

## 2017 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

### **"WE ARE STRONGER THEN CANCER"**

*By Matteo Barila*

I live in Glenside, Pennsylvania with a family of four and many pets. My mom happens to be one of the most caring and loving mothers, well, quite possibly people that I have been given the privilege to spend my time with. When I was five years old, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. Well, as a five-year-old kid, the concept of cancer wasn't exactly under my belt of knowledge; however, as I began to notice a change in my mom's liveliness, it just felt that something wasn't normal. Being the kid that I was, I obviously enjoyed playing with my parents in all the ways you can think of. As this "cancer" began to increase its role in my mom's life, I also started to notice a change in my life and how I was actually feeling on the inside. As a result of her cancer, she became much less social and active; I also seemed to pick up on how she became very stressed and had to take many naps, very long naps. Then, one day, I came home to a startling surprise; I came back from school to see a person that was in our house that didn't have any hair. At first, I was scared because there was a stranger in our house, and bringing "stranger danger" quickly to my attention. As I panicked, my dad had told me that this stranger... was my mom. I was just struck with mass confusion and became even more worried as I thought of many possible occurrences that may have led to this "bald" situation. My mom and dad then sat me down at our table and explained to me what this "cancer" was. After the explanation that changed my world, I realized that I was going to need to adjust to a completely different lifestyle and I needed to support my mom every step of the way as she was preparing for this fight against cancer. I knew I wasn't able to do this alone and I needed some friends that could relate to the pain that awaits me, well that's where Camp Noogieland found its spot in my life.

Allow me to summarize what Camp Noogieland really is, from the camper's perspective. Camp Noogieland is a place with all types of people of backgrounds too many to count. Camp Noogieland powers imagination and creates long-lasting friendships. This is the foundation of a community that accepts all people that come together as one team, in which we all say, "We are stronger than cancer, we are family." Family is a key goal of what Camp Noogieland intends to create. As a veteran of this group, I have truly been able to notice the compassion that this family shows for each other and how I am comfortable knowing that I have friends that I am able to turn to whenever I need to. But, how I was introduced to Camp Noogieland leads all the way back to my mom hearing about this camp from a friend. As she came home one day to inform me on this new camp, I wasn't exactly interested in this and I explained that it would be outside of my comfort zone. Basically, I was too scared of leaving my family. As I was presented with the privilege of attending this camp, this fear slowly deteriorated.

Also, when I attended the camp as a much younger child, I felt greatly comforted by the people of the community because they were going through the same ordeals that I was suffering through; therefore, I could relate to their issues. Since cancer had such a great impact on my family, I couldn't even imagine actually having cancer. Through this group, one thing I realized is how strong my mother is and how she was able to fight her way through. I aspire to acquire the bravery and toughness that my mother has shown me as my role model. One of the great privileges that I now have as a 15-year-old is that I am able to work as a junior counselor for the summer camp. With this, I can gather all the advice

and comforting methods that I had acquired over my years of youth in this organization and share it among the younger children that are just beginning to witness cancer. That causes me to feel good about myself because I know I'm doing my part in the community. Once we come together, we truly know that we are stronger than cancer...together. One may not fight it alone, but with friends and family, you can achieve great things.

As a young child, I really did enjoy playing with my mother in any way you could imagine. I really did love her, and still do to this day. I couldn't even begin to explain how thankful I am to have her with me today and continue to look up to the life model that she presents to me. One thing that I ponder over is that it wasn't only the chemotherapy that caused her to win the fight, it was the welcoming, loving community that allowed her to have faith in herself. And faith is one of life's greatest gifts. She must have felt so welcome and empowered to have that great amount of people who are suffering and have suffered through the exact situation that she had been inflicted with. If that's what a community is doing and that is the way that it is impacting people of that group, then one would say that this is a truly amazing group.

This doesn't only apply to cancer, but a community in which all people have similar troubles and issues is much stronger than one person going through an ordeal. Therefore, since we are team, more like a family, we unite or struggles and we empower each other in ways where we feel the boost of confidence and self-esteem that we are stronger than cancer. One thing that one should know, we aren't a group, we're a family; we're a loving family that accepts all people of all backgrounds and any other personality label that you could imagine. Family...