2023 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

Jacob Lahetta

My Essay

At 3:20 in the morning my brother came into my room to wake me up. He said “Jake, come downstairs, dad is saying goodbye”. It was that morning I hugged my dad for the last time. He died from pancreatic cancer in late July of 2018. For an entire month before it happened, I hid in my room, binge watching Netflix to avoid thinking of what we all knew would happen eventually. But at least I had time to get myself back together before I would be walking down the halls of school again. The summer after my dad died, we spent a lot of time together as a family and I participated in the cancer community horseback riding event. I have enjoyed horseback riding for a few years I also participated in special equestrians. Riding a horse has helped me with my confidence.

8th grade was my first year of school without a dad, but it was also one of my best. I pushed myself academically, I talked in class more, I had fun in school, it was like a significant weight was taken off my shoulders because I no longer had to worry about losing one of the people closest to me. I was also nervous about my day to day life changing. My mother told me that she would be able to stay in our house for a while but things would change. The cancer support community gave us school supplies which made me feel prepared for school.

2018 was one of the most important years of my life because I lost my dad, but also because I gained something. I gained some independence. I also gained life experience. Ever since, I have continued to improve, I now am taking a class equivalent to what college students are taking. I am learning about computers. I have learned the basics of computers, networking, and administration so far, next year will be cybersecurity and data forensics. I think next year will be my favorite because every time we have had a chapter about security, it has always been one of the most interesting. I don’t care about motherboards protocols or routers instead I care about security. Thus, cybersecurity is what I’ll get a degree for while in college. That degree plus what I already know plus a few certifications in the IT field will give me a job in a field I think I will like. I applied to 10 colleges and so far been accepted to all of them and waited listed to one. I know need to make a big decision regarding where to go.

I have adapted to larger changes than college before so I think I will be able to handle it well. When I go to college, I won’t hide in my room like the last time I went through something hard and different than what I am used to, I will rise to the challenge and succeed. I will do that by using what I have learned both from my dad’s passing and from the books my teacher has made me read. I will ask if I need support with my classes. I have also learned about the many resources’ college have.

My family and I have coped with the loss of my dad in different ways. In the beginning, we were our own community, sticking together and leaning on cousins, aunts and uncles, and friends. I have an older sister and brother who do not live at home and a sister in 8th grade. I did not feel comfortable going to events where there were groups of people. On the other hand my sister who is more social enjoyed learning how to sew, clubs and sports. In the end we are all different and should do what works for us. My mom has always been supportive of all of us and how we are all different.

Knowing that it wouldn’t be enough, we continued to be involved in the cancer support community that helped us when dad was still alive. My younger sister and I went horseback riding which was fun and relaxing. My mom was overwhelmed, and I was not sure if she would remember to get everything we need for school but the cancer support community took care of it. We still do walks and other fundraisers for families going through what we did.

Please consider me for the Ben Strauss Higher Education Grant. I am currently accepted at 10 colleges and want to help my mom with the high costs involved in obtaining my degree.