



2019 Ben Strauss Youth Program
Middle School
Teen Essay Contest

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A Story of Hope

Almost four years ago my life changed. My little sister, Maddie was diagnosed with cancer. I was nine years old when it happened, and my sister was only 7 years old. It all started when my Mom took Maddie to the doctors, from there they went to the hospital. And that is where this story begins.

You see at the time, I was living in a perfect world. Sure, I had heard about cancer, who hasn't? But hearing and experiencing are two different things. My entire family was suddenly thrown into a world of hospitals, oncologists, nurses, diagnosis, chemotherapy, and fear. I was trying to make sense of what was happening. I found myself crying out of confusion and worry. My sister remained at the hospital for a week and I struggled to go back to school. I could not focus on my work and as I was constantly thinking about my sister.

Eventually, things got better. My sister came home and began her treatment to fight cancer. We were all behind her and I was there to support her during this next chapter of her life. Maddie was courageous and strong.

Our family found strength through our faith and with the kindness of friends and family. We were also touched by the generosity of strangers. We felt supported by organizations like the Cancer Support Community. I went to weekly kid support meetings at the Cancer Support Community where they taught me everything I needed to know while forgetting my fears at the same time.

We made new friends along the way. Two friends that stand out were Eli and Sean. Eli and my siblings met at Gilda's, he and his sister were in the Kid Support program with us. Maddie and Eli became friends. He was about the same age as my sister and was a very bright and energetic boy. Sean was also a friend we got to know on our cancer journey. He was in college when we met him. He and my sister got along just fine, despite their difference in age. I tear up as I write these segments on Eli and Sean because I must share that they both died too young due to the cruel unforgiving hands of Cancer. I was left sobbing and wondering why? Why did the world allow this? They didn't deserve to die. They deserved to live, to have joy.

Years past, yet their memories did not. These were my first real losses, and I soon realized the loss changes people. They grow firmer, harder, and you learn to not sweat the small stuff. Things continue to get better as life moves on. Kind organizations helped us get through, but all and all my family and I have been drastically changed by this experience. A happy ending was given to our story. Maddie is in 5th grade and doing well. She loves skateboarding and playing guitar. This experience has led me to the conclusion that people are born with kindness and courage. Over time, these traits develop and become stronger through life experiences. My sisters' cancer diagnosis forced me to develop courage at a young age. I will be a stronger and more courageous person for having gone through it with my family.