



2020 Ben Strauss Youth Program  
Middle School  
Teen Essay Contest

# Elana Meltzer

## Living in Cancer's Shadow

I was only 3 when my older sister, Sara, was diagnosed with cancer. My parents have told me the whole story a few times, and it goes something like this: When Sara was 5 years old she was diagnosed with a diffuse fibrillary astrocytoma, which is a type of brain cancer. The tumor affected her right eye making it harder for her to see. She was taken to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) where she was diagnosed and treated with chemotherapy. The chemo caused her hair to fall out and made her very sick.

I don't have many memories of her treatments, but I do remember sitting in the waiting room for hours at a time and taking a lot of trips down to the hospital cafeteria. Every time she got sick or had a fever, she was taken to CHOP where she would stay for observation. A little while after completing chemo, she started physical therapy to help her with her balance and coordination. She finished her treatments in 2012, and is lucky to be living a pretty normal life.

Since my parents weren't always there to take care of me during Sara's treatments, I would often stay at friends' houses, but even when we were at home, Sara often came first. Over the two years of treatments and going to friends houses at least once a week, I had learned to depend on myself a little bit more than your average kid. After she finished her treatments, and still today, she has regular screening MRIs. Each time she has to go, I always want to come with her. Sara always thought it was just because we get milkshakes afterwards, but I choose to go because it's just nice knowing she is doing well.

For the past 6 years, my family has participated in the CHOP Parkway Run/Walk to raise money for cancer research. So far, we have raised over \$50,000 for CHOP with our team, *Strides for Sara*, and hope to raise much more in the future. It makes me feel good to help give back to the hospital that saved Sara's life and help other kids so they can live normal lives too. Sometimes it's hard to think that we've been doing this for so long and we still don't have cures. I'm hoping that if we keep raising money, there will be more treatments available.

Sara's story is pretty incredible; her doctors say it's a miracle that she's doing so well, so she definitely gets some recognition. Sometimes I wish people would acknowledge me too, and what I went through because I didn't have a normal childhood either. Sara has been on the news twice, in the newspaper and won a \$10,000 scholarship from a contest. And while she deserves every bit of it, even girls like me, who don't care for attention as much, still want to be in the spotlight every once in a while. I'll try to convince myself that I'm above it all because I shouldn't be feeling left out, after what she had to go through, but with everyone making a fuss over Sara, I can't help it sometimes.

Whenever my parents tell me the story, they say that Sara had a smile on her face the whole time. So, whenever I am faced with a challenge, I think of her smile and I am motivated by her. My sister may not be the tallest or the strongest on the outside, but she is strong on the inside. There is no doubt, she is a fighter. She fought against cancer. And she won.