

2017 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

Paint

by Madeline Chang

One of my favorite things to do as a child was paint. My mother would tape a giant piece of brown paper to the kitchen island while I mixed the colors on a paper plate. We'd wet our brushes and let them dance across the untainted surface. Together we'd paint fairytales. The sky was filled with gumdrops while rabbits paraded below in royal attire. As I got older, our adventures on the page became less frequent. My parents started working more, and I became entrenched with soccer, gymnastics, and voice lessons. I was flowering, right in my element, until I learned my mother had cancer.

As an ignorant eight-year-old, my natural instinct was to assume I'd soon be motherless. What was I to do without her? Who would make my lunch, drive me to soccer practice, or read me books at night? Would I be stuck being raised by my sisters? Would I go live with someone else? Could I handle such a loss? My mind jumped and jived to antagonizing thoughts. A father is innately different than a mother, and certainly wouldn't be enough to fill the colossal gap she was about to leave behind. My parents did not tell me much, so I had little awareness of the true situation. Sooner or later though, they had to tell me the full story.

I sat in the backseat of my father's infiniti, the one that I'd someday grow up to drive. We were parked in the garage when my father turned around to tell me that, "Mommy is sick". He told me it was thyroid cancer, as if I even knew what a thyroid was. Crystal-like tears filled my eye sockets. He reached for me with his skinny arm, declaring, "This is the best kind of cancer to have. This is the kind of cancer you want." What a strange thing to say. I insisted that we didn't want any cancer, but since I had no alternative, I reluctantly accepted his statement.

My parents began regularly travelling to the University of Pennsylvania where my mother received her treatments. I always stayed home with my older sisters or went to a neighbor's house, anxiously waiting for my mom to be fixed. One day I found myself before the desktop computer in the study, keying in the words "thyroid cancer death rates". Glossy tears pummeled down my tender skin. In my fearfulness, I forgot to close out the webpage, leaving my father to discover my online inquiries.

Up to this point, I had managed fairly well. On March 3, 2009, my mother went in for surgery to have her thyroid removed. My father e-mailed me a picture of my mother just before her surgery. She wore a hospital gown and surgical cap. Her neck was marked in black ink, indicating where the surgeons should cut. The sunlight gleamed on her beautiful face, and her calming smile could light up any room, and yet, I sobbed at this image. Her pure, soft, sweet skin was besmirched by the doctor's hideous paint. It was not at all like the paint I was accustomed to. There were no gumdrops or rabbits or royal parades. It was not a fairytale.

During the two years my mother was sick, I only thought of myself. What would I do without a mother? I cried many times, but I never asked how she was feeling. It never occurred to me that she might have been scared or sad too. I suppose it's natural when you're eight or nine to be narrow-minded, but I think the real reason I never considered such things is because my mother exhibited a superhuman amount of strength. A corrosive mutiny colonized deep in her flesh, yet she carried herself with her usual poise while unceasingly attending to her job and family.

After eight years, I still notice the effects of my mother's cancer. Without her thyroid, her body struggles to perform many functions. Her synthetic thyroid medication helps, but her lack of energy is evident. As for me, I developed separation anxiety. Going away without my mother

had me weeping every night we were apart. My condition has improved, but I still greatly fear losing her.

While I have realized life is not a fairytale like the grand pictures we created, we can still paint a new and beautiful perspective. I possess an immeasurable appreciation for my mother, and her positive attitude throughout this awful hardship only grew my admiration. Even when confronted with such destructive elements, she persevered with grace; for this reason, she will always be my inspiration.