2023 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

Seth Patel

The Story of my Life – My Cancer Journey

A year ago, I started to do things I could never imagine. I am a fifteen-year-old boy doing school and tennis all day. Just last year I started to travel nationally and internationally. I went to Ecuador and Florida, but just a couple years ago, I never thought this was possible because of what I had experienced when I was younger.

During my early childhood, the word cancer had no place in my brain. I did not know the definition of it or what it did to people. I remember being with my parents one time, we were having so much fun. We were doing our everyday task until my mom got a call. Little did I know, this call would change my life forever. My parents did not know how to break the news to us, but in short, I was told my mom had cancer. Now this was not just mild cancer, it was stage 3 and it had possibly spread - the worst cancer level out there. But at the time, I did know any of that. I thought my parents were okay and everything was normal. My parents took us to the Great Wolf Lodge, and I remember having a blast and even got blood shot eyes from all the chlorine and salt. I cannot remember when we got home or when my parents finally told all of us (my brothers are Cyrus who was eight at the time, and Tristan who was six at the time) that my mom was sick. She had cancer is all I heard and it kept repeating and I remember feeling scared. At my age however, I did not know what cancer was or if it was bad or good. This is how my mom getting cancer made my life change.

Once I really knew what cancer was and that it was bad, it had really devastated me when I had to go visit my mom. I started feeling what I know now as anxious. It could have been the last time I would ever see her again, but luckily, she was strong and fought through it. After she got better, I felt blessed but than she did something that threw me off. She started signing us up for camps that would be with other kids my age who also have family members with cancer. At first, I was shy and kind of mad. I cried for two hours straight that I did not want to go to my first camp at five years old, but now it’s kind of something I look forward to. It is a time where people with similarities get to know one another.

How is all this connected? While cancer was really horrible, my brothers, my grandfather, and Gilda’s camp and Noogie Land made my life fun. It was a one-of-a-kind experience where I met kids like me and my brothers. It was a place where all us kids got to be free and not think about what was really happening. This year marks my tenth year. Cancer Support Center of Greater Philadelphia as it is now known became part of me and my family. I remember capture the flag, lunch, movies, friends, and lots of memories. I cannot wait for it this summer again where now I get to be a counselor and help other kids.

In conclusion, to sum up my life, I do not know if I would be in South America today if it were not for my cancer journey. My mom now still healthy and alive and is with me full-time even though she had the worst possible cancer. Every day she wakes up and every day she teaches me that the day is a blessing. I still suffer from anxiety, but she stays and provides me with guidance. My anxiety started from the first day I heard my mom was ill but each day she is with me, it gets a little bit less. My mom believes in “we only live one life” so if you can dream it, you can make it happen. So here I am in Quito, Ecuador training by the equator with some of the best athletes and trainers while being home schooled by my mom. No one made me do any of this. I was asked what I want and then my mom said, “let’s make it happen.” So, this is the story of my life and my cancer journey. I cannot wait to see my friends and brothers again at Gilda’s Noogie Land this summer.