A close-up of a sign

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**2024 Ben Straus High School Teen Essay Contest**

**Ada Harvie**

**Putting On A Brave Face**

Cancer; as Merriam- Webster’s dictionary states, cancer is “something evil or malignant that spreads destructively.” The disease affects many people, some dear to our hearts. Whether it is someone you grew up with, someone you look up to, family member, or friend. In my case, it was my grandpa Fraser Harvie.

My grandfather, who I called Pops, passed from cancer taking over his body, and killing him over time. I never really knew Pops; he was distant, tired, and over all weary. Little did I know that he was like this because he had cancer. It made him so exhausted that he couldn’t get off the couch.

I have one clear memory of him, when he took me to a beach with my cousin. We rode donkeys into a sunset and played in the sand. I was about five when this happened. I have vague memories of him taking me to his favorite part of his garden, hidden by plants. I remember the wooden detailing on the inside of his car, and the smell, cigarettes. He drove me to school and gave me Tictacs before I left. He would then promise me more when I come back as something to look forward to.

I loved Pops even though I didn’t know him as much as I had hoped. I would have tried to know him better, but I thought he was just antisocial; I had no idea that he was dying. At the age of nine, I found out about his life threatening diagnosis.

I flew out with my family to see Pops because we didn’t know if he would survive for long or not. I was scared to walk into the house, but I put on a brave face and walked through the door. There he was, sitting on the couch, smiling; he looked at us and was unbelievably happy to see us. He was in tremendous pain even though he was taking a lot of medicine. We took photos with him and gave him big hugs.

My parents were leaving the house to get the car started, but I stayed for a couple minutes. As I walked to the door, I saw him; he was coughing insanely hard to the point you could hear the pain in his chest. He saw me coming so he put a pillow on his face to stifle the sound. All I could think about was how he must be in so much pain, I could almost feel it. That was the last time I saw Pops.

By this time, we had gone back home. My dad ended up flying out again, but this time he was by himself. He flew out to see Pops because his cancer was becoming worse. He was beside Pops for about a week at the hospice, while the rest of my family and I stayed back home. When my dad left to go home, the cancer got even worse. He couldn’t fly out again, so he facetimed Pops and stayed up all night, every night watching Pops, making sure he was ok. One day, my dad got woken up by a phone call, the phone call. Pops passed away at two in the morning.

When I was told the news, my dad was crying, and as much as I wanted to cry, I couldn’t. I felt like the worst person in the world because I didn’t cry for my grandfather’s death. I hugged my dad as hard as I could and showed my sympathies. *I am terrible. This is Pops we’re talking about here. Why am I not crying?!* I thought this over in my head so many times, it turned to nightmares.

My family and I flew out to England to attend the funeral. I stayed at my mom’s friend’s house. I went into my room and hung up my black dress with flowers trailing the lace. I was still unable to cry at the thought of him dying.

The next day was the funeral. There were so many people I had never seen in my entire life. I did however see, my grandma, and uncle Rob. People gave speeches on their life with Pops and how much they loved him. I was so emotional I didn’t know that at nine I could feel that way. It was my turn to walk over to his casket, and touch it, praying to him. I was sobbing uncontrollably; I could not see from the tears blurring my vision, I could not catch my breath, walk, or touch the casket. I later walked in on my dad crying in Pops’ room; that was the first time I saw him cry.

I can say to this day that I have never cried harder than I did that day. Cancer has truly hurt my family in ways that are too hard to mention. According to American Cancer Society, over eighteen million people have been afflicted by cancer. That number only counts the patients, not the friends and family that have to suffer watching their loved one’s pass. It is unimaginably painful to lose a loved one which I say from experience.