



2018 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

Anna Fonarov

The Big “C”

One step out of the building and the leaves began dancing in front of me from the sudden burst of air. I stepped through and into the warm autumn sun as a shiver ran down my spine. It was early October when the weather seemed to be just right. Not too hot and certainly not too cold. It was perfect until I crawled into the backseat of my car. As soon as I plopped down, I could feel something was off. My dad who usually was very welcoming and happy seemed to be solemn. I was only seven years old, so I didn't make much of it. The quick drive home was silent, with only a sigh filling the space. We pulled into the driveway and my dad shut off the engine and turned around.

“It’s been a difficult day, sweetie, we got some really scary news. Babushka was taken to the hospital because she wasn’t feeling too well and after a few hours the doctors figured out what was wrong. Anna, your grandma has cancer.” With the last word spoken, the air rushed out of me and I ran out of the car. My classmate’s mom had cancer, and she was bald for months with big, dark circles under her eyes, and recently she stopped coming to the bus stop.

It wasn’t possible, it was MY grandma, and she was very healthy. There had to be a mistake, and I kept running until I broke down on the front porch. My dad came around the

corner with my lilac purple backpack in his hand and a devastated look on his face. I looked up and practically leaped into his arms.

“Your mom is upstairs in our room, she's very upset and I think a hug and kiss can maybe help her.” With a nod I was off, I pushed the front door open and sprinted up the stairs. At the top of the stairs, I stopped. I made a promise to myself I would always be there for her, no matter what, starting now. I walked towards my parents' room and slowly pushed it open. There I found my mom crumpled below her sheets with a red tear stained face. I ran over and into her arms and she began to explain what was wrong with hiccups,

“Your babushka is very sick, sweetheart, and we don't know if she will ever get better. She has cancer, it's a tumor growing on her esophagus, an organ leading up to a stomach. This type of tumor is very fast growing and difficult to stop. Doctors said she only has two to three months to live.”

A few months, that's it. My grandma who made the most delicious Ukrainian food when I visited, the grandma who had been taking me to the park since I could walk and the grandma that taught me to sew. There seemed to be no happiness in the world anymore, even the birds singing outside sounded doleful.

September 6, 2014, the first day of fifth grade. I was officially the ruler of the school, the oldest and the wisest. I walked with a strut in my step and with my head held high. My moment of glory stopped the second I walked into the classroom and realized how much more work I would have to endure and how many days of school remained. The day couldn't have gone by any closer, and then finally at 3:30 pm, the bell rang and everyone was dashing out the classroom. I ran the building until I was at the door I had walked through every single day since first grade to be picked up. I exited the building and happiness filled my chest when I saw my

grandma and grandpa waiting for me in the only car I knew they had ever owned. It had been almost three years since my grandma's diagnosis, and she was still with us, beating the odds, surprising her doctors. Those three years were not entirely a smooth ride, my grandma had a few hospitalizations, her physicians had to change her treatments after she had a bad reaction to one of chemotherapy treatments, and she lost her hair as well as gained a wig.

A few more months have passed and December arrived, full of hustle and bustle, shopping, caroling, twinkling with Christmas and traffic lights, baking cookies, wrapping and unwrapping presents, full of hugs and family time. My grandma's illness taught us not to take those happy family times for granted. Bitter cold January brought in changes. In a matter of a few weeks my grandma's condition had changed. It began with a stroke, which we later learned was a sign of cancer spreading through her body. Quickly she began looking like a typical cancer patient, thin and tired.

The next two months were the most difficult for the family, with prayers being murmured for a miracle every passing minute and tears of discouragement falling after each visit. My mom tried explaining as much as she could, from what the medications being given to my grandma to why hospice was a possibility.

My grandparent's house is one of the coziest houses I know, it is filled with grandma's flea market finding and my grandpa's love for books is evident in every room, large comfy chair is strategically positioned in front of a sunny window in a family room, close enough to enjoy the view and close enough to the kitchen. This love and care filled house was very dear for my grandmother and knowing that she did not have a lot of time left, she insisted that she did not want to die at home. My grandpa was going to continue to live in that house and she wanted it to be the house where she lived, not where she died. It had been an enormous sign of heart, she was

willing to give up the comfort of her own home to the sterile, blank, bleach smelling hospital rooms, to secure some peace for her beloved husband, that she knew he would be lacking after her passing. She spend only two days in hospice and passed away on March 16, the same day her mother passed away thirty some years earlier.

Four years later and her passing still seems unreal. Her kind way of living and courageous way of dying has left an undeniable affect on all of those who knew her. She was one of the strongest people I know and always knew how to put a The death had taken a toll on my mom, her youngest daughter, who had sat by her side day and night until she passed. For a few months, I hadn't been able to recognize my own mom, who had begun her journey of grief.

Recently I had discussed this very contest topic with her and now I see a whole new perspective on the situation. Shortly after grandma's diagnosis, I had once asked my mom,

“Are you always going to be sad like this?” Today, I am cautious of what I say because there are certain words and memories that trigger that sadness to fall over my mom. During a recent talk we had, I mentioned the need to filter some of what I say to avoid her from becoming upset. She told me that she had a lot of time to think about it all, and has fully accepted it and even continued to tell me stories from those rough couple of months, the behind the scenes version. The entire time I found myself peering into her eyes and waiting for a tear to roll out, yet none of ever did.

“I took my mom's advice, always looking for that silver lining”, she said, “it certainly is not easy, but definitely is worth the effort”.

Cancer is an awful diagnosis, it is often perceived as a death sentence. Though it can give you a different perspective on life. It allows you to see what is really worth anything and what can be left behind. My grandma's diagnosis had allowed me to see how strong my mom

and dad were. In the toughest of times, they had managed to continue to care for me and my younger brother, and put on a smile even when it was the last thing they wanted to do. Not only that, but it also inspired me to strive for a career in medicine.