



2018 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

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Battle Against Cancer

It was November 4th. That was the day that my parents found out that their son had Stage IV Neuroblastoma. I don't remember much from those long months of treatment; I was only two. Most of what I remember has been implanted in my mind through stories my parents would tell me. The first time there were signs that something was wrong was when I was at my grandmother's house for a visit. When it was time to leave, I was complaining about a pain in my legs; I said I couldn't walk. Eventually, my mom hoisted me up and carried me out to the car. When we got home, my mom made an appointment to go see the doctor. At first the doctors didn't know what was wrong. Then my mom took me to CHOP. That's where we found out.

The following months were filled with chemo treatment after chemo treatment. Those were rough months for my parents. Unfortunately, I didn't see my cousins for Thanksgiving that year; my immune system was too weak. Having grown up seeing my cousins almost every month, it was a blow to me not being able to see them. Luckily, I could see my cousins at Christmas time. After the fourth treatment, I had surgery to remove the tumor that was in my left adrenal gland. I had one final chemo therapy after the surgery. Soon after my birthday in March, I went in for my first bone marrow transplant (a month long stay in the hospital under isolation). Although the transplant was rough, I got a wonderful surprise when I returned home; my baby sister was born on April 24th. Then I went back to the hospital for my second bone marrow transplants. That summer, I went back to the hospital for six consecutive days of focused radiation on the area the tumor was found.

Five years after my diagnoses; five years of hospital visits, blood tests and scans, I was officially cured of cancer on Nov. 4th, 2010. The following summer we hosted a celebratory summer pool party with friends and relatives. It was one of the biggest party I had ever been to. My dad had set up our badminton net, and we had a competitive badminton tournament. My friend Max and I went six games undefeated. With those hard past five years, we all deserved the party.

The thing is, just because you're cured of the cancer doesn't mean everything will be smooth sailing. Every cancer patient has side-effects because of the treatment they went through to save their life. Even before I was considered cured from cancer, I developed hypothyroidism in 2008. I take thyroid medicine every morning and then wait half an hour before I can eat anything. Then in the fall of 2009, I had cataract surgery on both eyes. I had two separate surgeries, one on either eye. After each one, I had to wear an eye patch all the time. Sometimes my eye would get itchy, but I wouldn't be able to scratch it. Having to wear the eye patches was a nuisance, but that wasn't the worst thing that ever happened to me. In the summer of 2010, I had to start taking growth hormones shots each evening. One common side-effect among neuroblastoma survivors is stunted growth. I just recently stopped taking them because I am no longer able to grow much. I'll have to get used to being 5ft-ish for the rest of my life.

Three years later, in May of 2013, I was complaining that my groin area was hurting when I was playing baseball. The pain didn't go away. After an x-ray, we were told to go down to the emergency room at CHOP right away. That was Wednesday night. I had surgery the following day. It turns out that it wasn't my groin that was hurting me, but that I had SCFE (Slipped capital femoral epiphysis). That's where the growth plate on your hip bone slips off the ball joint of the hip. I had a screw put into both hips. I was on crutches for six weeks. After those six weeks, I couldn't run for six months. I don't know which was worse. When you're on crutches, you can't wait to walk again. When you're up and walking, you can't wait to run. I remember coming home from the surgery, I was in a lot of pain. I could only go up and down the steps once a day; in the morning and at night. The rest of my day was spent sitting on the sofa watching movies, playing games, and sleeping. I did get a lot of visitors which was nice.

Between my SCFE surgery in 2014 and now, my parents have noticed that my legs are not straight. One is bow-legged and the other is knock-kneed. Until recently, that hasn't posed a problem. However, in the summer of 2017, we met with an orthopedist to discuss the possibility of getting leg realignment surgery. The surgery was set for later that fall. Unfortunately, during my first game of the soccer season, on September 10th, I dislocated my knee cap and tore off a piece of cartilage. I had surgery to repair that on October 10th. The doctor said that the injury was caused by my leg alignment. Once I had recovered from the repair, I went back into the operating room to have my first leg realignment surgery. The doctor had to cut a wedge out of my femur to realign my leg. I was in the hospital for a week.

I've learned a lot from my past experiences. I've learned to always look at the good aspects in life and not focus on the negative aspects. When I was stuck at home sitting on the couch while I healed from my SCFE surgery, I didn't focus on how bad my situation was, but instead I appreciated the visitors that came and enjoyed their company. My dad always said he can't believe how positive I've been throughout my hardships. There are times, though, that I feel like I just want to crumble. There have been times when I have crumbled. Sometimes I will just open up and cry while my parents sit close to me. They don't have to say anything, just

their presence is enough to make me feel better. Crying helps me release my emotions so I feel better the next day.

One word that people use to describe me is “trooper”. Whenever people hear my story, they always say: “Aw, you’re such a trooper.” When someone says that to me, I always feel slightly embarrassed. I’m not exactly sure why. I know that it’s a compliment, but it’s not like I’m doing anything special. I don’t purposefully try to act a certain way; it just comes naturally. I wonder if I was born that way, or I learned it when I was very young from my past experiences. I was given a shirt that says: “Ever Seen a Hero (front). You Have Now (back) “. I don’t see myself as a hero. I just got hit with an unlucky condition and dealt with it the way I know how to. Like I said, I wasn’t doing anything special, it’s just the way I am. Also, many people say I’ve had a rough childhood. I know they are trying to sympathize with me, but honestly, many other kids have had it way tougher than I have. I’m lucky to have such supportive family and friends. I couldn’t have gotten through half the things I’ve experienced without their help and positive attitude. Some kids don’t have that kind of support. Maybe I can be the “hero” everyone says I am and help kids who don’t have the amazing support I am lucky enough to receive.

I was too young to remember much of the early days of my battle with cancer, but from what I heard, I always had a positive attitude. That positivity has helped me push through my tough times and emerge as a stronger person, as a “hero.” I hope that in some way, I will be able to use my experiences to help others. However, I couldn’t have gotten to where I am today without the help from the doctors at CHOP, my friends, and of course, my sister, Dad, and Mom.