A close-up of a sign

Description automatically generated

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

**Honorable Mention**

**Andrew Tkach**

**Always With Me**

Since I was a little kid, I had always heard about cancer, but I never truly understood what it was until it came into my life in the Fall of 2014. It was a typical sunny day at my house, everything was fine until it wasn't. I remember playing street hockey outdoors with my father and my brother. We were all having such an amazing time together, enjoying father son time. My brother and I were showing off our hockey moves to our dad. He was very impressed and proud of us for excelling so much in hockey.

While outdoors, my father started having a painful headache. This had been going on and off for months. My mother decided it was finally time to get it checked out. My mother called my uncle to take my dad to the hospital. After testing, the doctors discovered my father had a brain tumor, glioblastoma. He got it removed that day and everything looked fine. A couple months later my father went back to the doctor because his head was hurting again. The doctors found out that the brain tumor grew back, but worse.

From that point on my father was a strong, brave soldier. Cancer did not stop him from doing fun activities. We took a family trip to Virginia, we baked, hiked, swam, and played in the arcade. My father was so happy that he was there with us, while battling cancer. He did such an amazing job being happy with us, but now we know he had been in a lot of pain. We made sure to spend as much time with our father as possible because deep down inside, we did not want to believe it, but we knew he was going to pass on.

My father had a hard battle with cancer, but sadly cancer won and took my father in June of 2016. It was not fair to me, my mom, or my brother. It broke my heart that my father had passed away. "Tears are words the mouth can't say nor can the heart bear,” says Joshua Wisenbaker. I could not believe that my father had died. I remember him in his nursing bed at home falling asleep the night before his passing. I went to bed as usual expecting to see my father the next morning. When I woke up, my mother broke the terrible news to me. I was shocked and scared, and I did not want to believe it. I went downstairs to check, and it was true. My father had really passed away.

To me, my father was the best dad in the world. He did everything he could to make sure my mom, my brother and I were okay and always having fun. He was kind and sweet to everyone. To me, my father was a perfect dad. He was also a brother, uncle, husband, son, friend, best friend, manager, and co-worker. Nobody hated my father. It was heartbreaking to see him go. A quote that I heard says, “God gives his hardest battles to his toughest soldiers.” As soon as I heard that quote, I knew I was God’s toughest soldier. I knew I would live a meaningful life for my father. I knew he would watch me from heaven.

I have done many things for my father, and I know he would be proud. The biggest thing was that I made the ice hockey team. My father loved ice hockey very much. I had made the travel team and I wore number 12, which was my father's number. I represented my dad when I played. Every time I step on the ice I play for my dad. I continue to score my goals for him, because he was the one that introduced me to hockey and ignited my passion for it.

An important accomplishment I made in which my dad would be so proud was my 8th grade graduation from Queen of Angels Catholic School. I graduated from school with outstanding grades. I continue to work hard and earn 1st honors at Archbishop Wood High School. After my dad died, I had started moving into a new chapter of my life. I have grown into a mature young man. I have learned many things without my dad although I wish he was here to teach me.

My mother is one of the most special people to me. She does so much for me and my brother. I am realizing more and more how much she really does for us. She always has a smile on her face and is always kind. She makes sure my brother and I are happy. She drives us to where we need to be such as to our hockey events, games, and practices. She drives us to our friends' houses and takes us on meaningful vacations, such as Wildwood, Disney World, and Lake Placid New York. I know my mom misses her husband every day, as I miss my dad, but her support gets us through it. My dad has taught me that times will be difficult, but you always need to find the joy in the situation.