

2017 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

No More **By Victoria Buterbaugh**

Sometimes, bad things happen to good people. No one knows exactly why or how these things happen, but sometimes it's just meant to be. Cancer, one simple little term that can change a family's life instantly. Whether it be in how they act around each other, simple routines, or how they look at life as a whole. The dictionary defines cancer as "the disease caused by an uncontrolled division of abnormal cells in a part of the body". I define cancer as something that can affect one or multiple persons emotionally and physically. Cancer wasn't just something that changed my life like it does for most people. Cancer changed everything I thought about or how I acted and what I did. It forced me to think more critically and to grow up faster. Cancer didn't just affect me like it does normal kids. For example, added stress, constant worrying, or even the big question "Was she even going to be okay?" Cancer caused me to close myself off. I shut off any and all feelings I had and, just tunneled through it.

It was the winter of 2010, and I had just turned eleven years old, when I received the news my mother had breast cancer. All I remember when I was told, was her crying when trying to even tell me. No child should ever have to witness so much hurt in one sentence at such a young age. After that day my entire life would change. I would never get a normal childhood. I'd never go to on big trips like to New York, or to Disney World. I'd never have a day where I could even take a deep breath and relax knowing she was okay. My mom had gone through five years of surgery after surgery and constant doctors appointments. During those five years she

had many complications. From being allergic to certain drugs, to having tears in stitches, she had always worried me. Looking back I think she finally realizes how much of a toll this all has taken on me psychologically but in that moment I just didn't want to have to deal with it. I had felt like her cancer put a label on me and that I was the person everyone talked about at school. I was stuck in a hole that felt like it had no way out. It wasn't really until 6th grade where I discovered the small and loving, Gildas Club.

When I first found out about Gilda's Club and the Cancer Support Community I was shy, nervous and all around scared. Did I really want to face all the feelings I had shoved away for so long? This community took me into their arms without question and helped me feel like I got the childhood I had always wanted. When I would walk in the doors I wasn't "the kid at school who's mom was sick". I was Tori, a typical teen who loved to volunteer and spend time with others. Of course, we talked about cancer and I learned as much as I could and we faced our feelings but, for once in my life I didn't feel alone. I didn't feel like I had no one who could understand me or just kinda be with me. I was surrounded by kindness and compassion. Gildas helped give me the knowledge to help others and provide support for other kids/adults who knew someone or had cancer themselves. This organization has also helped my mom. She found others who had the same cancer as her and she was able to learn about others' journeys. (My mother always taught me that each person's cancer is unique and their own journey. No two people can have the same journey but we can always listen and learn.) Even my dad enjoys going to Gildas. Sure, he still gets shy but I feel like he learns from being there too. Some people will think, "Oh this is just a sick person's club" but in fact it is much more. It's a place where you can go to talk or do various activities. It's a place where you can go to face your fears and not be alone. It's the

place I like to consider my second home. Thanks to Gildas, I was able to meet some really close friends. We make it our tradition to come back every summer and help out with kids camp and to help with various activities. I would also like to consider myself a more open individual that tries to make an impact on the world every day even by doing small things thanks to this community.

On a more recent note I have discovered my grandmother was diagnosed with a very rare type of abdominal cancer and she is going through Chemotherapy and Radiation. It has been a few months since the diagnosis and she seems to be doing okay. My family and I do everything we can to make sure she is comfortable and to remind her she isn't alone.

Cancer isn't just a label. Sometimes we feel as though it defines us but let me tell you it doesn't. Cancer only controls you if you let it. I'm proud to say that the summer of 2015 was my mother's final surgery and we have been brought closer together as a family because of it. Cancer has provided me with something I could never ask for: strength, love, and happiness.