2022 Ben Strauss Youth Program

Middle School

Teen Essay Contest

Payton Moretti

Stages

The funny thing about cancer is sometimes you catch it early and get sent through treatment and you recover, but other times you don’t find out until it’s too late. This is what happened to my grandfather. When I think about what my grandfather went through, I think about it in stages.

Stage one: diagnosis. My grandfather was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer with cancer cells that were traveling and growing throughout his body. They told him what was wrong in terms he didn’t understand, in a way that made zero sense to someone who’s not a doctor.

Stage two: treatment. My grandfather started his treatment by receiving chemo; this process went on for months with no progress. He just got sicker until they finally decided to give him a different option to the chemo that wasn’t working. He got pills that were supposed to be a less invasive option. As you might have guessed, they didn’t work.

Stage three: withering away. It had been a year and a half living with my grandparents, and almost nine months since he had been diagnosed. As time went by, the hardest thing to see was how even though he was so sick, he still wanted to keep everything normal. He still tried to make everyone laugh, he still nagged at me to make him his favorite snacks, and he still made sure he was up every morning to greet me with his warm smile and his goodbye wave. My grandfather wasn’t a very emotional guy. He never let anyone know when he was hurting; he had a hard time expressing his feelings sometimes, and he wasn’t the best at showing people how he truly felt. But he never failed to make me feel seen; he understood or at least pretended to understand when no one else would. He inspired me and taught me how to stand up for myself and how to not let anyone ever talk down to my family. He was an amazing person with one of the kindest souls I’ve ever been honored to interact with. But the day I could tell he was extremely sick was the day I noticed he wasn’t really there; sure, he still threw out a couple little jokes here and there, but he wasn’t himself. He wasn’t the Pop who I wanted to remember when he passed, the man who had a heck of a lot to do with who I am today. He was gone and a shell of where his personality and wits used to inhabit.

Stage four: loss. Death is a scary thing; something our parents do everything in their power to protect their children from. But it is something that is inevitable, something that must happen at the end of everyone’s journey. It’s how the world functions, how society lives their life. We do everything we can to avoid something that everyone knows can’t be avoided. See, most people are afraid of their own death, but I was more afraid of *him* dying, which I knew would arrive shortly. When you lose someone, there is no way to describe how it makes you feel, no way to explain to someone the emptiness that you hold within your heart. Loss is something so hard to explain I can’t even comprehend it myself.

5,946 hours and 55 minutes: that’s how long ago I lost my understanding of anything and everything. When my friends had people they knew that died, I would always say, “I’m here for you” and “I know what you’re going through.” But in reality, I didn’t have a single clue what it really felt to lose someone you hold so close to your heart. I thought in the weeks before he died that when the moment would finally happen, I would break. I thought I would fall to my knees and all the emotion, all the pain I had been feeling would simply pour out into my surrounding atmosphere, but it didn’t. When I heard those two words fall from my father’s mouth, it was like reality had vanished, and I was floating; I watched as everyone I loved broke down in front of my eyes with pain and agony seeping out of every pore of their grieving bodies. But I just stood there and observed. I didn’t cry. I didn’t show expression. I simply exited the room for a moment to let the thought process through my head.