

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

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**Take Care of the Blood Your Love Runs Through**

“Take care of the blood your love runs through.” These nine words are my driving force, my main motivation. I feel them coursing through my veins in my every waking moment. While my heart sometimes aches for the version of myself that I have outgrown, I still hold true to my main hope of taking care of the blood our love runs through. Not only for myself, but every individual I treat—even during an internship.

Being a nurse is more than just taking care of one’s physical health, but mental as well. It is about making a difference in each action, word, and tone. It is about being full of and providing the love that many lack when faced with sickness.

As a child, I watched my own flesh and blood battle cancer: my mom. During this time, she had to surrender a lot of her time as a mom. Instead, she spent that time in and out of hospitals, undergoing chemotherapy and radiation. Throughout her journey, she never once complained nor wished things were different. She felt fulfilled knowing that her family was right with her, holding her hand. We supported her and did everything we could to act as if things were not different. But, they were.

During the week, my brother, Gavin, took care of me. He was only in second grade, but took on the responsibility of caring for himself and for me. We lived off of sandwiches, toasts, eggs, and pasta, since that's all his 8-year-old self could make. My dad was with my mom most of the time, traveling to the hospitals with her. So it fell to Gavin to help me with my homework, recite my ABC’s, count my numbers, and tuck me in. It was a very large responsibility at such a young age, and a representation of not everyone’s childhood being equal. Not everyone can go out on the weekends and hang out with their friends, because they believe they are watching their mother slowly die.

I spent my days staying my distance from my mom because she could not afford a cold or a child’s sickness. I had to avoid hugging my mom for her own sake. I did not get the joy of playing with my moms hair and doing her makeup, because there was no hair, no eyelashes, no eyebrows. After a year and a half of fearing my mothers illness, nightmares of what was to come, and the unknown reality of cancer, she survived. My mom is a cancer survivor. She will watch me graduate, get married, and play my senior year of field hockey. She even walked me down the field for my senior day field hockey game. I am blessed to have such a role model of a mother.

 Cancer is not just a physical illness, it is a rapid disease; it sets fire to all in its path. Cancer terrorizes the family, their community, and the victim themself. Watching my mother walk through hell, and set fire to the rain as she battled the devil himself, showed me my purpose: to fight when I do not feel like it, to be victorious even when I do not feel like I am, and to give an extra smile to anyone who cannot find their own. My mother is the reason I am able to feel strong on the darkest of days. She showed me what it was like to feel at your weakest, but act your strongest. My mom is a fighter. She was not a victim of cancer, cancer was a victim of her. The second my mother was diagnosed, cancer had lost any chance it had. My mom will always be stronger than cancer, not because the cancer was not powerful enough—but because my mom was simply indestructible.

 I learned to face defeat, but not let myself be defeated. I have experienced a multitude of trauma over my years, but I have been built and encoded with my mother’s strength. Knowing this, I always was conscious of the fact that I would never fail, because I have my mother’s genes.

With this being said, nursing is not my goal; it is my dream. I want to be the person who is always around. Late nights, early mornings, I will choose to be there. We aren’t always sure what someone can need, so we be everything they can, so they have everything they could imagine. I want to be a nurse who can make people laugh on the darkest of days, give siblings the hope my brother once gave me, and represent my mother’s courage and bravery.