



2023 Ben Strauss Youth Program

Middle School

Teen Essay Contest

Honorable Mention

Summer Meitzner

Cancer Affects Us All

Cancer is a known world-wide disease that kills many people each year, but many people are also saved from it each year. While I have never had cancer, my dad and grandma faced this disease. My dad had it when he was young, before my siblings and I were even born. My grandma, on the other hand, got it when she was older, and due to her age and cancer type she grew her angel wings. This life-threatening disease hurts people in numerous ways and has given me one happy ending and, unfortunately, one sad one.

While my dad didn't have cancer when I was alive, it still impacted my life in many ways. My dad had Hodgkin's Lymphoma when he was twenty-four years old. When my sister and I were little, we always thought that my dad was super-human and had blue freckles. Imagine our surprise when we found out this was not the case... those blue freckles were actually small tattoos so that they could line up the markers on his chest for radiation. Once a year he has to go to an oncologist (a doctor that specializes in cancer) to have chest x-ray. They also put a camera put down his throat to see if the cancer has come back. My dad made the decision to shave his head prior to chemotherapy, so that he didn't

have to deal with it coming out in clumps and now, due to all of the chemotherapy drugs he has thin and fragile hair. This has affected me because I don't know if the cancer will come back, which is daunting to imagine having to watch my dad live through that experience. Also, there could be a gene in our family that predisposes me or my siblings to a potentially higher rate of having cancer ourselves. As much as my dad's cancer has affected me, my grandmas affected me even more.

When I was 7 years old my grandma was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Her type of cancer was a lot more aggressive than my dad's and she had some other health issues. Due to these challenges, it attacked her a lot faster knowing her body wouldn't respond as quickly. To this day, I still remember going out to Michigan (which is where my grandparents live) to see her because of how quickly the cancer had advanced. We attended our cousin's soccer game, and my dad received the call we were all dreading. It was a strange and sad feeling that while we were sitting there cheering for my cousin, when my dad got the call from the hospital saying my grandma only had 30 minutes left and if we wanted to say goodbye now was the time. When we got to the hospital, they took us all up to see her. The nurse told us that she couldn't see or talk, but she could hear us, and could feel us hugging her. We all told her how much we loved her and how she would always be in our hearts. Later that day she walked across the golden bridge into the arms of angels. Something I hadn't known about my grandma was that she had previously had breast cancer. She had it when she was in her 30's and they caught it at a stage that she was able to fight it and win. Thirty years later she had cancer again. Although she lost the second battle, she knew she was cared about and loved. She went peacefully surrounded by her family.

While I have not personally had cancer, my life has been impacted by cancer. From my dad's "superpowers" that turns to fear every year waiting for my dad's results, to knowing that my grandma who fought so hard to beat cancer the first time would not win the second battle. Losing someone to cancer is heartbreaking and I am sure that there are other kids, even classmates, who have similar stories. Cancer affects us all.