



2020 Ben Strauss Youth Program
High School
Teen Essay Contest

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The End of the Road

After sitting in the toasty warm car for a while, I get out into the frigid heart of a winter storm. With my sister trudging behind me, we follow our parents to the entrance of the Abington Hospital. I abruptly stop in front of the entrance. *Something feels off. Why does my dad have such a sorrowful face? As if the whole world has crumbled into ashes. As if someone has perished.* My heart punches my chest in a steady beat as my mind goes blank like an empty canvas, untouched and unsettlingly white. Milky white snow and toothpick thin rain fall down like a swarm of infuriated bees. The vivid pale moon covered behind the thick wool gray clouds that covered the starry sky like a massive long blanket. With her piercing cold hands, the wind tugs my cocoa brown hair in all directions and makes me shiver to the bone. Unable to endure the freezing cold any longer, I walk inside.

My frozen body melts into the embrace of the cozy indoor temperature like a snowman melting by the radiance of the sun. My parents and my sister had left me and went to the second floor, but I didn't need their guidance. After all, I've come here so often with my father that I practically knew the interior of the hospital. Boarding the elevator alone suffocated me, drowning me in confusion and worry. Anxiety towered over me, making me shrink in fear. I clutch my small baby hands together. *Everything is going to be okay. I'm sure it's like the usual. The whole family sees my uncle, we tell him what we've been up to, and then we leave with the thought of he's going to be out soon.* Stifled by the tight confined space of the elevator I waited, what felt like eternity, for the elevator to arrive at the second floor. When the doors slid open—when I thought I could take some time to breathe in after internally suffocating in the elevator—I see one of my aunts.

It was the first time I had seen her so grief-stricken. She sat in the waiting area with her plastic ebony black glasses on one hand and a delicate tissue placed to her eyes. She was crying violently, like a mourning banshee. I slowly begin to walk away from my aunt, walking closer to the room my uncle was in. My legs began to feel stiff and weighed down as if I was holding the weight of the world and heavens on my shoulders. Anxiety gripped my hand like a child clinging onto their mother. My pace slowed with each miniscule step I took as my heart banged inside me like drumsticks striking smoothly against the plastic top of a drum. Within minutes the door to my uncle's room stood before me, the only barrier keeping me apart from my uncle. I hesitantly grasped the cold slick metal doorknob. Anxiety loomed over me again. His intense stare stopped me from making any movement. *Maybe I shouldn't go in after all. Maybe—No I'm not going to let anxiety get the best of me.* Inhaling deeply, I slowly turn the doorknob.

It was deathly quiet. A pastel blue curtain hung across the little passage inside the room which led to where my uncle lay. Dark silhouettes of my relatives were displayed on the curtain, contrasting against the light-toned blue. As I leaned close to the curtain, barely touching the cloth, I peeked through the straw thin gap where the two ends of the curtains met. My relatives surrounded my uncle's bed like tall thick baobab trees, blocking my view. I attempted to look through the gap at different angles hoping that my uncle will be in my line of vision, but it was no use. Dejectedly, I stood behind the curtains, matching the silence of the melancholy atmosphere. My mom then takes notice of me and quietly walks over to me.

“You're not supposed to be in here. Go and stay at the waiting room,” my mother whispered. Her lukewarm breath tingled my ears.

“Why can't I stay and see uncle?” I faintly whispered back.

My mother gave no response and only silence. I looked at her square in the eyes. They were coffee brown and shined against the florescent light, making them look like a polished glass marble. Tears welled up in her eyes as she softly mutters,

“Your uncle passed away from stomach cancer just a few hours ago—”

Her words mushed together like different colored paints being mixed together into a muddy brown mess. I stood there in denial. *He was just getting better yesterday so why— why did you take him? Each night I prayed—No I beseeched for him to be out of the hospital. So, why did you whisk him away from the face of the earth. Why did he have to go?* My legs move away from the room on their own as if I was controlled by a demon.

The news hit me as if I was a deer mindlessly and hesitantly crossing the barren street only to be bashed and run over by a car. I inattentively walked to the waiting room where my

other relatives sat. I lifelessly sat down on a hazel brown chair like a marionette collapsed on the ground that had its strings cut off. Tears stream down inside me, and none dared to fall out of my eyes. Then I began to uncontrollably laugh as sorrow's scorching hands wrap around my throat and choke me. The shock had hit me so hard that it felt like the world flipped upside down. Grief embraced me into his arms cradling me, comforting me.

I sat there defeated. No matter how much I wanted to run away from the truth and reverse time to when he was still alive—to when my mom noticed his symptoms, but my relatives said he was fine. To when he was still breathing out of his, now lifeless, body or to his last breath just to say one last goodbye. Back to his youth when he was still an unbroken hourglass and grains of sand flowed life and time through him. But now the hourglass was broken and there was nothing I could do to fix the millions of shattered clear glass shards back together. His death wasn't as painful as the thought of him never coming back. The thought and truth that he was gone scarred my heart. Which hurts me the most... forever.