A close-up of a sign

Description automatically generated

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

**Jessica Whisler**

**Thinking of Good Memories**

I believe cancer has affected everyone's life in some way. Whether it was a relative with cancer or a friend’s family member. For me it was my grandfather who cancer took from me too soon. He was taken in 2016 while I was in 5th grade right after his 80th birthday. He had fought cancer for years and they believed that he had won and it was gone. Instead, it hit us harder than I would like to admit. When they told us it was back and had progressed I felt my world collapse. At the end he couldn’t remember my name and I knew that it was time, but I wasn’t ready to let go. When he died I packed all of my feelings aside and continued to live my life as I would have. While my brother and cousin took time off from school I did not. I decided to go to school and pretend like nothing had happened because if I thought about it then I would realize that my grandfather is gone.

So I just kept working and reading until I failed a test. The test was a day or two after he had passed and my teacher was concerned because I had never failed a test before. She emailed my parents, who believed that I told my teacher about what happened even though I didn’t, and asked if something was going on. My parents ended up telling my teacher what had just happened and had me stay home for a couple of days anyways. I was going stir crazy in the house though because my thoughts kept wandering to my grandfather and everything he would miss in our lives. He would never see my cousins and mine senior year, final games, our dorm rooms, none of it. Everyone in my family would talk about him in a sense that I couldn’t fully grasp, as if they were fine with him being gone but not at the same time. My mother kept trying to talk about his death with me and I just kept blowing her off. If I never thought about him then I wouldn’t be sad and I could be strong for my family.

It took me a while to finally realize that I needed to feel the way I did because it means that I loved him and I lost him. My father told me that instead of remembering his death, remember the happy times with him. My grandfather was one of my favorite people in my family. My dad’s side of the family were very serious people and they didn’t always see eye to eye with my humor as a kid. I was an energetic, loud, and funny kid but they didn’t like that. My grandfather never shamed me for the way I was as a child and he even indulged with my humor most of the time. He gave me Taylor Swift CDs which is what got me into her at such a young age, he did puzzles with me, and even played games with me when no one else wanted to. He was one of the only people that truly let me be me in my childhood and didn’t even care how I acted as long as it wasn’t dangerous. Which is why when he did pass I tried to shove it all down and I learned that it was not how I should handle it. My other grandfather has been diagnosed with cancer recently. Even though I am not as close with him as I was with my other grandfather, I've been to an appointment with him and am hoping that he will be alright.

Even though I choose to remember the good times with my grandfather I still think about him in a sadder way, especially my senior year. I had my senior night, a competition for school, I’ve won awards, committed to a college, and all without him. I will graduate high school with a piece of my family gone that I can’t get back and that still upsets me. I have forgotten his voice which is something I never imagined or cared to admit because I’m afraid it means I didn’t love him like everyone else. He taught me love, compassion, and gave me a great deal of pride in being true to myself. He will forever be one of my best friends.

Cancer has taken one of my favorite people from me at such a young age that I don’t even remember his voice. It’s taught me heartache and also taught me how to cope with it as well. Cancer takes from a lot of the people in the world but it’s taught multiple people how to fight, love, and grieve. I choose to remember the happy memories of him and not the cancer that won.