



2019 Ben Strauss Youth Program
High School
Teen Essay Contest

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The Strength I Didn't Know I Had

“Grandma has cancer,” is the one sentence I never thought I would hear in my entire life, but I did. She was healthy, she worked hard, she exercised, ate right. It didn't make sense to me. I didn't want to believe it. At first, I just pushed it aside, I made myself believe that she was okay, that she didn't have a tumor growing inside of her. I was just starting High School, I was in Marching Band, in Color Guard, in a lot of things; I wanted her to be there. I know this sounds selfish of me, but, with cancer, you never know the outcome, the person that was there for you one day, could be gone the next. Cancer doesn't just affect the one with it, it affects the whole family. It affected me, because that sentence impacted me, and has changed my life ever since.

At the beginning of my ninth grade year, my grandma was diagnosed with stage 3 Lymphoma, and a week later it turned into stage 4. It started with her not feeling well, and she was taken to the hospital, where they noticed that something was wrong. They had to do many tests, and in result she was diagnosed. Stage 4 is where no one wants to be, and it was a very scary time when we found out. I'm very close with my grandma, and when she told us, it hit me harder than any truck could. I knew what cancer was, and I knew many people passed away from it, and death was the one thing I was most terrified of. She told us she would be getting chemo, and that it was going to be a long journey, in which none of us were ready for.

For the next few months, my grandmother got worse, and it was very touch and go for her. We didn't know if anything was working, and we didn't know what was going to happen. Many chemo treatments and many cat scans later, my grandmother went into remission. It was a very happy time when she did go into remission. Everyone was happy and glad she was okay. We knew she was not 100% better, but she was getting there.

“Grandma has cancer.” is what I heard four years ago. “Grandma has cancer again” is what I heard 4 months ago. Then I felt so alone, so isolated from the world, and very depressed. Today I still feel the same way. My experiences with cancer have been filled with anxiety, fear, feeling useless, and feeling as no one understands me. In the beginning of when she was diagnosed, I walked around with a mask on. I was terrified that if others saw that I was sad, they

would ask me what's wrong. I didn't want anyone to ask me what's wrong; I was still making myself believe that it wasn't true. That was not going to last for long.

I lost myself for a long time, and shut myself off from many people. I took all my feelings and bottled them up, and became like a stone. My grandmother did not even know how I felt about it. Everyone was asking me what was wrong, everyone was concerned, everyone was worried, and one day, I just broke. I broke down crying. I finally let all the feelings I was holding in go. What was I terrified of you may ask? I was scared she was going to die. I finally admitted that I was scared that my grandmother was going to die. I finally realized that she had cancer, that there was something within her growing. I also realized, that I wasn't alone. My friend informed me about Straight Talk About Cancer, a cancer support group through the school that helped teens that have cancer in their lives. I did join, and the day I first started cancer support group, I was a very shy person, and from past experiences of being judged when it came to talking about personal issues and feelings, I was scared to talk about cancer in my life and how it was impacting me. We were all introducing ourselves and talking about our family members who have cancer, and it became my turn. I was so nervous and scared, and as I was talking I was stuttering and shaking, but I got through it. No one judged me, and everyone was accepting and listened. It made me feel as everything was going to be okay and that I could get through it. I'm still in STAC today, and everyday this group helps me get through it all.

Day by day, I take it slowly. Cancer has impacted my life very much. I have had many ups and downs through this journey, and with the diagnosis again I know it's going to be a long journey also. Through the journey however, I have learned that it's okay to be sad, to be depressed, to cry, to feel as you are alone. It is normal. I told my story because within it, is lessons that I never knew I would face. There are many things that I have learned, many things that I will continue to learn, and many obstacles with my grandmother and my family that I have faced. Cancer is a very terrible thing, but in result of having it within my life, I can say, the biggest thing that I have learned is that I am not alone, and that is the greatest strength that I have.