2022 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

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Again

My heart drops out of my chest as my eyes meet the black stains of mascara dripping down the sides of my mom’s pale cheeks. It is as though the only thing that matters in life is what the letters spitting out of her mouth combine to say. As a gust of wind cuts through the knots in my hair like scissors, the feeling of worry once again swirls around in my stomach. The muggy air mixed with the sweat dripping down the sides of my forehead burn my skin. At that moment, I can taste the buttery bagel that I ate for breakfast, progressively maneuver its way up my throat. While the wails of my mother seem to burst my eardrums, I try to focus on the murmurs coming from the phone within her shaking hand.

As my shoes brush the rigid hardwood floor in my kitchen, I can feel the little crumbs from breakfast seep into the holes of my white crocs. The smell of burning popcorn lingers in the air while I clutch onto my ice-cold phone. Unexpectedly, a huge fly swarms around my head and seems to buzz as loud as a ringing alarm clock. When I look up from the ground, I can see my mom’s bright blue eyes gazing down at me as I pick the skin around my bitten down fingernail. Without hesitation, I approach my mom, who remains silent as she glances down at the dark screen on her phone. Then, in a quick turn of events, the phone that had once been as dark and lifeless as a cloudy night sky, now rings to the sound of a symphony as colors flash across the screen. “Hello,” my mom gulps as she tries to sallow the fear in her squeaky voice, “who is this?” Despite my efforts to try and figure out who the muffled voice on the other line is, I am left wondering why my mother sounds so frightened. As my curiosity eats away at me, I eventually burst out, “Who is it?”

“Mikayla’s mother,” she quivers as her voice seems to go up another octave.

*Why would she be calling my mom?*

As I touch my mom’s shaking hand, I see a glistening tear pour out the slit of her eye and make its way down the side of her motionless face. Instantly, my knees begin to lock, and my face turns as white as a ghost. During that second, the humidity of the air hits me like a punch to the stomach and leaves me feeling as though a word cannot slip out of my mouth. As the hazy chatter from the phone seems to surround me, I can vaguely hear my mother’s voice hysterically bawling, “The cancer is back.”

*I can’t believe this!*

My mom then grips her sweaty hands around my body and pulls me into her chest. As my nostrils become overwhelmed with perfume, I try to utter a few words. “It will be ok,” my mom cries, “she is very strong”

 “I know,” I softly whisper under my breath.

However, a little voice inside the innerworkings of my brain says otherwise. The world seems to spin around me as tears fill up my eyes leaving me blind. I zone out everything around me and I am left in complete and utter silence with my thoughts. My brain, that seems to be working a mile a minute, fully turns off and I feel all the food sloshing around in my stomach gradually creep its way up into my mouth. The warmth of my mother’s hug is the only thing that keeps me centered as the rest of my soul seems to drift away in the wind. At this split second in my mother’s arms, I realize that my life will never be the same.

Now looking back on this moment, I am proud that I was able to handle myself this well, especially at my young age. Before this moment, I never really knew what true pain was; I didn’t know that pain was anything other than just being physically hurt, like having a broken arm. Finding out that one of my close friends had cancer for the second time changed my life in so many ways that seem impossible to put into words. Mikayla always tries to look at the positive side of things and believes that everything happens for a reason, which is something I still struggle with. This is because whenever I think about this concept, it makes me wonder why someone as sweet as her, had to go through so much pain and suffering.

Overall, the second that I figured out what was happening, I was immediately prompted to think about my life in a new way and how quickly everything can change. We went from going on long bike rides as the sun set, to sitting beside each other on hospital beds. This traumatic moment caused me to set my priorities straight in life and to think about what really matters. Rather than worrying about all the tiny things that seem important in the moment, we, the human race, should think about things in the long run and about the people that we truly care about. Overall, the morals of living every day to the fullest and taking risks apply here perfectly. I will never know anyone as strong, brave, and kind as Mikayla and I am so grateful that I got to be a part of her support team. She is the complete embodiment of courage, and I am so lucky that she is still with me today.