



2020 Ben Strauss Youth Program  
High School  
Teen Essay Contest

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## Rollercoaster

Cancer. It is such a despicable and villainous disease. It is something that you would never wish on your worst enemy. It makes you rethink life, *what had I done to deserve this? Why me? Why my family? Why my friend?* Cancer does not just kill the people infected with it, but it also kills the family and friends around it.

Before I was 13 years old, cancer was something I had heard about on TV or in books. It felt so distant and unimaginable that I had never expected to come head to head with it. But just when you least expect something, you get smacked in the face with it. My grandmother, the strongest woman I know got diagnosed with Ovarian Cancer in the summer of 2016. I did not know enough about it to understand the effects of it and I thought that a simple surgery and home rest could cure it. My grandmother has always been superior, she survived the Holocaust, World War II, emigrating into two different countries in her lifetime; cancer was just a small challenge she had to face. *What could go wrong?*

I was not prepared for the lengthy journey that I was about to be put on. We had visited four different hospitals in the matter of a few months. From x-rays to procedures to surgeries, I unfortunately had seen it all. It seemed as if every single time my family and I would step into the doors of a hospital, our visit became worse than the last. I started to realize that maybe this is not a tiny challenge after all. My grandmother was constantly passed by to different doctors because they all were not sure how to proceed with her cancer. Some doctors said, “she is too old to get surgery” while others said, “to continue fighting”. What doctor do we believe? I felt hopeless, I hated being there and watching my heroic grandmother slowly become sicker and sicker as the days went on.

As the summer started to come to an end, I was hoping that my grandmother’s cancer was too. My grandmother had come to the conclusion that she would like to receive surgery. It was the week of my mother’s birthday and we had to spend it in a hospital. Her only birthday wish was for her mother to get better and I think everyone could agree with her. I was never a religious person but I had found myself starting to pray to God, asking for his help and guidance. I prayed for my grandmother’s surgery and for her to come out cancer free in the end. When she left for surgery, my whole family sat around her bed, in silence and in shock. The only noise that could be heard was the TV working from the patient next door. After sitting in silence for quite some time, my sister took me down to the cafeteria to get something to eat. As we sat down I asked her, “Will she be okay?” My sister looked up from her pizza and stuttered “Yes”. I felt a sigh of relief in the moment. Years later, I wish that she indeed was okay after that surgery.

When my grandmother came back from her surgery, she had a slight smile on her face. Maybe it was all the morphine that they had given her or maybe it was relief of hoping that this is all over with. A few moments later, the doctor came into our room with the lab results, *this*

*could be really bad*, I thought to myself. I looked around, my grandmother was holding onto my mother and uncle. We all took a few breaths in before receiving the information that could change our lives forever. The doctor explained that they had taken out all of the cancer that they could see, but unfortunately this is the type of cancer that spreads easily and she would need four rounds of chemotherapy. I thought to myself, *huh? Chemotherapy what is that?*

Around a month had passed by and she had started her first round of chemotherapy. One afternoon, I went over to my grandmother's apartment to check up on her. I still remember this day like it was yesterday, she was sitting in her sofa chair with the remote in her hand, watching Family Feud. Her face was skinner, her eyes had undereye circles and was extremely pale. She was wearing a thick, warm sweater and a purple beanie in the middle of September, I guess the side effects of chemotherapy have already kicked in. It was difficult to watch the most loving person become so irritated and bothered by anything that came her way. Nethertheless, I was scared, what had happened to my genuine grandmother? I felt a rollercoaster of emotions running through my body, I felt as if my heart was stabbed by a thousand needles. I thought to myself, *I guess this is what chemotherapy is.*

At the point months have passed by, my grandmother's chemotherapy was making it harder on her. She had lost all of her hair, appetite and will to continue fighting. It was not easy on any of my family watching her this way. We all tried to stay by her and take care of her but she resisted. She wanted to be alone, she did not want anyone seeing her ill. But I would still sneak in and visit her, she did not like us visiting her. She would get annoyed when my mother would bring her groceries. My grandmother would say that she does not have an appetite, and food doesn't taste good to her anymore anyways. I would watch her watch her favorite TV shows with no emotion, she sat still as a rock. Not even a laugh or a smile. She had never been a serious

person, she hardly ever had a contempt look on her face. Now for the second time in life, I had found myself praying to God again to bring my grandmother back.

God had answered my wish, my grandmother was back. After her final chemotherapy, she was transitioning back to her old self. She had started to cook again, look after herself and most importantly, she started to laugh and smile again. I could not have been happier to have seen my grandmother transition back into her routine. She did it, she had beat cancer! The next few weeks were the best weeks I have ever had. My family was eager to get back to where we were before the summer of 2016. Everyone was ready to erase the horrid memories of hospitals and doctors. My grades in school have gotten up, I started to hang out more with friends and there was a constant smile on my face. My grandmother was back and so was I!

February 14th is Valentine's Day, the national day of love. Some might celebrate it by going out to dinner with a partner, some might celebrate it by being with their family. On February 14th, 2017, I was too with my family but not for Valentine's Day. My grandmother had passed away. No one had seen it coming, not a single person. *How did this happen? She no longer had cancer, she finished her chemotherapy and she was cured.* Her family physician had explained that her heart just could not handle everything that had happened to her in the past few months. *Her heart could not handle everything. Her heart could not handle everything.* These words kept running through my mind. My grandmother was strong, she had beat cancer! I could not believe that the same woman that had believed in soulmates, the same woman that still wore her engagement ring 10 years after her husband's passing, the same woman that had only kissed one man in her life had passed away on Valentine's Day. *Was this some kind of joke?*

Unfortunately life is a rollercoaster, when you are low you expect to go high in the air again. But you never really think about going back down once you are high in the air. You love

the feeling of being up and high, smiling and giggling as you look down to see how high you are. In the moment that you do go back down though, you never see it coming. My experience with cancer was an emotional and physical rollercoaster. I hate rollercoasters by the way, just like I hate everything that my grandmother had to go through. She did not deserve to pass by like this, not after everything she had been through. But God has a plan for everyone and my grandmother's plan ended this way.