



2020 Ben Strauss Youth Program
Middle School
Teen Essay Contest

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Drowning

Do you know what ineffable means? Something so powerful or emotional you can't describe it. It feels almost ironic that it's the word I'm choosing to describe how I feel.

Many out there are swimming in a sea of tragedy. We each have our own way of surviving. I have a lot of things keeping me afloat, hope is the structure that keeps my head above the water. Optimism is like an oxygen tank if that structure falls apart.

When my mother died of breast cancer I felt like I had neither, like I was drowning. She wasn't supposed to die, everyone was always so hopeful. It happened so fast.

When my mother died, it was all so confusing. I felt lost! I did not understand how life could just go on without her. She fought so hard, only to lose in the end. Life truly isn't fair to take such wonderful people away and leave us drowning alone in the aftermath.

When my mother died, I felt like hope had failed me, like my foundation was gone. I've always been an optimistic and hopeful person, and I had hoped and believed with everything I had that she was going to be okay and it crashed down around me nonetheless.

I felt like I was drowning in an ocean of memories, alone with nothing but darkness and that gut wrenching grief that pulled me down as a storm of silence raged overhead. I never had the chance to go up for air.

It was a cozy Sunday night in January of 2014 when my parents told me and my siblings. I must've been 7, and at the time I had no idea what it even meant. In fact I told some of my friends at school that 'breast cancer' meant light, or not as bad, cancer. I wish that was true.

The first time around she tried to beat the cancer by changing our diets to organic and healthy food, and it worked for a while. Then it got bad again.

She decided to go into chemotherapy. She managed to crack jokes and make us laugh as she explained. She always was good at that.

Her hair did start to fall out, and at a certain point she decided to shave it. She even let my sister shave off a piece.

Life had been like a roller coaster for a while. No one expected that big dip at the end.

I remember clearly that moment a few days prior, our house was full of people who cared about her. My dad pulled me aside onto the porch and told me that she could die. Time stopped.

She had to get better, she could not die. I was still so hopeful.

Monday, November 6th, 2017, 4:25PM. The first thing I did when I entered the bedroom was look at her to see if she was breathing, I do that often if people aren't moving, but this was the only time someone hadn't been breathing.

I couldn't explain to you if I tried all the feelings in the air, in the room. The terror, the sorrow, the pain, it truly was ineffable.

I wish there wasn't a word limit to this essay, because there is so much more to say. My mother was one of the most wonderful people you could have met. She was smart, happy, charming, funny, she always knew how to cheer you up. I think I got that from her.

My mother has always been my idol. She brightened every room, she had a smile you could not ignore. She was always optimistic. She had the best heart, full of joy and love. I have always strived to be like her.

I've always tried to keep pieces of her alive. Sometimes I have done it without realizing. Things she's said, things she's done. I feel like it keeps a piece of her with me.

She didn't deserve to die before she got to see us graduate, or get married, or any of our first kisses. When I think about how much I miss her, I am sure she misses us too.

It took a while, but I eventually learned to hope again, and in the end, my family found something somewhat normal. If there is anything I would want her to know, it's that we are ok. We miss her so incredibly much, but we've found our ok, we can breathe again, and we will make it.