

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

**2nd Place Winner**

**Corrine Coleman**

**Everything Happens For A Reason**

C-a-n-c-e-r. A six-letter word, with a dense meaning, a lasting scar, and a lot of pain. I've seen shows and movies with families impacted by cancer. I've always thought about how depressing and isolating that it would be, but never truly understood the experiences that come with the fear, pain, and disastrous mess that it would create in a family. Except, that's until it wasn't just something I was imagining, it was something that I was experiencing. Something that I could have never prepared myself for, yet something I would be grateful for later.

A mom for a teenage girl is a role model. Someone who is your best friend, a parent, and someone who's there for their daughter for whatever reason. They are supposed to be the ones holding your hand through hard times and guiding you through them. Except, my mom was going through the unimaginable…cancer. She was diagnosed with stage 2 Hodgkins Lymphoma in May of 2023.

May 5th announced the result to see if my mom had cancer or not. The words sounded like a blur. My heart dropped to the floor. I didn't know how to react… so I laughed. Yup, I laughed. I was in denial. Instead of being sad, I was coping with the news by trying to pretend they were joking. Shortly after, I broke down into tears. I remember looking up at my mom, that was one of the first times we would cry about cancer together. I looked at my dad, and his face said it all. He was just as scared as my mom and I. All I could think about in that moment was the future.

2 days slowly passed and it was time to tell my siblings, this was hard to watch. I remember seeing my siblings’ faces. A 9-year-old girl along with a 5-year-old boy were going to have to question their own mom's well-being, and so will I. My mom's parents were going to have to spend their days worrying. My dad, her husband, was going to have to worry about the love of his life.

The day my mom got her head shaved; the first-day cancer showed a visual change. My mom wasn't just sick inside her body, but the outside looked sick. This was the realization that made everything feel real. Chemo stopped her from doing so much. Such as beach trips, the Fourth of July parties with my family and friends, swim meets, and simple everyday tasks. This was hard for me because summer in my head was meant to be spent outside and having fun, not inside a grieving house. A house that I dreaded going into every day. Thankfully, by the beginning of November, my mom was cancer-free, but with many side effects.

The truth is, as much as I hate cancer (which I do) a part of me is grateful for it. I learned how many people care and choose to step up and help. I've learned about what true friends look like. And how family, whether or not blood, is the most important thing when going through hardships. I went to a summer camp and met a ton of different people who also had parents with cancer. I learned a lot about myself. Like how strong I am, how I can get through hard obstacles, and that you're going to have to go through bad moments, but that's the only way you're going to appreciate the good moments.

One of the most important lessons I think in my lifetime I would need to remember is that everything happens for a reason and in most cases, it's to learn something from it. This simple thought makes everything make sense. It helps relieve the fear of the future and what's going to happen next. Cancer showed me that family is more important than anything and that I can’t control what comes next. I can only control the way I cope with it. This is something I learned from a horrible situation. I found the dim light in a world of darkness and I am forever appreciative of that.

I'm sitting here now, relieved by writing this essay, and still wondering what the future holds for me and my family, but I'm not scared of it. I’m grateful that I got the chance to experience it with my mom, my family, and the supporters standing behind us. Truly, everything happens for a reason.