*. I just feel empty, like a part of me died when that one simple word affected my family. I would never have guessed when I was eleven years old that something so bad could pretty much rip my family apart. When my mom first told us she had cancer I remember beginning to feel very distant from my parents. My dad was put into pretty much a state of depression, coming home from work and not really wanting to talk or do much, and my mom constantly coming home stressed and worried. They overall really didn't have much time to consider my feelings in the whole thing. After all, how could they even begin to imagine what I was going through when they themselves couldn't wrap their minds around the entire thought? More chores were beginning to be stacked on top of both my father and me based on my mother being bedridden leaving me to lose time with my friends and overall lose some friends. I was pretty much forced to grow up by the time I went into the sixth grade. Ever since, it has definitely taken a long time for my family to heal, but overall I think, in the end, Cancer brought us closer together and has opened our eyes that every moment we spend together is timeless. This past summer I was given the surprise of a real family vacation where only my parents and I went to Virginia Beach. (Usually, my Aunt and Uncle ask my parents to spend a week down at the Jersey Shore with them.) A place I haven't been to since I was in kindergarten. We also have spent more time doing things together, such as going outside for walks to simple stuff like just watching a television series together.

Cancer has pretty much flipped my entire life upside down though. I mean if you think about it, I probably wouldn't be the person who I am today. I know I for sure wouldn't have met all of the amazing people from Cancer Support Community, or wouldn't have felt as loved as I do every time I step foot in the door. Honestly, I pretty much owe them my life. From being able to walk down a runway modeling for them to them being there when I needed a break from the stress of life, or even just a shoulder to cry on, they have always had my back and have supported me 110 percent. One of my favorite parts of being a part of Cancer Support Community is the yearly Camp Kids weeks over the summers. I absolutely adore all of the kids and getting to spend each moment with them, whether it be good moments during games or crafts, to rough moments where they don't feel well or are having a rough start to their day, these kids and their amazingly strong parents, are the ones that keep me going. They are the ones that inspire me to push myself and pick myself up even in all of the moments where I feel like I can't go on. They never give up. Being able to spend these moments with these families make

everything feel worth it in the end. Like, I've finally found that one thing that makes me generally happy and not fake happy.

In the end, Cancer has shaped me in ways I personally just can't describe. It's a feeling that you just have to go through in order to fully understand someone's pain or perspective.

In the beginning, we were great.

Then things changed.

In the end, we are **stronger**.