A close-up of a sign

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

**Honorable Mention**

**Zachary O’Brien**

**Dealing with Cancer**

In the year 2021, my family and I lost a great man, my father. Our father was assassinated by cancer. My family has been tainted by cancer for generations, and it has affected me because after my father died from cancer, I became afraid of it. I also had to watch my mom become a solo mother to myself and my twin brothers.

My family has been tainted by cancer for many generations, starting with my Great-Grandfather. My Great-Grandfather had cancer that he then passed down through many generations, leading to my father, which has scared me, and now I'm afraid of getting cancer. The pain that I witnessed my father bear was difficult for me, and it's still fresh in my mind. I think about it daily. I think to myself and wonder if I spent enough time with him. I remember not being able to see him face to face and only being able to see him through the door. Having to see my father like this made me afraid and not want to have to relive this moment by going through what he had to. Now today, when I am home sick, I have the fear that I might have cancer. Even though it was very difficult for me to see my dad go through all of that, and it is still hard for me to think about, I felt as though after he died, he was at peace.

On June 3rd, 2021, my brothers and I were in the middle of the worst night of our lives. We had just returned from a friend's house and saw about ten cars in front of our house. That was the day I felt my heart drop, remembering everything my father told us would happen, and I saw my mom become a single mother. When my mom became a single mother, I noticed many changes, such as it becoming more challenging to get my brothers and me to different places, and she made house changes after there was no one to stop her. When I had a basketball game, and my twin brothers had one an hour earlier, I was always late to play because it was difficult for my mom to drive us back and forth. To this day, I appreciate all that my mom has done for my brothers and me. Seeing her become a single mother was hard, but I am honored to be her son.

Lastly, losing my father to cancer has impacted my life strongly in the most stressful ways and is hard on my family and me, but we have grown closer. I now have more appreciation for all the things my mom does for me and my life. My advice for others going through this is to stay strong, accept support, and ensure you assist the family members through the struggles. My father always told me, "When you fall, you get back up," my mother always told my brothers and me, "A winner never quits, and a quitter never wins." I try to remember when cancer hit my family. I got up because that's what my dad always taught me, and I am a winner and will not quit because I have my mom and brothers to help me stay positive.