



# 2018 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

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## In Memory of Patricia

“The disease caused by an uncontrolled division of abnormal cells in a part of the body.” This is the word for word definition of cancer in Google dictionary. Reading and rereading these words so many times have left me numb from their significance and left a imprint in my heart where they will always be remembered. I lost my grandmother to breast cancer in the summer of 2010 when I was just seven years old. Hearing her name or even the term “cancer” no longer invokes an arresting surge of emotions that it once did, but her battle was not an easy one, and I am sure that she gave everything she had to try to conquer it. I could write thousands of pages about visiting her in the hospital or about seeing her in the funeral home for the last time, but the memory that sticks out the most to me and the one that is most cherished in my heart was when I had just turned seven years old, and I was not yet aware of the treacherous road she had ahead of her.

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“Grandma! When can we go out to the garden? I want to wash the peppers like Papa does,” I yelled while sitting on her kitchen tile floor playing with the fringe on the nearby rugs.

The low ceilings echoed my call, and in this tiny one story farmhouse she was sure to be able to hear my question with no problem.

“In a just a second darling.” she responded, poking her head around the corner. “Let me finish picking up a couple things and then I’ll be right there.” With my patience dwindling and my frustration increasing, I tottered over to the living room, making sure to remove my shoes before I dared to take a step on the pristine white carpet. I knew better than to get mud on the carpet, for this was the special living room with couches coated in dust from not being sat on in years and dried stink-bugs collecting in the corners. I didn’t understand why she wanted to keep this room nice and never allowed me to go into it, so I just accepted the fact and only ventured into it when I was desperate for something to do. *Well I don’t hear any police sirens and she hasn’t taken a step out of that bed so I think I’m good for now*, I thought to myself. On one side of the room was a large window with the afternoon sunlight streaming in and on the other stood the untouched couches and a large dresser in the far corner. At the foot of the dresser lay a gray, limp shape, and I scurried over to investigate this new addition to the house.

“What the heck,” I mumbled silently to myself, confused about the furry ball I now held in my hands. On one side there were gray spirals of hair just like the ones my grandma had on top of her head, and on the inside was a tight netting. It wasn’t until years later when I looked back at this memory that I realized that it was a wig. At the age of seven I was kept in the dark about what my grandmother was enduring, including the cancer diagnosis, ongoing pain, radiation, and double mastectomy procedure. All I was told from my dad was that we were visiting grandma for the week, and she had a cold so she wasn’t feeling well. My seven year-old brain had not even heard the word cancer, let alone the meaning and stories behind it.

So with my curiosity piqued, I continued to play with it and try to unravel the mystery behind the fuzzy gray cloth. I sat down on the carpet and ran my pudgy hands through the plastic fibers, squealing as some of the curls tickled my palm. Whatever it was, I could not understand how it looked exactly like my grandma's hair that I so loved to brush when she let me play with it.

"Now, what are you doing, Missy?" Grandma asked me teasingly as she walked into the living room to bust me. "You're just like your dad, you know. He always wanted to be where he shouldn't." As she leaned over to pick me up I caught a whiff of her scent, fresh turned soil mixed with a hint of sautéed onions from today's lunch. Her face, now a mere six inches away from mine, was creased with lines, each having its own story of age and wisdom. Both hands tucked underneath my armpits, and I could feel the weight release from my legs as she slowly raised me into the air.

"Whew. You sure ain't a little girl anymore, are you?" she asked with her southern accent shining through as she struggled to place me on her hip.

"That's right! I just turned seven last week so now I'm a big girl," I giggled, enjoying the attention. It felt good to be held, and the warmth coming from her chest felt comforting on my cheek. With me in her arms, we went outside, and I spent the rest of the afternoon under the warm spring sun, racing in the meadows while she watched me from the porch and resting under the large oak tree in the backyard.

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To this day I still don't quite know why this is the memory that plays most vividly in my head. It could be because it was the last time I saw her truly happy, or maybe because at this time she was still recognizable as Grandma, the one who spent eight hours a day picking vegetables and working on the farm, then made a home-cooked meal, and still had time to play and read me

a story before bedtime. I'm not complaining though. I like the fact that I am able to remember her as a strong and free-spirited person, without the weight of life's struggles resting on her shoulders. She was able to fight cancer and beat it once, but sadly the second time she was not as fortunate.

Two months later after this visit and after being in remission, her breast cancer was back. Not only did it spread throughout her chest, but it had now traveled to her lungs. I wasn't there with her in her final months, but I can imagine that every breath was a struggle, as cancer had a firm grip on her entire body. It was hard to come back and see her, so frail and weak, lying in the medical bed set up in her bedroom. She struggled to lift her head to see me, and her words came out raspy, breaking at the end of her sentences. I didn't recognize this lady that lay in front of me. Where was the strong, opinionated, and capable person that I grew up with? Yet I loved her, and if it broke my heart seeing her like this, it shattered my heart to millions of pieces to hear the news that she was gone. I may have lost my grandmother that summer in 2010, but I can sleep soundly with the fact that I carry her memory with me every day.