2023 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

Honorable Mention 5

Jackson Stuetz

Memories Last Forever

The Doctors diagnosed my Mother with cancer in 2011. I had no clue what cancer was, or what it would cause in our family. I did not know why everyone was giving us gifts, food and why people were supportive. Gilda’s club taught me everything I know to this day about cancer. Not only did I learn about cancer, but I had a great time every night in noogieland. I learned I was not alone on this journey. They gave me support. After some time, I got less and less nervous.

Cancer was exhausting, emotionally draining, and unfair. Cancer did not stop us from doing amazing things. We went to sports games, Disney, Great Wolf Lodge, and the mountains. Whenever we went somewhere, it was always a good time. We took loads of pictures; we made loads of memories, and that will stick with us for the rest of our lives. Looking back at it, I realize my mom was able to put on a smile and act like all was well while being in the worst pain of her life.

The Doctors informed my mom that they had eliminated the cancer, but some cells remained and could not be cured. My mom had stage four cancer. Stage four is when it spreads to all parts of your body, such as organs and bones. Stage four cancer is not curable. I can remember what happened and where it happened when my dad told me we will be stuck with it forever.

Soccer is a big part of my life, and part of the reason I am still doing my best is for my mom. She always wanted to see me succeed and for that reason, I tried my best in every game for her. Mom was my biggest supporter, my number one fan. She went to all my games and cheered me on, no matter what the score was. My first ever travel team called the Fury was the most iconic year for me because I still remember she screamed out my name after I scored one of my first travel soccer goals.

Hockey was also a big part of my life. My grandfather had season tickets with the Flyers and my dad continued them for a while, so we made loads of memories at Flyers games. Not only did we watch hockey, but I also played roller hockey and my mom always watched my sister and I play. I always think of one video my dad recorded of me getting the puck and going down the ice and scoring and my mom said, “Way to go Jackson!”. Every time I watch it, it makes me so happy.

We thought the nightmare was over. Cancer did not stop us from doing amazing things. We got support through everything, and even now, after we get support from family, Gilda’s and For Pete’s Sake. We got to go to Disney, where we had the time of our lives. Riding rides, meeting the characters, and spending time together. We got VIP access to sports games. Our family got to go to Philly’s games, a Brooklyn Nets game where we got to see inside Jay-Z and Beyonce ́́‘s sweet. We got to go to Great Wolf Lodge and so much more. We are so grateful for the things we got to do as a family.

We went to Maine at my Grammy’s and Grandpa’s house where I learned how to skate on their pond. This started my hockey career. My dad was also skating, sadly my mom was in too much pain to skate, but she put on a smile and watched. I got stitches in my hand before our trip, and my dad had to take them out to Maine. I was terrified, but it didn’t hurt that bad. My mom really wanted to see a moose, and on the last day on our way home we saw one on the side of the road and took pictures with it. This was such a glorious trip because we saw so many different things and actually got to see a moose with our mom on our last day.

We created so many memories with mom while we still had the chance, which is why my life has been so profoundly changed. Another significant memory I have was in 2015, when my family earned the Gilda Radner Award. My mom won the award, so we went to a Gala with her. We went on stage with my mom, and she was so happy. We have the glass cup on top of our TV cabinet and it is one of our family’s prized possessions.

Memories last forever and the memories we made will stick with me forever. I will never forget the amazing things we got to do as a family.

My mother died September 6, 2016. That day is still the worst day of my life. Cancer got to her liver, and without a liver, it is almost impossible to survive. I remember I was at my grandmom and pop’s house because I had slept over at their house. We had all the snacks in the world and all seemed well. Until my dad came home from the hospital and said that my mom had died. That moment will stick with me for the rest of my life and thinking about it makes me feel like I get punched in the chest. Living with loss is like walking through hip-high mud. We remember her in soccer by wearing pink socks. I am surrounded by great family and friends that will continue to help me through my toughest days ahead.

To this day, we are still getting support from Gilda’s, which is benefiting our family so much. My dad is in a family program where we do family night and one-on-one time, which is connecting us together more than ever. I am so thankful for what they have done and are currently doing for our family.