



CANCER SUPPORT
COMMUNITY
GREATER PHILADELPHIA

2023 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

1st Place Winner

Madison Stuetz

Time Forever Lost

I am now a teenage girl and mom-less. I am no little girl anymore. I have big things coming up and big changes happening and being a teenage girl is hard. It's even harder to do that without your role model, your best friend, and most importantly, your mom.

Now I'm not saying it's impossible because nothing is impossible when you put your mind to it, but every day I go through the halls being reminded that I am alone.

Something like losing a parent isn't as uncommon as people think it is. Cancer has and will forever impact my life. Every girl's dream is to be best friends with their mom, and when all of my friends have someone to go to when they are having trouble, I sit there and wonder: well, what am I supposed to do? The times when I just want to talk to my mom and laugh with her and have fun with her are indescribable. I want to be able to go

to her for advice when I have problems at school or simply just talk to her. Cancer has put a huge dent on my soul that will be there forever. No mother as a best friend, no mother role model, and no mother in my house. Going out to pick dresses with my aunt and her best friend and her daughter is helpful, but it will never be my first choice. I will always dream that I can go with my mom. When there is school drama, I want to talk to my mom about it. If I am having friend trouble, I can't consult her and ask for advice. I have learned how to do things everyday by myself or my friends, things that my mom should have taught me. I have friends who taught me how to do everyday things as simple as finding an outfit that matches, but I'll always wish it was my mom who taught me instead.

I walk through the halls of my school every day, and I'm reminded that I don't have a mom. My friend came to school complaining about her mom because she got into an argument with her. She said she hates her mom and wishes she didn't have one. Well, here I am sitting trying to help my friend and hide my feelings that this hurts because fights happen and arguments happen, but I know for a fact that having a mom is better than not having one. Hate is a strong word and saying you hate your mom to someone that doesn't have a mom hurts. No one but people in my position understand that pain. So, I'm here helping my friend because that is what my job is, and I'm acting normal even though I'm melting inside because as cliché as it sounds, I would love to get into a dumb little argument with my mom. I've been in the position many times when friends are embarrassed by their mother, and they tell her to go away. I wish I could be

embarrassed by my mother. I never got the chance to grow up and be a moody teenager with my mom there to handle me.

People sometimes ask me, "What does your mom think?" How am I supposed to tell people that I don't have one? That isn't from me being embarrassed. I don't know what to say because I don't want them to feel bad. I hate it when people tell me they are sorry, so I give up. I don't have the heart to tell them because it is embarrassing for them. I go along with it. As hard as it is, I sacrifice myself so other people don't feel bad. "Oh well, what did your mom say?" They will ask me, and I will pretend and go along with it and make up something that makes sense but, I haven't talked to her in years. When it rolls around to May 14th in school there are always activities for us to participate in and I'm making something either for no one and to go home and throw it out or I'm making it for my grandma, her mom. Once again so many people get to go home and give it to their mom while I go home and give it to the garbage or my grandma. Doctors, orthodontists, and dentists are my worst nightmare. You get in the office, and they ask, "Who are you with today?" or "Better tell your mom how good you did this appointment" it is time to put on a smile and chuckle. So many people put it past them how many people they encounter that have the same problems as me. It is overlooked and not talked about. We're conditioned to believe that a "normal" family has both a mom and a dad. Them knowing I don't and if they did, they wouldn't say that to me but that doesn't stop me from thinking and just remembering that I'm alone. Professionals in the healthcare occupation are forced to ask questions as stated before but disappointingly I am one of the ones, the ones that they worry they will face one day, the ones that make them wonder if they should be asking those questions.

I was put into the group of ones years ago and young me didn't understand as well as I do now. I just brush it off and move on because they don't know, and it isn't their fault. The younger me didn't understand that. She thought the world was against her and was rubbing it in her face. In her head, she thought "Why would they say something like that? I don't have a mom." She was alone in the world; it was her against everyone and she was losing. Why was it her? Why did her family have to be the one affected? Am I that unlucky that I'm stuck without a mom for the rest of my life? She was incredibly confused and sad with emotions running through her. Since then, I have been to places that helped me realize people are in the same boat as my family and I, and I've met other people that have been through similar things as me and suddenly I wasn't so alone. I have an army of support behind me, but I will always have those thoughts and those moments of realization when she isn't here, and I will never see her again. Cancer is the worst thing to go through in a family; it forces you to change everything and adapt. Many people don't realize and are lucky enough to not understand what I'm talking about when they aren't able to relate. It flies over so many people's heads that so many people walk on the earth and struggle to worry every day all the time about a family member with cancer or mourning a death. People will say "Oh I understand" but they have never experienced people going through death or cancer in their close immediate family. Your whole life changes and although you may have sympathy you may feel sorrow and feel for the person you don't understand. Life is hard but you got to keep on swimming and pushing through. This is my story and I hope I opened your eyes to see my point of view.

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