



2019 Ben Strauss Youth Program
Middle School
Teen Essay Contest

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How Cancer Took My Friend

Cancer took my best friend when I was young, but not the way you would normally think. When I was in third grade my best friend was Claire. She was a strong little girl, made even stronger by devastating family issues. Her father, Joe, was diagnosed with sarcoma, a rare form of cancer. Cancer had spread rapidly through his body, until it was discovered too late. That was when things started to change with Claire. I did my best to help her stay happy and healthy, but she became sad, and even mad, as her dad's health rapidly declined.

I tried to hang out with Claire more often, so she would know that I was there for her, no matter what happened. By that time, my best friend had changed. Maybe it was lack of attention at home, or her dad being sick, but Claire became angry. One day at recess Claire, another friend Aiden, and I were playing tag. Aiden tagged her, and she suddenly spun around and kicked him in the gut. Aiden and I weren't mad at her, just shocked at how this once sweet girl had changed after her dad fell ill. Other things changed as well. Claire and I no longer told each other our secrets, or gossiped as all little girls do. Another time I simply asked her if she had a crush on Aiden, but she became furious. Although I knew she was stressed, I was hurt because my best friend had lashed out at me. I tried to get her to open up like she used to, but she was isolated on her own little island of unhappiness. Claire had closed herself off, and I didn't know how to help. She tried to put on a happy face most of the time, so I knew she was trying, and I hoped her childhood wouldn't become an unpleasant memory.

I continued to try and strengthen my bond with Claire, but she wasn't the same. Distance grew between us. Her dad was going through chemotherapy, and then the unthinkable happened; Claire's father passed away. I remember vividly Claire telling me that the last things he ate were two dumb-dumb suckers. This made me wonder if Claire had brought them to him, since she also had a sweet tooth. I didn't know Claire's dad all that well, but I knew the rest of her family. It made me so sad to think that the kind family that had invited me over to their house to shoot marshmallows out of a blow tube and sing

karaoke had been ripped apart. I realize now how quickly cancer escalates, until either the person recovers, or death ensues. For this poor family, it was the tragic latter. As a little girl, my best friend continued to drift away, and I wasn't completely sure why. At that time, cancer seemed like a mythical thing, not a real disease that sneaks up on people and takes their last breath away. Like the monster under your bed, not really there, until it suddenly appears. Cancer is a monster under the bed.

After the visitation, Claire's family moved to North Carolina. This was shocking to me, but I was young and thought that I had lots of other friends to replace her. A truly foolish thought because Claire was an amazing girl. I recall the last time that I went over to her house before she moved. We were dancing in the basement, and when it was time for me to leave, I didn't realize that I would never see Claire again. We made silly little kid plans about how we would visit each other every year, but those plans never materialized. I haven't seen her since, and probably never will. Hopefully she has moved on with her life, and has coped with the sadness of losing her dad. I still have one parting gift from Claire, a little duct tape coin purse that says, "A Present To You". I sent her a postcard a few months after she left, but it never reached her. I kept that card hoping that she knew I was still thinking of her and wishing her future happiness. I know the family is strong enough to get through the hard days, and reach for the better ones. Claire and her family made an imprint on my life, and I will never forget their story or my best friend Claire.