



2019 Ben Strauss Youth Program

Middle School

Teen Essay Contest

Megan Adelman

29 Years and Counting

One day, my mother came home and explained to me that my cousin has been sick before and that the doctors were not sure if she was going to survive or not. MaryPat was twenty-two and I was six. When my cousin, MaryPat, was six years old she went to the hospital with my mother's family and was diagnosed with Leukemia and AML Leukemia. Before my first six years and this moment, I was clueless about my cousin's disease. My jaw dropped and tears started to flood my eyes. My underdeveloped brain did not know that this disease was extremely deadly. We drove to the hospital and I noticed sick children with worried parents. From watching the fear in the children's' eyes I learned to take nothing for granted. At the hospital, MaryPat went into remission, but her cancer relapsed. Cancer sometimes returned in her bone marrow, organs, or blood. Later that day, my mom told me that my cousin had relapsed for the fifth time, with Leukemia.

I had never felt like my problems in life did not matter, until my mother told me about MaryPat. I knew I had to be emotionally strong and that I had to be able to change my life to intertwine with MaryPat's. I knew that if MaryPat wanted to go and see a movie that I did not want to see, I had to deal with it because her needs came first. Additionally, seeing my cousin in the hospital made me never complain about the small things in life. She was going through the unimaginable. I learned to never take advantage of any situations because I never know how you will end up.

As the years passed, there were many ups and downs, and many tears and smiles. Recently, at the age of twenty-nine my cousin's disease escalated to AML Leukemia. Because of her symptoms, she needs chemotherapy treatments and radiation, which causes her to lose her hearing, eyesight, mobility, and speech. MaryPat has been so sick that her body cannot receive any more radiation without her cells dying. Despite the effects and these disabilities, these situations did not confine her. My cousin will never let anyone feel bad for her. She always tells others that cancer is "no big deal". She is optimistic about everything and her optimism impacts my thinking and helps me stay positive.

MaryPat's illness has affected me in many different ways. Her smile and life change my mind about my own problems. For example, when she was very sick she would always downplay her illness. She never made being sick a big deal, and this was something I looked up to. She inspired to stay positive and happy. My cousin showed me that there was light in the darkness. She has taught me to fight back, never give up, and face challenges head-on. My outlook on life has changed hundreds of times after witnessing her sickness.

For the past seven years, my cousin has relapsed four or five times. I will never compare my problems to someone facing near-death experiences every day because nothing is worse than that. She has taught me to graze over the messy details and look on the bright side of every terrible situation I have been in. I have learned to wake up every morning and be thankful that I am fortunate enough to live a healthy life. She is twenty-nine and nobody thought she would ever live to be this old. Her birthday is on April 29th and she will be turning thirty years old. She has defied the odds of life... and cancer.