



2019 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

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Family Health Scare Teaches Perseverance

February 18th, 2017...the day it all began. I will never forget coming out of work and getting in my dad's car, he said "mommy is at St. Mary's hospital in the emergency room." At any age a child would freak out, but my 15 year old self did not know what to do. I called my mom mom who was at the hospital with my mom. She told me not to worry and that my mom probably had kidney stones. I wish it was only kidney stones. This hospital stay was horrifying for my mom. Her pain level was a 10 and the doctors did not know what to do to help her. She felt as though she was being tortured. She lost so much blood that she also needed blood transfusions multiple times. On February 24th just six days later my mom was transferred to The Hospital of The University Of Pennsylvania (HUP) by ambulance. At this point none of us knew what was going on. Scared is not even a word to describe how I felt during this time. Eventually she was discharged on March 3rd. During this two week hospital stay doctors found that my mom had a hematoma in her kidney. With that being said we did not know how long she had been internally bleeding or what the cause was of this. We were told she just needed to keep getting cat scans to see if the bleeding was going down.

Through this entire time I still went to school even though it was hard and I still went to cheerleading so I would not let my team down. But, always in the back of my mind was is my mom going to be okay? She was in the hospital on my 16th birthday. I still went out and got my permit that day and the first place I drove was to see her. Seeing her in that hospital bed was devastating. I had never seen her like that in my entire life. It got harder to see her when she was transferred to HUP because it is much further. Also, one of the hardest things I had to do during this time was compete at NCA cheerleading nationals in Dallas, Texas. As I worried about my mom every minute of every day I had to leave her home to compete with my team. She knew it was best for me to go, and she still supported me while I was there. I will never forget hearing about her and her nurse watching my performance on livestream. It is a story we still tell people about today. Luckily, she was not there too long and I was so grateful when she got to come home. Although I was still worried because they did not know why she was internally bleeding.

As I said before, every so often my mom had to now go for cat scans. After a handful of them, the doctors could finally see the problem since the bleeding drained itself slightly. My mom was diagnosed with a tumor in her kidney. As serious as this sounds it doesn't stop here. After meeting with the surgeon he came to the conclusion that he had to remove the entire left kidney in order to fully get rid of the tumor. This surgery is called a radical nephrectomy. My mom's surgeon wanted to do the surgery immediately, but she convinced him to let her come see me compete at my final cheerleading competition of the year, The World Championships in Orlando, Florida. Her surgery took place on May 15th, 2018.

Finding out that my mom had a tumor was terrifying. My one and only mom. The woman who does everything for me. My very first friend. What would I do without her? I have anxiety as it is, but now it was uncontrollable. Thoughts of what ifs circled in my head. My school was notified about this tragic time and to take it easy on me. The person I am I continued

to go to school and turn my work in on time. Cheerleading was my get away from the sad and scary life I was living at home.

Now, to discuss her surgery. At this point we did not know whether the tumor was cancerous or not. Even before the surgery though the surgeon did not like the look of it. Her three hour surgery felt like it was days long. The day of I had an AP National English Exam as well as cheerleading tryouts for the new season. I kept in touch with my mom as much as I could since I could not be there, it killed me. My mom was a mess and completely out of it after surgery I couldn't even talk to her. When the surgeon came in the room to discuss the surgery and check on her we found out some new things. During the surgery he removed not only the kidney, but the lymph nodes around it as well. The scariest thing for me to hear was the tumor was way bigger than they ever thought, it was double the size. The tumor was sent to the lab to be tested. Which took much longer than expected to get the results. Plus, the surgeon presented it at the tumor board to determine what type of tumor it was. My mom was diagnosed with a rare kidney tumor known as epithelioid angiomyolipoma. This type of tumor, at least in my mom's case was malignant, and also known to hemorrhage which is what cause the bleed a year before.

I will never forget the look on my mom's face when she answered the phone call and found out the tumor was cancerous. My heart sank, I couldn't believe this was actually real. Her surgery was about eleven months ago and she still needs to get cat scans every six months. This time in our lives although extremely scary allowed me to build character. I persevered through this time and did not let anyone down while doing so. I was there for my mom when she needed me, but didn't just shut down. This situation makes me thankful every day that I am healthy and that my mom is now okay. It is crazy how fast things change and this was my reminder to always be kind and never give up.