

2017 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

My Best Friend's Fight **By Melina Rubas**

Cancer; to some, this word means practically nothing. As for me, this word makes my head turn; this word has changed my life forever. I met Cryssiah Mendiola (many say Siah for short) online through some friends back in 2014. The best choice of my life would be that I chose to stay in touch with him. In May of 2015, after a short year, we decided to commit to a long distance relationship. The rest is history.

It all started at a church where Cryssiah was playing dodge ball with his family. In the middle of playing, he hurt his left leg. Siah's legs bothered him for weeks before he went and got it examined. In October of 2014, he was diagnosed with Osteosarcoma in his upper left leg. Although I hadn't known him for long, I already cared for him so much. I was terrified; I had no clue of the troubles that lie in wait. He immediately went in to chemotherapy. A year later he had surgery to remove the tumor. Cryssiah lost two-thirds of his femur and the entirety of his knee. They are now bionic, made of titanium and chrome.

Just a few months into recovery, he started going to physical therapy. One night in December of 2015, I got a phone call from Cryssiah while I was sitting in my dining room. I still remember the first thing he said to me was, "Don't freak out". I thought he had done something that would make me upset; However, it wasn't something he did. It was so much worse than what I could have imagined. While he was in physical therapy, his therapist had him balance on his left leg. Cryssiah's leg snapped and he fell to the ground. He quickly pushed the bulge back in place as they called for the ambulance. Right away I couldn't breathe; I started panicking. I had to be with him, but it was physically impossible. I was absolutely torn when I heard the news. It was just a few weeks before he would fly down and visit for Christmas. As the news

sunk in, hopelessness took over and I grabbed hold of my chair. My mind was blank, yet filled with uncountable thoughts. Siah finally called me on Skype later and he told me how his physical therapist looked terrified and guilty. Siah still wishes to go back to apologize and tell his therapist it wasn't his fault. Cryssiah nervously went into surgery again the next day. We found out the cause of his leg snapping was that the surgeon that performed the first surgery put in a metal stem that was five centimeters long; It was too short for his bionic femur to connect to his natural femur. I was infuriated when I was told and it made me nervous for his following surgeries.

Cryssiah was recovering again. He got his doctor's approval to fly down to Philadelphia for Christmas. He spent Christmas in crutches, but I was overjoyed that he could make it, having his company was amazing. After a while of physical therapy for his leg, he started to learn how to drive and even started going to college. I was ecstatic since he was just about to start his life again. This was until he went to a doctor's appointment in the winter of 2016. The doctor was casually speaking about his scans he had back in July. She was saying that he had one tumor in each lung. I was exasperated that no one told him about the scans until over four months later. Instead of going back on chemo, he decided to go on several diets, vitamins, and even strong medical marijuana. He had to drop out of school since he was sick again. Siah also had to stop learning how to drive since the medicine made him both incoherent and exhausted a majority of the time. He was supposed to visit again that December, so I told him to get scans before he flew over. He and his mom kept pushing scan dates back until a few weeks after he visited. I had a bad feeling about it, so I kept pestering him.

A day after he got home, he started to cough. It was barely noticeable, but something about it made me feel uneasy. Siah very strongly claimed that I made him sick. I didn't say

anything about it though; I barely even acknowledged it. A week later, the coughs grew worse. I knew something was off. A night close to his scans, Cryssiah and I got into a fight. I don't quite remember why; all I remember is going to bed upset. I woke in the middle of the night and saw he messaged me at twelve, I ignored it and went back to sleep. What a big mistake that was. The next morning, I carelessly skimmed his messages. He was complaining about chest pains and breathing trouble. He was saying how the pain was really bad. Siah's last message to me after that was "I love you". He always says his chest hurts when we get into arguments, so that's what I thought it was, just him being upset. I messaged him back apologizing and to message me when he wanted. I went to school, not thinking much of it. The end of second period arrived. For some odd reason, I decided to check my Skype messages, which I never do. I saw my brother messaged me that Siah had to go to the emergency room. I was petrified; I rushed to the bathroom and checked Cryssiah's messages again. I somehow managed to read over the message saying that he went to the emergency room. I tried calling Cryssiah's mom, but I realized it was five in the morning in California, so I just messaged her. I was hysterical. A whole eight hours I was ignorant to the fact that he was in the hospital, struggling.

I somehow managed to get through the school day. I got home, waiting for something, anything. A few hours later, I finally got a call from Siah's mom, Christina. She said everything I didn't want to hear. The tumor in his right lung had grown to four inches and was pushing against his lung. He had low blood pressure, so the nurses had to keep stabilizing him. He also needed to be on oxygen, since he had trouble breathing on his own. I was stunned by how fast everything went downhill. My heart ached that I couldn't be with him. I was so desperate to talk to him, and it hurt immensely that I couldn't be by his side.

After what felt like an eternity, I finally heard him calling. I quickly answered the call and placed my laptop ahead of me. He was pale, and he looked utterly exhausted. I couldn't resist the tears pouring out of my eyes. The only words I could manage to speak were, "My poor baby". He repeated phrases that I will never forget, words like, "I'm so sorry" and "you don't deserve to go through this". He kept expressing how he loved me and how beautiful he thought I was. His doctor decided to put him back on chemotherapy as soon as possible. A few weeks later, his doctors saw he had fluid build-up all around his right lung. His side was drained to relieve the pressure; they drained a full two liters of built up liquid out of him. A few weeks passed again, and we find out the tumor grew to five and a half inches. The tumor took up eighty percent of his lung, and had the possibility of pushing his heart against his ribs.

It's now March 30th, and the tumor has shrunk to a little under three inches, almost half its size. Siah's doctor said he had never seen a tumor shrink so quickly before. The surgery to remove the tumor from Siah's lung is April 20th. This whole experience has been a blessing, yet a curse. This year has no doubt been the hardest of my life. Everything throughout the years has greatly strengthened mine and Siah's relationship. We both have changed immensely. This experience has taught me to appreciate and cherish every second I get to be with the ones I love. I've grown to be a genuinely better and more thankful person. I also haven't really believed in God before, but through some magical moments, I have learned to believe. I was taught to let go, trust, and let God take control. I now have a more optimistic and positive view on life. I pray that one day Cryssiah will be recovered and be truly healthy again. I am determined that we will be together someday. I sincerely thank you for giving me this opportunity to share the story of my best friend's fight.

