2022 Ben Strauss Youth Program

Middle School

Teen Essay Contest

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One In A Million

Everyone says that I am one in a million. But not for the reasons you would think. I was diagnosed with cancer when I was seven. I remember when we started noticing symptoms. Most noticeably, I was getting some underarm pain. The doctor said it was growing pains. My parents thought I hurt my arms using the monkey bars at school. Soon though my stomach started getting bigger. Kind of like a swelling. Here is where it gets foggy. I remember being in an ambulance with my mom. I remember feeling scared but not knowing why. My mom was right next to me on her phone, probably texting my dad. Then my mind skips to being in an ER and watching cat videos with my Aunt. I distinctly remember the taste of the ham sandwich I was eating. Cold, the tart mustard, the dry bread, and not like home. It was a weird feeling. But that is all I remember from those early days. My journey was long. I was in treatment for two and a half years. I was cured of cancer when I was ten and had two years of a cancer-free life. I thought my cancer journey was over.

When I was twelve years old I was diagnosed a second time. Now here is where the one in a million part comes in. This time I remember it much more clearly. My relapse symptom was a cyst-like bump on my head. Again we went to the doctor and he said “oh it’s just a cyst. It will go away”. We wanted a second opinion.  Since I was still seeing CHOP from my last diagnosis, the next time we went we asked about it. They wanted to do a biopsy. Fast forward a couple of days we got the results back, and yup you guessed it. I relapsed. And the way I relapsed was one in a million. They even told me “ You’re gonna end up in the medical books.” So not a great start, but I held my head high and told myself there would be no more surprises. And boy was I wrong. Throughout my treatment, I’ve experienced one in a million chances. One example is I got an infection called, Shewanella. Oh, you never heard of it? You wanna know why? Cause out of BILLIONS of people there are only a few cases. After a month of being in the hospital, I got better. Then of course when I thought all the surprises were over I developed AVN. This affects 10,000 to 20,000 people a year. But it’s extremely rare for children to develop AVN. I got AVN as a result of the years of medication I needed to cure my cancer. AVN is a painful joint issue. It happens when the bone tissue dies, due to the lack of blood supply. But here is the kicker, I have it in both my arms and legs. Two very active joints. In one month, I’ll be done with my cancer treatment. But will be left to deal with the effects of AVN.

Although most of my one-in-a-million experiences have been difficult. Throughout my years of treatment, there have been many one-in-a-million experiences that were good. There have been so many nice people who have helped me throughout the years. My friends, family, school community, complete strangers, and of course organizations like Cancer Support Community Greater Philadelphia. These people made my bad experiences happy and worth it. I am now fourteen and about to start high school. I’m so excited to see what the future has in store for me.  So, I guess you really could say I am a one-in-a-million.