A close-up of a sign

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

**3rd Place Winner**

**Roman Tkach**

**Gone But Never Forgotten**

When I was six, my dad lost his battle to cancer. I never fully understood cancer and why something so bad was harming innocent people. My dad’s fight started 10 years ago when I was in preschool. I only remember so much because I was at a young age. I do remember a beautiful sunny day and my dad was teaching my brother and me cool tips about hockey. He wanted the best for us and getting into a sport like hockey would strengthen our body and mindsets.

A bit later, my dad told my mom his head was bothering him, it was a pain he had never felt before. Like any young kid, I thought it was just a headache or migraine. Little did I know, this was not the case. My uncle, who is my dad’s twin brother, rushed over to our house and took my dad to Abington Hospital. My mom did not want me or my brother to worry or be scared. I asked my mom when dad was coming home. She told me that he would have to spend time at the hospital for surgery on his brain. This was the moment I knew everything was not okay. The first couple nights without my dad were scary because I love my dad and he was the protector of our family. I really would not know what I would do without him but unfortunately, I was going to find out.

A big part of keeping our family strong during these tough times was our Ukrainian Catholic Faith. If anything was ever wrong in our lives God was the first person we would pray to. After the initial surgery, we thought we might’ve gotten the best news. They told my dad and family that the full tumor was removed. At that moment I was filled with excitement. But, after two months, it came back. I wanted to cry so much; I kept asking God why? I didn't want my dad to die. My dad died on June 9th, 2016, the night before my kindergarten graduation.

My brother and I are lucky enough to attend Catholic school due to my parents' hard work and dedication. One thing we are taught is that God has a plan for everyone. When my dad passed away, I was extremely mad and full of anger. I wasn’t sure who to be mad at and it was like I was having a fight with my soul. Now that I am older, I understand that God wants to spend time with us in his home, which is heaven. Now I have trust that God is with my dad and taking care of him.

My dad had a very strong passion for sports, especially hockey. My brother and I have been playing ice hockey for 6 years. Even though we lost our dad years ago, because of his hard work, he still provides for us to play the sport we love. Travel ice hockey has really impacted my life. When I'm angry at someone or something I step onto that ice and play my hardest to overcome anger. With my mind still developing since my dad died, whenever I step onto that thick sheet of ice, I think of him. Through the hard and good times in ice hockey, I dedicated my talent and skill to my dad. My dad was the toughest and bravest person I know. My dad is still my role model even if he is not present with us today.

Another reason my brother and I are able to play ice hockey is because of my mother. Since my dad died, she is always there supporting us. Through our hardships I know I can count on my mom to be there no matter what the circumstance. Every night before I go to bed, I give my mom the biggest hug and tell her that I love her. A valuable lesson I learned was never to take life for granted because you never know what could happen the next day.

In the Fall, I'm going to attend my dream high school, LaSalle. With the skills that my parents taught me, I am ready for the next big chapter of my life. I am excited and will work hard to the best of my ability to keep doing well.

Cancer has really impacted my life, but I know how to stay strong and always believe.