



2020 Ben Strauss Youth Program High School Teen Essay Contest

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A Life Unforgotten

Cancer. That word meant nothing to me two years ago. Back then, I knew it was something bad and that it took many lives, but I never saw the full impact it had. Sure, I knew that my fifth-grade teacher had it for a while, and it was obvious from the head-covering she wore, but she had fought hard and won. Even though she told us about her experience on more than one occasion, I never truly understood how cancer affected people's lives.

"Ignorance is bliss," people say. They are right. Sometimes I wish that I was still ignorant.

It was June 2018 and my youth group and I were headed down to Philly to volunteer and spend a week hosting camps for kids in the community. Naturally, we were all pretty excited and ready to help the kids, but something was not right. Our youth pastor, who, at the age of 57, usually had the energy of a 6-year-old, was feeling fatigued and tired. The drowsiness had been going for a couple weeks and after a long conversation with him, a couple other volunteers and I came to the conclusion that it was probably nothing major but suggested that he should go see a doctor. In my mind, it was not something to be worried about. He had relatively good health and lived an extremely active lifestyle. Nothing major could possibly be wrong. On Tuesday night, he went to the hospital. We were told that everything was okay and that he just needed some rest so he decided to remain home for the rest of the week. On Thursday afternoon, after a long, tiring day of camps, we were told the news. When our pastor was at the hospital, he had his blood taken. When the results of the test came back, he was told to immediately go back to the hospital. He was diagnosed with leukemia. Nothing had prepared me for this news. I was in shock. How could someone so wild and energetic have cancer? I thought it was some type of elaborate prank because he really liked to play jokes on people. I refused to accept the fact that

my pastor had cancer. That night, I googled the survival rate of leukemia. There was roughly a fifty percent chance of survival, yet I knew that he was going to beat it. He was strong. He was capable. If anyone could defeat the odds, it would be him.

It was strange seeing him after we heard the news. It seemed like nothing happened at all. Though he was tired at times, he was still the same boisterous, adventurous person. He took me and a friend biking, played tennis with us, and somehow still beat me when we raced. It was like cancer had no effect on him. He was unstoppable. At times, I forgot that he even had it. Gradually, his condition became worse and worse. He required a blood transfusion. After waiting for a couple months, a donor was found! It was an answer to our prayers! Though we knew we could not see him for a while, everything was going to be okay and things would go back to normal. For a while, it was so, and things seemed positive. His body did not reject the blood and he even went back home. In no time, he would be back at church trying to get us to participate in various crazy, slightly dangerous activities and tell us stories of things that he did when he was younger, some which seemed borderline illegal.

But then suddenly, his condition quickly deteriorated, and he had to return to the hospital. In what seemed like an instant, it was decided that no more could be done for him and he was sent back home. You do not truly know what cancer is like and how it affects a person unless you see it with your own eyes. When I went to visit him, the sight I saw was something I never expected to see. Gone was the man that I knew him to be. Gone was the loud, energetic person that was excited to see everyone. Instead, there laid a man, too weak to lift his head, too tired to open his eyes. A man once filled with so much life was now replaced with one that seemed lifeless. But still, even during those moments, the impact he had on others in his life was evident. The house was crowded with family, friends, and people that he impacted. Little did I know, that was the last time I ever saw him. Two days later, he was gone.

There is a point in everyone's life when they discover how cruel life is, and for me, that was it. If there was anyone who deserved to live a full, rich life, it was him. He loved everyone. From the first time he visited our church until the last, he showed so much love to everyone he saw. He cared like no one could and as the result of it, changed many lives for the better, not just spiritually, but also emotionally and physically. Most importantly, he had a family that he loved very dearly. To me, it was so unfair that a person that was so genuine and compassionate had to live such a short life and was in a lot of pain during his final moments.

For someone who described himself as an "average Joe", he certainly made a mark on the earth. Roughly 600 people came to his memorial service, told stories about him, and remembered him. It was amazing to see how one person could impact so many lives in such a short period of time. By remembering his life, a couple lessons were taught to me. One, life is precious and fragile, so love and be a positive light in the world while you can. Two, by doing so, you can change many lives for the better. And three, you do not truly know how much you appreciate something until it is taken away from you. My pastor was a blessing to all who knew him, and he positively impacted many lives. Through his influence on the world, Bryant Geating lived a life unforgotten.