

2017 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

I Miss You

By Lillian DeMarco

Cancer is a disease that spreads quickly, just like the sadness, hurt, and heartbrokenness that is caused by it. It affects many people, but not everyone reacts in the same way. Some people take years to get over a death from cancer, some people have a sense of relief, yet some people are happy (in a way) that their loved one is not suffering any longer.

No one likes suffering, but unfortunately it's a part of life. The fear of suffering is what keeps us alive, but for some, it's the reason why they end their life.

I've been blessed that I've never had cancer myself, but I had been deeply invested in my great uncle's last years of his life since he was diagnosed with intense lymphatic cancer at stage three almost seven years ago. He died almost two years ago, and I still remember that there was not a dry eye on the funeral day. My uncle, who lives very close to us, drove more than an hour to New Jersey every single day to help my Great Uncle David – whether it was him organizing books, cleaning up a bit and getting rid of stuff (since David was a bit of a pack rat) or even simply just caring for him and keeping him company. I rarely saw my uncle for that year before my Great Uncle David died. He was such a help, and we knew that David appreciated it.

The last time I remember seeing my Great Uncle was the summer before eighth grade, which is now almost five years ago. He was an amazing musician, and shared my passions about singing, playing the clarinet, and wanting to learn piano. Eventually, I did try to learn piano, but when he was visiting (before he was too sick to visit), I was content in just sitting next to him on the piano bench in my uncle's house and listening to him play. At this time, I don't think my mom even told me that he had cancer because I was still young and she didn't want me to worry.

He was the most unselfish person I knew. He would listen to my young self talk about everything that interested me at the time, and he would always try to relate to me somehow; to make me seem older and to help him feel younger, I suppose.

I never wanted our visits to end. Too young to drive, and still in school, I could never go with my uncle or visit on my own during the day to see Great Uncle David in his little apartment. When we heard the news one summer that he might not make it until Christmas, we were all so devastated, so we visited as much as we could. It still wasn't enough. My uncle actually brought him here to see us, which was almost two years before he *actually* died. When he made it past that Christmas, *and* the next Christmas, we were so happy and felt blessed that God would give us another year and more time with him.

It was such a strange time, because the doctors were all puzzled *why* he didn't die yet, in the best sense possible. Of course they wanted him to keep on living as we the family did, but

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from a purely medical standpoint, they were baffled. He was in stage four lymphatic cancer, which takes all of one's energy and makes it hard to do normal things like eat, drink, and breathe properly, let alone move around. He was still alive, but he wasn't *living*. There's a difference, in case you're wondering.

It was after a swim meet that my mom told me that my Great Uncle David passed that day. I'm glad she waited to tell me after my meet, because we both knew I wouldn't have done well if I'd had that weight on my chest before I had swum. We were silently crying to ourselves on the way home, and hugged each other fiercely once we were home. The next morning, it totally hit me: he wasn't coming back. *Ever*. It was like I had slammed into a brick wall. And that's when I realized that I had rarely asked about him. I know I was young, but I wished I had asked him about his life and anything awesome he could have told me when I had the chance. I knew he was so intelligent, and I wished he passed on some of his complex and integrative thoughts to me. In this way, I almost wish I knew he was dying when we were spending time together so I would have treasured the time spent with him better.

Cancer takes away your will to live, your liveliness. You may still be *alive* when it's done with you, but your life hasn't had its full potential the whole time you've been sick. Of course, I'm sure if you have cancer, staying alive is the only thing you're striving for. But wouldn't most people, when they are diagnosed with and are being affected by cancer, want to do everything they've dreamed of before it's too late? Wouldn't they want to complete their last remaining bucket list items? That's what I would do. I'd think ... I'm dying anyways, so I might as well have fun along the way. If I die doing this fun thing, that's okay, because it's something I wanted to do. Of course, some kinds of cancer make you bedridden, so you wouldn't be able to do anything too fun. But if that was me, I'd live through my family and friends and have them tell me wonderful stories and watch videos online of people doing all the crazy adventurous things I wish I could have done. I would live through others, which is the best kind of empathy and love there is.

I wouldn't let cancer take away my liveliness. I would let it help me be alive for as long as possible. And that's what my Great Uncle David did for as long as he could: be alive through music, instruments, and giving and receiving constant love from us. I wish I never had to see him go.