

2017 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

Dark Days, Brighter Futures

By Daniel Wenick

August 12th, 2015, that was the day summer ended early. After a blazing hot day of grueling tennis practice outside, I thought that the day couldn't have gotten worse. Well, it did. It got exponentially worse. I would no longer have the luxury of losing in tennis being my biggest worry. The ride home was uneventful, but I could tell something was... off. Mom seemed weak and tired, but that was expected after being out and about all day. It was not until we arrived home that the news was dropped.

“So...I had a mammogram done..and I have breast cancer. Stage 2.”

Initially, those words had no effect on me. What? What's a mammogram? Stage 2? Well how many stages are there? In the days and weeks that followed, I tried to block out the fact that that conversation even happened. Then again, the first stage of grief is denial. However, forcing the memory out only made it stick more in my mind.

Fast forward to the first week of September. At this point, Mom was ready to go into surgery to get the tumors removed, and I had for the most part accepted her condition. Because she had the operation while I was at school, I left early with my sister to go visit. After a seemingly eternal wait in the hospital lounge, the doctors finally let us enter her room. It was a large corner room with an HD TV, but it did not distract from the fact that my barely conscious mother laid in the bed, her face locked in a horrible image of agony. Almost immediately, I

broke out in tears, gazing out of the window to hide my welling eyes, and keeping quiet to disguise my choking up, cracking voice. I spent six hours in that room, watching my mother, one of the strongest people I know, suffer. Not a day goes by where I do not remember how awful that was, and it remains as one of the darkest moments of my entire life.

Cancer is a thief. It steals your money when you shell out thousands of dollars to have expensive, traumatic surgery and treatment procedures. It steals your hair when you are blasted with radiation in an effort to completely kill all of its miserable cells. I was just lucky that it didn't steal Mom's life. It is difficult to understand just how ruinous and senselessly, unyieldingly vicious cancer is until it attacks one of your own. I would not wish this experience on my worst, most despised enemy. Is there anyone cruel enough or heartless enough to do so? Unfortunately, cancer cannot be handcuffed and thrown in a cell for stealing money, resources, and lives. It truly is the foulest, most despicable thief on this planet.

To this very day, cancer continues to play a part in our everyday life, almost becoming a member of the family. An unwanted, destructive, evil one, whom I would be delighted to wipe off the face of the earth. When I returned home that first night, I realized that I was no longer the baby of the family. I realized that Mom and Dad had bigger things to worry about than their whiny teenager son. Pre-diagnosis, I had taken my parents for granted, to the point of relying on them for things like money and housework. With Mom unable to work for the foreseeable future, and Dad caring for her, it was time to take some initiative and reorganize my life. I had no job, so I obtained not one but two in order to become more financially autonomous. Going to school was therapeutic, and whenever I found myself struggling emotionally, I channeled my feelings into important, productive things. After her diagnosis, my mom asked me not to let this interfere

with my life, my goals, my dreams, and that is exactly what I did. I like to think that I handled this in the most adult way possible. I could have let this destroy me. I could have just cracked and begun the long, windy downward spiral, but I didn't. I couldn't let it win like that. I became an adult when I fulfilled her request and didn't let her cancer wreck my life as well as her own, where a child would shut down and figuratively implode. Now, a year and a half later, my resolve has never been stronger. I continue to work tirelessly to live up to my parents' expectations, and this blight on our lives has only strengthened our familial bond. They say you never know what you have until it's gone, when really you always know what you have, you just never think you could ever lose it.