



2020 Ben Strauss Youth Program
High School
Teen Essay Contest

Morgan Corner

My Aunt's Cancer Story

"Will Aunt Pam and Uncle Tom be there?" was the first question I would always ask whenever visiting my extended family. My aunt was so inspirational to me. I thought she was the most confident person, always nice to everyone. Then one day, everything changed.

At the time, she and Uncle Tom were living in Arizona with their 2 dogs, cats, and their own rooster. She had a bad cough that wouldn't go away. They waited for it to go but it never did. Then, as they were getting more nervous that it was something serious, they made an appointment with her doctor. They sat anxiously in the waiting room. They both kept telling themselves, *It's fine. It's nothing serious. We're worrying for nothing.* They got called in, and Aunt Pam took a scan. It was torture waiting for the

results to come back. When they did, it was worse than anyone could ever imagine. The doctor told them that she had stage 4 lung cancer.

Uncle Tom cried.

In the next few weeks, things were tense. Uncle Tom communicated with the entire family on the east coast with updates. After Aunt Pam was told the news, Uncle Tom and her realized she would be more comfortable in Pennsylvania, with her family. Shortly after she was diagnosed, they packed everything up and moved to Media with the rest of the family. My parents pulled me and my siblings into the living room and told us what had happened. They didn't speak at first; my sister, my brother, and I all looked at each other, dazed and frightened. Finally, my mom spoke. She said that our aunt had a serious type of illness and the doctors caught it late. They didn't think there was much that they would be able to do. I looked up, still waiting for more. I needed her to say that it would be okay. I needed her to say that Aunt Pam would be better soon and everything would go back to the way it was. Then, when nothing else was said, I finally got the message. That was it. We weren't sure if she would get better or not. There was a possibility that she wouldn't survive it if her treatment wasn't working. I looked at the floor, picked at my cuticles, and even started to shake a little. By that point, all of us began to understand how serious it was. Tears filled my eyes but they wouldn't come out. We sat there in silence for a couple minutes until my dad got up and walked out of the room to talk with my uncle on the phone. We all got up from the couch at the same time and went to different rooms.

I sat on my bed and wiped my eyes with the back of my hand. I hugged myself and bent over, suddenly feeling very sick. It couldn't be. Not my aunt. She was the bravest person I had ever met. Standing tall, taking crap from no one, but still the sweetest person anyone would be lucky to even know. She had to beat it. My eyes watered again but this time, I let the tears fall onto my rug. I went to visit my aunt whenever the chance came up.

Rain or sunshine, feeling good or feeling bad, having courage or not, every single chance I got, I was right next to her hospital bed. I went to school everyday and tried not to think about her cancer. Sometimes though, the tears still slipped out. I ran out of the classroom whenever I felt them coming because I knew I had to be strong in front of everyone. No one could know what was happening.

By the end of the first year, I had finally gotten used to seeing her in a hospital bed. But my feelings still had not changed. Every time after I left, I went home, silent from the sickening thought that wouldn't leave my mind. *Will she beat the cancer?* Finally, almost 2 years after she had been diagnosed, we got the call:

"She's cancer free."

I dropped the phone. My mind was going a million miles an hour. My whole family came in and asked what was wrong. I could barely get the words out I was crying so hard. When I finally did, my family just hugged each other and knew that everything was ok. The entire family drove straight over to see the rest of my family at my grandmother's house. I walked in and started to cry. However, I think my uncle was the one who was sobbing hardest. That night, it was full of every emotion that a human

being has. Aunt Pam and Uncle Tom kept saying the one thing that kept them going. *It was always faith*, they'd say. I always thought that sounded a little cliché, but as I grew older, I realized they were right.

After cancer, my aunt became stronger and braver which I didn't think was possible. She went back to her life with her job and managed to have 3 kids after her cancer treatments: Grace, Jordan, and Zoey, with whom I am very close. Every time I think about it, I am amazed and astounded by how she pulled herself from the very bottom, from getting diagnosed, to losing her hair, and all those scary thoughts about not making it to the finish line of beating her cancer, to an even better person than who she was before. I absolutely love to talk with her about anything, but especially things that have deeper meaning, because I know she'll know how it feels, considering what she's been through. My aunt is one of my biggest role models. She's the one who taught me that nothing can get in your way, absolutely nothing.