2022 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

Allison Ashby

Every Moment Matters

10:10 pm on January 29, 2017. The moment that forced me to grow up. A moment that I will never forget. The declaration of my father’s death. This moment influenced me to change my mindset on life. It made me realize that life ends. No one lives forever. The time we have here on earth is valuable, and nobody knows when that time will be up. Prior to my father’s death, I never had any emotional heartbreak. I never had to stand next to someone in their last moments on earth. I never had to hold hands with someone who held my hand back looser and looser until I was the one holding their hand. I never had to see the life leave someone’s eyes. As much as I wish he were still here with me today, my father and his death inspired a new understanding of life and the things that truly matter within me.

June 10, 2015. I remember the day vividly. It was my fifth-grade field trip to Gettysburg, and I was so excited that my dad would be coming with me. However, he woke up that morning super sick and could not leave the bathroom. My mom took him to the emergency room, and the doctors ran test after test. I went on the field trip, came home, and he was still at the hospital. I had a sinking feeling that something was not right. When he finally came home, he told us that he had stage four colorectal cancer. The doctors said they were not expecting him to live long, for cancer had metastasized through his vital organs. It would slowly take over his body until it was too powerful, and his body would give in. For my twelve-year-old self, this was something that I could not wrap my head around. My father, who had a long life ahead of him just days before his diagnosis, had a ticking time bomb placed within him. The person I was closest to on this entire earth would soon no longer be here. Every day from the start of my father’s diagnosis mattered. Every day was one day closer to the inevitable. It made me realize that although the future is important, it may never come. No person on this planet knows how much time they have left.

My father is an inspiration to me. He fought for his life every second until it was taken away from him. His perspective on his diagnosis was the most admirable thing I have ever encountered. He said that if it took his life to get even one other person to understand their purpose here on earth, it was all worth it: the long hours at the hospital, the uncertainty of what the future will hold, and the immense pain. He was a God-fearing man and believed that what God had in store for him was better than anything he could ever imagine. He shared his testimony with hundreds of people through his final days with us. Towards the end of his journey, his body was rapidly deteriorating. His body was failing his soul and mind. On his last day, my father managed to tell me that he loved me. He had not spoken for several days and was unable to move. He spent the last of the life he had in him on me. I will never forget that.

The period following his death was the hardest thing I have ever gone through. The grief of losing the person I admired the most was almost too much to bear. His death mentally and emotionally drained me. However, it left me to think about my own life. Wondering what my future would look like knowing I could follow my father’s fate. I decided then that I would make life worth living. My father inspired me to focus on what truly matters. He always put his family first. The last month he was on earth, he made sure he celebrated my brothers’ birthdays and saw my brothers and my baptism. He dedicated the last two years of his life to making the most of the time he had left with me, my brothers, and my mother. He encouraged me to focus on what would add to my life and not take away from it. He helped me realize that I want to put my time and energy into helping others. Without my father, I would not be where I am today.