2023 Ben Strauss Youth Program

Middle School

Teen Essay Contest

Honorable Mention

Hailey Davis

October 5th

As a six year old you aren't expected to get the news that your three year old little sister has leukemia but unfortunately I had no choice. Life was normal. My family and I would go to school or work and then come home and spend time together but that all changed on October 5th, 2015. My sister started to get what we thought was a cold. My parents brought her to the doctor who gave her an antibiotic. She became more sick and weak and she overall was just not the same kid anymore. My parents knew something was wrong so they took my sister to the doctors again and that's when they knew it was something more than a common cold. They told my parents to take her to a hospital. I remember being super nervous wondering if my sister was going to be okay. Once I was able to go see my sister she was sleeping on the hospital bed hooked up to a machine. I saw my parents and they had the most anxious look on their faces. They took me into the playroom at the hospital and sat me down and told me the horrifying news. My mom's grandfather had cancer and I remember her telling me stories about him. I knew he had passed away from cancer so as a six year old I knew cancer only as a terrible sickness that killed those diagnosed with it. Immediately when I heard cancer my heart dropped into my stomach and I felt like I wanted to throw up. My eyes filled with tears as I looked down trying to hide the fact I was going to cry.

The first couple of months after finding out that my sister had cancer were horrendous. My parents would be gone for days, weeks, or even months at a time. As a six year old who had horrible separation anxiety this was super challenging. I always wanted to be with my sister and my parents but I couldn't because I either had school or visiting hours at the hospital would come to an end. During this time school was a huge obstacle for me. Every day was a battle. As you probably can assume I missed a lot of school during this time. I spent so much time at the

hospital that it started to become a second home and the doctors and nurses became family. During this time I had numerous therapist and therapy sessions. Therapy was suggested by many people since I was so young with so many emotions that I didn't know how to express. Even after all the therapy nothing seemed to change. I still didn't open up about how I felt so I just bottled it all up inside.

My sister's treatment plan consisted of one long intensive year of chemotherapy. My sister was in the hospital for a month after finding out she had cancer. She had to have a port inserted into her chest for her chemotherapy. After the first month, she would have weekly appointments for chemo and spinal taps. There was also a time during her treatment when she had to do an inpatient stay for chemo. There were so many terrifying situations that happened during her treatment. For instance, my sister had to get a drain placed in her stomach due to chemo complications, she got pneumonia which resulted in a lung biopsy, and she also had a couple of bone marrow biopsies and blood transfusions. The long horrific year of treatment finally ended and she was in maintenance, which meant my sister’s chemo and spinal taps became monthly. After a long almost three year battle, my sister completed treatment and is still to this day cancer free.

Now here we are five years later, my sister is eleven and I'm fourteen. Cancer has definitely had a negative effect on my family and I but I would also say there were some positives. My family and I are stronger than ever and we know whatever obstacles are thrown our way we can overcome them. I wouldn't completely be who I am today if it wasn't for that horrible experience. I have learned not to stress over the smaller things in life. I am more mature and I have a completely different view of life. Cancer completely flipped my world upside down but it has also made me so incredibly thankful for where we are today.