

2017 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

The Impact of Cancer

By David Bleiman

Cancer comes in many types and stages, but regardless of the stage or the type, the impact is nonetheless the same. After my mom was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer, my life changed tremendously in two different, but equally important ways. The most noticeable change was the amount of work that had to be done in the house, with my mom being unable to do anything she normally did. This forced me to grow up and mature into a reliable son and adult. More importantly, however, my mom's diagnosis gave way to something much more than my maturity. It opened my eyes to life in general, and how life every day in itself is a gift.

To give some background of how much my mom has done for me ever since I was born, let me begin by saying that, as a 17 year old boy, I had never once done a single load of laundry, I had never started the dishwasher, I had never gone grocery shopping, I had never made my own lunch, and I had never had to help anyone climb the steps every single night. Of course, that all changed the moment my mom was released from the hospital after a three day stint in which we found out about her having cancer. Weakened and highly medicated, I remember my mom trying to do the laundry even though she couldn't walk straight herself. That scene is something I will never forget. Fortunately, I have three older siblings that were able to help me from time to time with the chores. Unfortunately, two of them are in college in Philadelphia and one has graduated college, yet still lives in Philadelphia. So it was not as if I could rely on them to always help me. Factor this in with a dad who was constantly working, and I had my hands more than full.

Luckily, doing the laundry and dishwasher seems much more difficult than it actually is. Sure, I spent countless nights staying up late to do the laundry and folding it so that my mom wouldn't have anything to worry about, but I just wanted to keep her happy. I've realized that having a good attitude amidst all this chaos is essential. Although the chores take some time, I don't really mind doing them. What I do mind, now more than ever, is how my mom feels, both physically and mentally. Before the diagnosis, I did care about my mom's feelings. All sons should care about their mom. After the diagnosis, however, I find it to be my job to keep my mom smiling each and every day.

While I often pride myself on being a good writer, I have never had such difficulty addressing a prompt such as this one. The reason behind that is because after four months, things become normal and you forget how your life used to be. I cannot remember the last time I didn't walk my mom up the steps or drive her places. Ironically, when I got my license last year, my mom told me that she would never let me drive her anywhere. It's crazy how things can change so quickly. Nonetheless, I have been with my mom through thick and thin without a moment's hesitation, because, quite frankly, I would do anything for my mom. I have been praised countless times by aunts and uncles and family friends for the way that I am able to take care of my mom. I graciously thank all of them, but I truly believe, and hope, that what I do is what any son would do for his mom.

Throughout high school, the one thing that I loved most is the sport of track and field. As a senior this year, I was the captain of the cross country team and I was looking forward to running fast times in the winter and spring. While track is one of the most important things in my life, my mom tops that list tenfold. For the past four months, my mom has become my main focus and track has taken a backseat. I didn't hesitate to take weeks off from track in order to be

with my mom. In late February of this past year, my mom landed in the hospital for ten days. Every single day after school, instead of going to practice or even going home, I went to the hospital to be with my mom. I would eat dinner there and stay with her until she fell asleep. Every single day she would thank me for coming by, and I would have the same response every single time: "Mom, you never have to thank me for that." With all that I've been through the past four months, I no longer put myself first. I am always more than willing to stay in for the night if my mom is ever alone. I will truly do anything to make my mom happy.

Ultimately, cancer has changed the way that I look at life. Waking up the next morning isn't always guaranteed, which is why it is so important to always be happy and make the most out of each and every day. More importantly, my experiences have taught me to love everyone and never take family for granted. Although I know my mother will eventually be back to normal, I will always cherish every moment with her. Cancer might be powerful and harmful, but it will never be able to tear family apart.