2022 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

Aidan Henkel

Unbreakable Oath

“If we are linked by blood, my love is an oath unbreakable by any action fathomed possible. Whether I have never met you, or I am not familiar with you yet, you are still my blood and I allow my love and unknown passion to flow through the veins feeding your heart. I love you. No matter what happens, I love you.” These are the words I shared with her on one of her first days of chemotherapy.

My aunt has brain cancer. My brain has been fuzzy since I had found out, but I think she’s had it for a couple months now. To think that my aunt is living, unwillingly watching her brain eat itself away. I cannot explain the mix of emotions I have experienced over the months I have been living with this on my shoulders. I walk everyday with the weight of my anxiety and pessimistic thoughts of her death. Although I have only met her a handful of times, it feels like she is my best friend.

Just a short time ago, I had been ecstatic. My aunt had beaten cancer. Brain cancer of all things. The way that I felt for a person I did not know was something I had never felt before. The ecstasy and tears of joy flowed like a white-water river crashing against everything in its path. My mother had felt the same way, if her feelings were not more intense. I wanted to congratulate her and visit her, do things with her that I had always wanted to do and share with her. Experiences I pleaded to have with my distant family; one of my only present branches on the tree of life that pushes and connects us together. But I had kept quiet. Something inside of me said that something was wrong. Very wrong.

I could not put my finger on what it was or whether or not it was related to my aunt, but in the following days I had started to cease from coming out of my room and I felt like I smiled less, keeping my guard up and watching for someone’s next move. The thought of all the terrible scenarios made my insides feel alien. Just trying to figure out what was missing. I felt I could no longer feel until I could know what was going to happen, or maybe I was just going insane with everything going on or the returning pessimistic thoughts. And I was right. And my mother was hysterical. The doctor was wrong; cancer had returned worse than before. Or maybe it had never left in the first place. But the doctor was wrong. I say this so I am able to blame this on someone other than Him.

It is March 3, 2022. My aunt is still alive, and she tells me she is doing okay. I do not believe her. I spoke to her on the phone; it was amazing talking to her. I felt like I was flying when I first heard her voice bounce through my head. Unfortunately, not meaning to be harsh or rude, but I suspect that she will die within the year. Brain cancer is not something that people can brush off or pick an easy fight with. If you lose your brain, you lose your life. I hope to God that she lives so I can finally get to know my mother’s sister, my family, my blood. But I cannot guarantee, and I have serious doubt. It is hard to say such things out loud, but I refuse to lie to myself, as it is clear due to the condition that she is in.

She is strong, but it is entirely not up to her. She is doing the best that she can, but she knows that her chances are slim. My mother refuses to believe that, and I pray with everything that I have that she is right. Many days I reminisce the short periods I have spent with her throughout my life, and I miss the many smiles she beamed toward me like the sun was reaching out to warm me. The way she spoke gently comforted me. She always used to make me feel like I could trust her with anything, and she is one of the only people in my family to ever reach out or be interested in someone who shared their DNA. She is an angel sent from up above, and her work has done wonders on the family she was blessed with. I thank those up above for letting her make such an impact even when I didn’t know her. Stories and tales about the fun times my mother and her shared together, like a piece of history never spoken or shared. A tomb of secrets, never shared publicly, but only for those begging to listen.