2022 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

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Cancer

Cancer by definition is described as uncontrolled cell growth. These abnormal cells go straight past cell cycle checkpoints, ignoring apoptosis, regulated cell death. The cells cause tumors, which is a solid mass of tissues. The tumors associated with cancer are malignant. This growth can start anywhere in the body and spread. This disease can be fatal and there is no cure. Although there are treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and surgery. These treatments can be dangerous and there is no guarantee it will work. The Facts & Figures annual report states “There will be an estimated 1.9 million new cancer cases diagnosed and 608,570 cancer deaths in the United States.” This is one year. In one year there are 608,570 deaths from this horrific disease. Every friend and family member associated with someone who gets diagnosed with cancer is affected by this horrible disease in one way or another.

Twenty years ago my aunt was diagnosed with cancer and ten years before that my grandma was. They both had breast cancer. Although I wasn’t alive during these hard times, I know it was a struggle. My grandma and aunt both had chemotherapy, losing all their hair and battling through the hard treatment. They were both fighters, surviving cancer. These times most definitely put a damper on my family. They were all worried, hoping for the best, but still anxious for the worst. Everyone stayed positive through this setback, praying and visiting when they could. They were both fighters, survivors, winning the fight with this disease.

A few weeks ago my aunt was again diagnosed with cancer. The doctor found tumors all in her stomach, supposedly from the breast cancer she had such a long time ago. This is stage 4 cancer, cancer that metastasizes or spreads throughout the body. Hearing this news really upset my family. We all visited her in the hospital. Seeing her in pain, laying there, made me feel helpless. I try so hard to help everyone to the best of my ability, but being 16 and not a doctor, I just had to sit there. We’re all very close and losing a loved one is something no one wishes for. Having lost an uncle a year ago was extremely tough on the whole family. It’s still hard sometimes now, being more than a year after.

Four days ago, the doctor announced that her cancer is terminal, meaning there is no cure and the best they can do is help her survive. This announcement caused a shock to everyone. We all knew it was bad, we all knew she was in pain, but having the news out there confirmed it was very serious. These past few weeks have been extremely tough on me. To try and distract myself, I took on crocheting. Having something to do with my hands helps keep my mind busy. Another distraction I’ve found is music. I got a ukulele and taught myself how to play. This really helps me focus my mind on something else. These distractions, however, are temporary. The struggle and pain is still there, they just help me forget for a split second. When I do remember it causes immense sadness and stress. I realized that I am falling behind in my classes, simply from the anxiety and worry this causes. She’s still with us, but the thought of losing her stays in my brain. I love her so much and I really don’t want to lose her.

My aunt is such an optimistic person, even being with this horrible disease. She is a true ball of sunshine, who loves to dance. A little while ago when I visited her in the hospital, she played “Three Little Birds” by Bob Marley at full volume, not caring what other people were thinking. She was just having a good time dancing and singing. She loves nature and lives on a 17 acre property full of woods to hike around. Whenever I’m over there I always have a blast. I remember one of our family parties when I was around 5. All of my cousins and I played hide and go seek on her property. Me, being the youngest, of course did not win, but just being engulfed in nature and woods, running around and simply being a kid was awesome. I miss those times, when everything was simpler.

Cancer is a disease that eats people whole. It’s a deadly disease that causes pain. Having this experience of my aunt being affected by cancer, shows me that this is not a disease to take lightly. Most everyone knows this is a horrible disease, but they don’t know to what extent until they lose a loved one or have it themself.