

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

**Honorable Mention**

**Haneen Mighri**

**Drowning**

Drowning is one of the main phobias we humans have. From the salty water resembling tears choking us, to that dropping feeling of hitting the ocean floor, the one that resembles a nervous feeling in the pit of your stomach. While sinking, you flail for anything that will help you. But as you spiral and realize there's nothing you can do, you accept. Accept this is how it's going to be.

In June 2021, my parents called me to the living room. Our house at the time resembled a forgotten submarine, with us as the survivors trying to get back. The thing that had drowned us was unforgettable; Covid-19. I sat down, confused. The news they had broken to me felt as if an unknown creature rammed into the glass window of the sub; my mother’s brother, Wael, had just been diagnosed with cancer.

As the time changed, so did our family. Before, our family was happy. We weren’t the richest, but we were comfortable enough to eat out at the mall on Friday nights and had more than enough love to go around. After the diagnosis, my parents worked more, there was more pressure put on me, and we all had to deal with holding our breath more. More, more, more. It was too much, and the small, cracked glass had turned into a big gap, gushing in more and more water.

Us marine biologists went from working together on the sub to turning against each other. Soon, the small crack went to a big gap, gashing in water.

My uncle had a drug addiction. This caused an infection that grew into a cancerous tumor. We had tried helping him over the 3 years by sending money for medicine, and even getting him his own doctor and helping him pay rent, even though he had lived all the way in Saudi Arabia. He had spent the money on drugs, and his health rocked up and down the choppy sea until he sank.

 When I was a child, I was curious why we had so many anti-drug lessons in school.

Now I understand why.

 On November 20th, 2023, I woke up at 6:30, just like any other school day. The same week, we’d been getting news about how my uncle was in bad health. The lights were on downstairs, but the paranormal silence washed over my mind like crashing waves. My dad was in the kitchen, staring into space. I looked at his tired eyes and immediately felt something was wrong. So I asked what. I never thought I’d hear the answer that came out of his mouth, the one we worked so hard to prevent, to stop, to cure.

My uncle had died that morning. As the news came, salty tears ran down my face, ones that reminded me of the ocean, choking me in their warm embrace. It was finally over. That day I went to school, surviving the place by a thread. As I lived the next few months, I realized something; I felt as if there was a weight lifting off my shoulders. I realized it was better this way. Better all of me, my family, and my uncle.

But I know now the submarine would never resurface, would never be the same, still stuck on the ocean floor.