



2020 Ben Strauss Youth Program
Middle School
Teen Essay Contest

Emily Schwartz

A Sprinkle of Hope in a Sea of Sadness

I came home from school that day to my mom crying. I asked her why, and she said she had seen a sad movie, and being the gullible 8 year old I was, I believed her. She was scared as well, and I thought it was fine. I just went on with my day, thinking nothing of it. My sister was at her friend's shore house. I went to bed, my mom still crying. I was really worried, and sat awake for a while. I was thinking, 'wow. That movie must have been really sad.' I fell asleep, knowing nothing, not knowing that my life would change forever. It was Sunday, and my sister came home. My mom and dad need to tell us something bad. I was thinking of the worst, and I got it. My dad told us he had cancer. I started bawling immediately, thinking, 'this is it. I'm losing my dad.' My sister said, "We told you to quit. We told you. You never listened to us. Ever."

My dad smoked since I could remember. We always asked him to stop. He never did. We asked for Christmas, birthdays, and just daily in general. He never did until that day he got his test back. My dad had just survived a blood clot, so feeling true joy that your dad is okay felt unreachable at this point. A few doses of chemo, radiation blasts, and a couple months later my Father got a PET scan that showed less cancer. He and my mom were happy.

A couple years later a friend, Emily, told us about this cancer support group, Gilda's Club, and how fun it was. Her Mother survived cancer and their family loved Gilda's Club. We went that night to bake cinnamon rolls, and it was so fun. I had just a

little bit of time to feel really, truly, happy. Suzanne, the baker, she was so kind and helpful to us and the 3 girls, Kyra, Emmie, and Junie were so nice and fun. After that, we went weekly. We had baking, movie nights, and so much fun. Gilda's Club made me feel like I belonged more than usual. I felt real, true happiness. My dad's tests continued to be better, the cancer controlled, not growing. I was so happy, I almost passed out.

It was February of 2019 my dad was acting odd. Looking at my homework, and not being able to read it. My sister was going to her friend's house, and he kept repeating, "What boy? Who?" He had known the friend, Bella, for years. He was also reading badly, so my mom said he had his next test soon. When the day of the test came, we all knew the cancer was back, but not where. The doctors said that it had spread to his brain this time, and I felt so depressed. At least I had my friends. I was going to Gilda's more and more, until I signed up for kid's support. I got closer and closer to Junie, Kyra, and Emmie. I had so much fun with them, so that made the learning, and talking about my feelings easier. I had established a good friend group, and that helped too. There were bad days as well as good ones. I had to be driven to places by my mother's friend, Kelly, when my mom worked, but Kelly was very nice, and caring. She was very helpful too.

When it was controlled again, I felt like it wasn't a big deal, tried to shut the thought out, but at Gilda's, I learned to tell people how you feel. I felt even better after that. I had my friend group, Emmie, Junie, and Kyra; it was so amazing to have so many people support you. I felt so happy, and finally, finally, after countless times of baking, kids support, movie nights, and other fun activities, my dad did get better. I felt like my whole world was coming together again, and I still go to Gilda's, to see my friends, and have fun. Gilda's was one of the crucial steps in making everything better. I had my friends and family to help me. His reading got better and better, and he's doing better now. I still go to Gilda's, and I sometimes get sad thoughts, and I have Gilda's to help, as well as my friends.