



2020 Ben Strauss Youth Program
High School
Teen Essay Contest

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The Power of Positivity

A few blocks west of the coffeehouse chain Starbucks, walking distance from the historic basketball arena known as the Palestra, in the heart of University City, sits the world-renowned Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. Inside the narrow hallways are doctors and nurses bustling to tend to their next patient. My room is aligned amongst endless other rooms like cars at the Lincoln Financial Stadium parking lot. The dividing curtain reflects beautiful colors as the sunlight shines through the open wall of windows. Autumn brings a change of colors upon the trees’; leaves are scattered throughout the courtyard. Inside the stark, sterilized room is standard furniture consisting of a bed, bedside table, chair, and, of course, a TV. Pictures of my close family and friends are hung to remind me of the memories that have suddenly come to a screeching halt.

I heard the doctors, nurses, and medical students in deep conversation about my prognosis. It was all so foreign to me. I listened, fearful and confused, as they talked to me about my medical procedures and test results. I didn't have to see tears in my parents' defeated eyes to know that they were crying on the inside. My parents were told I had cancer; something no parent should have to hear. I immediately endured a rigorous schedule of intense chemotherapy. There would no longer be time for some of my favorite activities including going to the playground, crafting or playing sports. Worst of all, Kindergarten would be put on hold and I wouldn't get to ride the bus with my friends.

Soon after my diagnosis, I laced up my boxing gloves and quickly developed a two-component strategy to compete. The first component was a plan of action to stay happy. I started by covering my hospital room with my favorite symbols: smiley faces and rainbows. In my free time, I colored these symbols as a mission to keep my spirits up. Together they turned my dull hospital room into a place of beauty, peace, and serenity. Once my personal space was transformed, I developed the second component of my strategy: stay focused. I redirected my attention to helping others, whether it be something as simple as smiling at a stranger, crafting a bracelet for my favorite nurse, or being an ear for a friend.

As I sat in my hospital bed, I repeated to myself, "red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple." The colors of the rainbow. I was crafting bracelets out of beads and was determined, despite my exhaustion, to complete the task at hand. Countless IV's and needles left my fingers numb and my arms sore, but I was focused and had a purpose. There was no turning back now. I was obsessed with becoming an entrepreneur.

Stringing vibrant beads in unique patterns to create symbols of hope, was my mission. I started making a few bracelets for my friends and family, and before I knew it requests were

coming in from all over the hospital. I began charging two dollars per bracelet to be donated as a contribution to the hospital's tradition of providing children with the best possible medical care. Soon after, I was designing nearly fifty bracelets a day and distributing them to local stores for sale. I discovered that burying myself in beads was therapeutic. Pushing myself to fulfill orders was not a game to me; it had to do with me getting better.

The happiness I experienced by raising money for the hospital significantly outweighed any physical pain I endured. I was controlling my destiny - turning a negative into a positive. My mind, my body and my spirit were being pushed to the limit. But with each bracelet, I felt stronger.

As I sat in my hospital bed, I repeated to myself, "red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple." This bracelet would be customized for me. With beaded letters, I spelled out my nickname, "Rock". A rock is defined as strong, solid, and unchanging. Stone formations often symbolize the passage from one life to the next, but I was given a second chance in mine.

I am a cancer survivor. Although the battle was tough at times, in the end, I came out victorious. Raising money for children with cancer is my passion. It saved my life. I will continue to fight to ensure that someday childhood cancer will have a cure. Battling leukemia at the innocent age of five is something that no book could ever teach; however, we can all make a mark in life – and this was the start of mine.