A close-up of a sign

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

**Honorable Mention**

**Isabelle Swenson**

**What Cancer Means To Me**

Cancer affects many, from children to adults. I was the youngest, in my family when cancer entered my life. I was four years old, so you can believe it was hard. It was a shock, a horrible one. I was not knowing what to expect made it a scarier experience.

It first started in the living room, where my parents broke the news, I didn't know what it meant then. My big sister, Maddie, at the age of seven, was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. She was the closest person to me, she was my hero, my best friend, and more importantly my family. She was diagnosed in second grade. She is the middle child in my family. We have an older sister who was ten years old when Maddie was diagnosed. Her name is Abby. Although Maddie was the one facing cancer, Abby and I were also affected by it.

People knew Maddie as “tough, and strong” but I knew it must have been really hard. She got many gifts, cards, food, toys, and love. I remember being almost jealous. Looking back, I feel bad for having those emotions. We started going to cancer events, went on a make-a-wish trip, and joined Cancer Support Community Greater Philadelphia.

Cancer Support Community Greater Philadelphia offered my family support and helped us get through one of the hardest times in our lives. The many ways it has helped us overcome this horrible time is by offering my sisters and I support through the Kids Support program. Soon after we were invited to holiday parties and events, I was able to go horseback riding, making gingerbread houses at Christmas, and going to camp in the summer. We loved going to the holiday brunch and receiving presents.

After three years of treatment, we had the biggest party to celebrate the end. All of our friends and family came to celebrate with us. Although we thought it was a happy ending, it wasn’t… at age thirteen, she got cancer again. We all thought she beat the odds and overcame it, now suddenly we were thrown back into it. I remembered the hospital parking lot numbers for my mom so we didn’t get lost, but in a way, we were all lost. I will admit I remember being extremely sad and scared… my parents told us again in the living room it was like deja vu, a repeat. And all of this was going to be for the next 3 years, another 3 years of pain and knowing there was nothing we could do to stop this from happening, but also another 3 years of experiences and people to meet along the way.

In the end, she overcame it and is now healthy and the best sister I could ask for. Cancer is experienced by 2.0 million people every year. However, it does not affect just the patient, but everyone who loves them. It's an experience we overcome mentally, physically, and most importantly as a family.