2022 Ben Strauss Youth Program

Middle School

Teen Essay Contest

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My Story

When my brother was around six years old he was diagnosed with brain cancer. It came as a shock to my entire family, but at the time I was four years old and wasn’t really aware of what was happening. As I got older I started to understand a little more. Despite the circumstances everyone was really supportive, even my friends from school. Even though my friends were supportive about the situation, I don't think they really understood it. My family and I needed someone to talk to who was either in the same or a similar situation.

My parents eventually found resources like Make A Wish, and support groups like Gilda’s Club. We made a bunch of new friends and got to enjoy a lot of new experiences. We even got to visit the Galápagos Islands. It was a really cool experience, and I would go back in a millisecond. Despite the fun experiences, there were also experiences that were not as fun. They weren’t as fun for my brother, more so.

Even with all the treatments, in summer of 2016 my older brother passed away. I was at a summer camp for the day so I didn’t know until after. I was devastated about it. Not one of my family members wasn’t. I wasn’t very outwardly emotional about it though. I never have been outwardly emotional, about anything.

After my brother passed away, I still went to support groups for a while. Talking with other people helped for the most part. I tried not to let my sad emotions get in the way of the things I enjoyed, like reading, drawing, or even more, music. I started playing piano in kindergarten, and in fourth grade, I picked up the cello, which I've really come to enjoy.

I not only play a lot of music, I listen to a ridiculous amount of it too. I mostly listen to indie pop and rock. I like that kind of music because you can really learn more about the artist just by listening to their lyrics. The songs are the artists own, and not fine tuned for the public, like mainstream music. I think of it as kind of a soundtrack for your life. I would love to make my own life soundtrack, but first I would need to actually learn a bit more about music.

My interests aside, my point was that I didn't let the miserable emotions get in the way of my life. I was sad, incredibly sad, and of course, I still miss my brother. But that loss didn’t stop from enjoying the things I knew I could still enjoy. I got to have a bunch of fun experiences with my brother, and I’ll have even more fun experiences even without him. I’ve learned that life goes on, and you gotta catch up with life to actually enjoy it. I’m not saying to just forget about those who’ve passed, just to enjoy your own life. I know that’s what my brother would’ve wanted for me.