



2019 Ben Strauss Youth Program
Middle School
Teen Essay Contest

3rd Place Winner

Jackson Stuetz

Cancer Struck our Family

My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2011. I did not know what it was at the time. Then I found out because I went to a place called Gilda's Club. I learned I was not alone on this journey. They gave me support. I also learned cancer was not contagious. I learned, but at the same time I had fun. After some time, I got less and less nervous. Gilda's was like my home away from home.

Cancer was exhausting, tiring, and stupid. Even though my mom was told by her doctors that her cancer was cured, unfortunately she was not fully cured. Some cells remained and couldn't be cured. My mom had stage four cancer. The only type of cancer that can be cured is stage one, two, or three. Stage four cancer means you're stuck with it.

Cancer re-entered my life...but worse. I thought it was over, but it wasn't. My dad said it was back. Even though my mom's cancer was back, it did not stop us from doing fun family things. We went to baseball games with people from For Pete's Sake, Flyers games, the Poconos, and the Great Wolf Lodge, which was given to us by my mom's work, Masonic Village.

We went to Disney World in 2012. We were sent there by For Pete's Sake. We had the time of our lives. I got to see my favorite animal in the wild, an alligator. My family saw all of the superheroes in Universal. We rode all of the amazing rides. When we were in Florida, it was amazing. We had a great house that had a pool and a pond. Every day we went in the pool. One time there was even a lizard in the pool screen. We were thankful for this awesome opportunity given to us by For Pete's Sake.

My mom kept on working at Masonic Village nursing home, even though she was sick. I loved visiting her at her work because they would give my sister and me free ice cream. They also had a dog named Roscoe and Bell. We loved playing with both of them. My great grandma and my mummum lived there as well. We enjoyed our time at Masonic Village.

Another great memory I have was in 2015, when my family earned the Gilda Radner Award. My mom won the award, so we went to a Gala with her. We went on stage with my mom, who was so happy, she cried, so my dad did most of the talking for her. It was amazing.

We were thankful for all of the great family moments we had together. My mom started to feel really sick as summer 2016 began. She could do less and less with us. She ended up in the hospital for a week. We spent a lot of time with my grandparents. Going to their house helped my sister and I take a break from the hospital. My Uncle Tim and Aunt Lisa also helped take care of my sister and me during this time.

My mother died September 6, 2016. That day is still the worst day of my life. Cancer got to her liver and you cannot live without it. I remember I was at my grandmom and pop's house because I had slept over their house. We had ice cream, chips, soda... everything seemed great. Until my dad came home from the hospital and said that my mom had died. That moment was like a lightning bolt that struck my heart. Grief, for me, is like walking through hip-high mud. Luckily I am surrounded by great family and friends that will continue to help me through my toughest days ahead.