



2020 Ben Strauss Youth Program  
Middle School  
Teen Essay Contest

# Norah Levinson

She Always Seemed Happy  
- Living with my Mother's Cancer

She always seemed happy. I always had great memories with my mom. Her hair was long and beautiful. Then on Thanksgiving night 2015, it all changed. She had gone to the doctors because of a simple rash and came back diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer! She had only told my little brother and I a couple of days later. I hadn't let my mom in my room because I thought I was in trouble, so my dad had come into my room later that night. When he told me I was very worried and wasn't sure how to feel. I didn't really know what to expect.

When she started treatment she was always in her bed and barely got up. My dad had told us we weren't allowed in the room. That was really hard for me because I barely got to see her. She would constantly throw up and have awful side effects of the chemo. Although times were tough I knew she could beat it.

One night while my mom was laying in bed I went to join her to watch some tv and spend some time with her. While we were watching tv she took her temperature and had a 104-degree fever! She had to get to the hospital but I didn't want her to leave. I started yelling and crying out because I finally got to spend my time with her and it was all ruined. I still feel awful to this day for doing that.

Luckily after a year of treatment, she had recovered! I was super happy. I knew she could beat it. It was like the phrase that she liked “Just because something bad is happening doesn't mean good things can't happen.” And that's exactly what happened. That phrase describes the journey of how awful things happened, but suddenly got better.

Everything got worse. Two years later she got tested for cancer, again. This time the cancer came back, but much worse. She had stage 4 breast cancer now! Everything just got so much worse, I was 8 years old and didn't really understand what was happening. It was all so confusing for me, she had just gone through a year of treatment and had to do it all over again! I was angry and worried because everything was much worse.

It was scary for me because my mom had bruises from all the shots, and would have to go to the doctors a lot. While some things got better others got worse. It was bad enough that my mom had to stay in her room all day, but then she had to start going to a doctor in Philadelphia every day and that was almost 2 hours from our house! So because my aunt Aunt and Uncle's house is closer to the hospital she stayed with them for almost a whole month! And she only visited us on the weekends.

Later after treatment was done, she had gotten radiation to make sure she couldn't get cancer ever again. And even though the journey was tough Gilda's club, Camp Kesem, and support from my friends really helped me get through this! Remember how I said good things can also happen? Because of my mom's stage 4 breast cancer, we got to go on amazingly fun vacations, including Myrtle Beach & DollyWood! Those trips were my favorite by far.

The links to the organizations that helped us are below:

Camp kesem: <https://www.campkesem.org/>

Myrtle Beach: <https://www.littlepink.org/event/myrtle-beach-sc/>

DollyWood: <http://www.lesliesweek.org/program>

“Just because something bad is happening doesn't mean good things can't happen.”

The experience with my mom having cancer, although really tough and bad, made me feel and realize how appreciative I am for having an amazing and loving family, living in a free country, having access to science and health care that saves lives, and living my life to its fullest.