



CANCER SUPPORT
COMMUNITY
GREATER PHILADELPHIA

2023 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

3rd Place Winner

Alex Kolb

You Never Lost Your Battle

I met an angel who will forever be a light in my heart.

Her name was Mrs. R, and she was my art teacher at Hereford Elementary School. Her bright eyes shone like the sun and she walked so gracefully, she almost danced. She became my favorite teacher when I first met her in kindergarten. She often has us paint, and inspired us to put all of our emotion into our art. She let us do our artwork wherever we wanted to get in touch with our feelings so we could express them into our pieces.

I admired Mrs. R from the start. I listened to her intently as she gave us her lessons and participated as much as we could. My imagination was bigger than my artistic abilities. Whenever I was given an assignment, my mind would drift off and envisage a masterpiece to hand to Mrs. R so I could impress her. But the moment my pencil hit the paper, my artwork was more of a blob. I practically had two left hands, and my artwork was nowhere near as good as some of the other students in my class. This disappointed me when I compared my work to everyone else. Mrs. R saw this disappointment and encouraged me every time to just keep trying and that one day, I would be able to create something I would be proud of.

I was feeling down about not being able to make something I was proud of, but Mrs. R never gave up on me. I made a drawing for her at the end of the year, and she even gave me a card in return to encourage me to keep trying.

“Thank you for your wonderful drawing and good thoughts. I really enjoyed them. I love being your art teacher and enjoy having you as a student! You really make class fun!! Keep drawing and being your beautiful self - you make the world a better place! - Mrs. R.”

I was so touched by this, as no other teacher had appreciated me the way Mrs. R did. By the time summer ended and I had reached 4th grade, I was more motivated than ever to submit a fantastic piece of artwork, as our school was hosting an Art Show. The school’s Art Show took the best work from everyone in the school and put them in a gallery for parents and other students to look at. Student’s art practically had to be Picasso in order to get into the show. I was excited and nervous all at once, but determined to somehow make it into the show.

During that year, our big project was making clay pots. We got to paint the colors however we wanted and designed them in any way we wished. I expressed my art by adding extra clay to the pots in the shapes of faces. It made me laugh because smiley faces on anything were my sense of humor at the time, and I was satisfied with what I created. I didn’t think much of it because I figured my artwork had no true potential to be in the Art Show.

Mrs. R graded our pots and passed them back, and I noticed a sticker on my pots that other students didn’t have. I examined it further and realized it was labeled to go into the Art Show. The moment I saw this, I gasped and jumped from my chair with pure joy. I was shocked and completely excited, and I ran up to Mrs. R’s desk to thank her for putting my work in the Art Show. I asked her why she put it in the show and she replied with, “I liked the faces. They really stood out to me and no other student’s design was like yours.”

I was so proud of myself that day.

When the end of the year rolled around, I was saddened by leaving for the summer and not being able to see Mrs. R. So, I decided to get creative.

I took a water bottle and filled it with gems, folding a card into it and making a flower out of plastic. I left it by Mrs. R’s desk on the last day of school and waited for her to notice it. Her eyes lit up at the sight of it and she showered me in her appreciation. She said she’d miss me over the summer and was excited to see me next school year.

I cried to my heart's content that day, not wanting to leave the school. I felt hollow when I eventually did leave.

A week after summer break had started, I heard a knock on the door. When I went to answer it, my heart flew out of my chest to see Mrs. R outside the door. I opened the door with joy.

"Mrs. R! What are you doing here?" I asked excitedly.

My mom came to the door, and Mrs. R explained how touched she was by my gift. She was so thankful to have me as a student that she had gone out of her way to do something special for me. She gave me a card and went to her car, pulling out a small pillowcase and bringing it to me. I was shocked and felt my heart melt at the sight of it. The pillowcase was embroidered with the first letter of my name and had stars sewn all over the back. I took the pillowcase with a huge smile, asking her where she got the pillow from. Mrs. R smiled, telling me she made the pillow herself.

Mrs. R left shortly after that, and I ran up to my room to read the card.

"Thank you for your kind and generous gift you gave me at the end of school! I was touched by your special gift. I wanted to do something special to thank such a lovely young lady. Hope you enjoy the pillow. I made it with a cool fabric that does something cool when you turn out the lights! Enjoy the rest of your summer! - Mrs. R"

I felt my heart swell with joy, taking my pillowcase into my arms and shadowing it in my hands, looking into the pillow. The stars began to glow a bright green. I found this astonishing, placing the pillowcase onto a pillow and keeping it on my bed.

And little did I know that would be the last I ever heard from her. When summer ended, I excitedly returned to school, only to find a new teacher sitting at Mrs. R's desk. I was confused upon seeing this, asking about Mrs. R.

I lost a part of my heart hearing the answer to my question.

Mrs. R had been diagnosed with breast cancer long before I could even see the signs. She lost her battle over the summer.

I felt my heart seep into the ground and a wave of shock overcame me. I silently walked away from the new teacher and sat at my desk, demons of emotions swarming my stomach. I

began to realize the pillow was a gift of goodbye, the card was her final words to me, and she was never coming back.

I had been bound to the ground ever since I received that news. Art class no longer became a class I looked forward to, but a graveyard I weeped in because that room always reminded me of Mrs. R. I tried creating wings with my tears to fly up beside her in the heavens just to be with her one last time. The pain I had felt after losing her was the cost of love, appreciating someone so much that my life felt empty without them, staring at the final card she had given me and wondering, “*Why don't I just trade my six feet for yours?*”

The cost of love was expensive. And we are taught to forget and move on so that the pain of losing someone doesn't hurt so much. But in reality, that pain and memory is all I have left of Mrs. R. To this day, I do not regret the pain I feel from missing Mrs. R because I still try to hold on to her.

I wish she was still here to celebrate my accomplishments. I wish I could hear her voice telling me she was proud for never giving up on myself when times got hard. I can only hope that she is watching me from above with a smile.

Mrs. R was a strong, kind woman. She never lost any problem placed in front of her. She never even lost her battle with cancer. When she died, the cancer died with her.

You never lost your battle, Mrs. R. You're a true warrior. May you fly high.