



2025 Ben Strauss Youth Program
Middle School Essay Contest

Audrey Cacchio

Dancing Through The Storm

2nd Place

It was my last day of kindergarten when my mom received a call. In an instant, our lives were forever changed. Up until then, I was just a regular kid. I loved school, my friends, and having dance parties with my mom and big sister while listening to music. But that day, everything shifted.

At the hospital, my memories are a blur. I remember my mom and dad crying, a kind nurse showing me how to give pretend needles to a stuffed animal, and big windows I could draw on. I was confused, looking up helplessly at my mom and asking, “What’s wrong?” I didn’t understand her response. She answered with one word that turned everything upside down: “Leukemia.” It meant my blood was sick. A song flashed into my mind: “Bad Blood” by Taylor Swift. It was my favorite—one my mom, sister, and I would twirl around to in the living room while dancing. I remember thinking, *maybe she’s singing about me.*



The summer was spent going back and forth to the hospital. At home, I spent my days sick, resting, and watching *The Greatest Showman*. I listened to the song in the movie “A Million Dreams” repeatedly, not quite understanding its lyrics.

One day, my mom asked, “Would you like to see if the doctors think we can take a break and go to the beach?” Her whole face brightened. “It could be something to look forward to” she explained. Every week, I waited anxiously to hear whether I was well enough to go. I could picture my sister and me playing in the waves, digging in the sand, and watching the sunset. Planning an exciting beach day with my family kept me going through all the needle pricks, bone marrow biopsies, and terror of learning how to swallow medicine.

Finally, after what felt like forever, I watched my dad start packing the car for our trip, and heard him say, “Today’s the day!” That afternoon, my sister and I ran toward the ocean. We dove under and over the waves, built sandcastles, and chased seagulls. The sun’s rays felt amazing on my skin. As evening approached, we went to the bay to watch the sunset. The pink, gold, and blue colors mixed as the sun began to lower. I looked over and saw my mom crying. I had just turned six, but I knew something important had happened. My mom whispered through her tears, “You did it.” “You made it to the beach!”

Now, at twelve years old, those memories have laid the foundation of my fight. I have never let anything slow me down. I am a straight A student. I am a competitive cheerleader. I am a volunteer for a local cancer organization. Although, I dream of a day when I am no longer in treatment, I know that I can achieve any goal I set my mind to. I continue to hope, dream, fight, dance, and sing through every challenge that comes my way.