

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

**Honorable Mention**

**Zachary Wert**

**Cancer, My New Worst Enemy**

It all began with my seven-year-old sister Molly complaining about a lot of pain in her left leg. My parents became distraught and took her to our doctor. The doctor told my parents that she looked fine from what she could see, but we should see an orthopedic doctor. My mom waited for about a week, but the pain kept up, so they went to the orthopedic doctor. Once again, the doctor said the bones looked fine and recommended blood tests.

A week later they took the blood tests at the hospital, and she was told to stay at the hospital because the first results showed that she had leukemia. I still hadn’t been told about the cancer yet and wouldn’t hear about it until 5 days later.

I was scared when I saw Molly hooked up to a tube. We brought her favorite food, Chick-fil-A. We got to eat and talk with her for a little. Then Molly gave us a tour of her part of the hospital. It was neat how the room was decorated with all the cards and gifts people gave her. I found out later that she had most of the tubes that went into her were taken away, and she had one left. She called the machine that inputs the medicine in her, her “best friend” since it follows her around everywhere. There was also a port on her chest that she called her “secret button” since only the doctors could touch it. Later, after her doctors gave her the nightly medicine, we played Super Mario Bros on the switch together. It was hard to say goodbye not knowing what was wrong with Molly, but the next day I had to go camping.

When we were driving back from the hospital, my brother said, “When are you going to tell him?” After we got home, we took my stuff out of the truck, and my dad told me that Molly, my sister, had leukemia. Before I went to bed, My dad showed me a book the hospital gave us to explain what was happening. Then he told me that most likely, Molly would be home tomorrow, and I was so happy. “But,” he said, “she might not act like herself, because of the drugs they were giving her. These drugs make her act weird and trick her mind.”

The next day, I found out he was right. She was really happy to see us but got sassy sometimes. I still had a ton of fun with her. My friend and I had previously made a welcome home sign for her, so we added that to our cousins' sign. I was with my pop pop when she came back, and we were so happy to see her. She was practically asleep. Exhausted from the day. Later I was able to give my mom and Molly big hugs.

The following day, we found out that on Tuesdays she gets tests to check on her, and on Fridays, she gets diagnosed. I tried to play with Molly, but she was yelling at me and not acting like her usual self. I walked away, wondering if the “Molly” I knew would ever come back.

Later that week, when the effects of the drugs were gone, I played with her again and she was mostly her normal self. I was so happy and did not want to stop playing Mario Kart with her. I loved it when Molly laughed because I knew this only happened so many times now.

Additionally, we get a lot of support from our neighborhood. They drop off pre-made meals so my mom doesn’t have to cook and give Molly gifts to make her feel better and give her something to do. I have been getting a lot of support from close friends and teachers at school telling me that she will get better and that I can do this. I am very grateful for all the help and support I get from my friends and teachers, and I know my family appreciates it more than I do.

Overall, cancer has been affecting our family a lot. I feel nervous every day at school because if she has the smallest fever, she has to go to the hospital. I worry about Molly when I am gone from home as well, but I know she is strong and will get through this. Cancer has impacted my life greatly. I hate cancer for stealing my happiness.