

**2024 Ben Straus Higher Education Grant Essay Contest**

**Brianna DiCriscio**

**The Odds of Life**

Before the summer of 2021, I knew the bare minimum about cancer. I only knew the basic knowledge that was taught in biology class. That was until my dad was diagnosed with stage four glioblastoma, GBM, a type of brain cancer. We were told his tumor had an IDH mutation that responded differently towards chemotherapy and radiation treatments. I knew there would be many changes to my family and my own life from then on.

Since the diagnosis, my family and I educated ourselves more about GBM and learned a lot about the cancer itself and treatments for it. We joined the Cancer Support Community soon after hearing about it in hopes of connecting with other individuals in similar situations to us and to hopefully learn more from them. Through various activities, nurses and other community members, we have found ways to change our lives to accommodate both my dad’s needs in his journey living with cancer and to live our own lives without the diagnosis drastically changing our day-to-day living.

I recently took an astronomy class in school, wanting to learn everything I could about how we are even able to be living on Earth. Statistically speaking, it is a miracle that humans exist and have a planet capable of keeping us alive. In a broad spectrum of the universe, we mean nothing. Although that sounds harsh and demeaning, it is an amazing odd that we are here. To me, this means that we can do anything we want and be whoever we would like to be. No matter what struggles we have in life, as big as cancer or as little as stepping in a puddle of water with socks of, we are so lucky to be alive. I have learned to appreciate all factors of my life. Instead of getting upset about seemingly simple things I would have been able to cry over just a few years ago, I try to remind myself that it is not a big deal at all. This being said, nobody has a perfect life or mindset and there will always be times that you get upset about a little thing. It all boils down to having a healthy mix of good and bad. One person’s ratio of good to bad absolutely does not equal another person’s ratio of the two. Healing is not a linear process and is shown differently for everyone.

A family friend of mine told my mother in the first weeks of our journey with cancer that we cannot worry until the oncologist states that there is nothing else we can do. I have kept that statement close to me because although it is a horrible disease, if treatments are working to keep the tumor stable, or to lessen it, it is not capable of ruining my family and my life. Therefore, until the treatments stop working, I will encourage myself and others to live their best lives, because it truly is the only one you have.