2022 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

Lylah Pompetti

One of the Many

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women worldwide. Each year in the United States, approximately 255,000 cases of breast cancer are diagnosed in women. After getting breast cancer, the survivor has a 3% to 15% chance of a breast cancer recurrence. My lovely grandmother, Charyce Pompetti, was, unfortunately, part of this percentage. She was a victim of breast cancer not just once but twice. Cancer and its effects unleashed a storm of emotions on my family and me. At a young age, cancer made me realize the things I took for granted, such as having a grandmother. I no longer was able to make memories with my mom-mom, no more boating trips with her, and no more Thanksgiving pumpkin rolls were made together. The disease changed my life and took away my closest friend.

In 2002, Mom-mom Charyce received her first breast cancer diagnosis. Mom-mom Charyce was fifty-three years old at this time. I had not been born at this point, but I have received an abundance of information from relatives about how cancer affected my grandmother. Her cancer was found in a mammogram scan. Each year getting a scan was a top priority of hers, and that year her consistency paid off and the cancer was found in its early stages; she would later undergo various treatments at Tunnell Cancer Center. Mom-mom Charyce had one chemotherapy treatment and two radiation treatments. She would later get surgery to remove the lump in her breast known as a malignant tumor. From then on she was “cancer-free”. After Mom-mom Charyce beat cancer, she earned the name “Mom-mom” from her three grandchildren, two girls, and one boy. Even though she lived a state away from my family, she made sure she was a present grandmother. My family would often drive down to Lewes, Delaware, to see her. She also played her part and made an effort to see us by coming to Pennsylvania on weekends and for Christmas. The Christmas visit became an enjoyable tradition for our family. Mom-mom Charyce would spend the holiday season at my house. I did not know my seventh Christmas would be our final one together.

After staying consistent for twelve mammogram scans, Mom-mom Charyce missed a scan in 2014. In August of 2015, my grandmother would walk into Tunnell Cancer Center for a thirteenth scan. After the appointment, she left with heartbreaking news. Mom-mom Charyce was informed that a second tumor was detected in her breast. After 13 years of having clear scans, it was uncovered she was no longer cancer-free. The doctors told my grandmother her breast cancer was treatable, however, they would later find out, after many misread scans, her breast cancer spread into her bones. Instead of fighting one war, she was fighting two. Within a month of her initial diagnosis, Mom-mom Charyce became severely weak. She was incapable of standing up on her own, she didn't have the ability to take a shower without assistance, Mom-mom also stopped eating because she was too tired to swallow her food. My father was told that she had six months to live, so he made a quick decision to transport his mother from her home state to Pennsylvania. On September 25, 2015, Mom-mom Charyce arrived at our house to spend her remaining time with my family. Constantly throughout the day, she was to be monitored. Hospice immediately jumped in to help take care of her. Family members I had never seen before flooded my house, eager to see my grandmother. With all the chaos, my family members stopped allowing my siblings and me to see our grandmother. Even before she took her final breath, we were no longer involved in her life.

It was obvious she was ready to let go. Only a tiny thread was keeping her from ripping away. I knew it was her time when she didn’t have the ability to swallow her medication. The pills would sit in her mouth for hours and hours, slowly disintegrating into her tongue. My eight-year old mind was pretty confused at this time:  *Isn’t it easy to do something so effortless such as swallowing a pill?* I understand now why she wasn’t able to do this simple task. Mom-mom’s mind wanted to, but her body did not have the energy to do so. The doctor's lengthy prediction of 6 months, now turned to a week and a half. Eleven quick days after she arrived at my house, she passed away. Moments before she let go, my dog, Huggo, walked up to her bed and took a big inhale just as she was taking her own last breath. He sensed it was her time to go. On the morning of October 6, 2015, the thread ripped. God gained an angel that Tuesday.

A disease is viewed as a condition that affects an organism negatively. I see a disease as a curse that changes people's lives. The disease that negatively changed my life was cancer. My mom-mom was the unlucky one in twelve people that developed two types of cancer at the same time. Throughout all of her struggles with the disease, I was lucky enough to be seen as her get away from reality. I was always unafraid to spend time with my grandmother, no matter what the conditions were. On the days I wasn't forbidden to see her, I would observe her. Most of the time she wouldn't acknowledge me, when she did, a smile would appear on her face. Though, every time I laid eyes on her my stomach would unsettle, she looked completely numb. Morphine was one of the only things stopping cancer from taking her away. Cancer is an ugly disease, and because of the horrible ways it affects victims, I never had the chance to say goodbye to Mom-mom.