

2025 Ben Strauss Youth Program
Middle School Essay Contest

Lily Tomasso

Cancer Changed Everything

Honorable Mention

Cancer has been in my life since I was two years old. It's always been a scary word, even before I really knew what it meant. I just knew my pop pop had it, and then he died. Later, my mom got the same type of blood cancer, and I thought she was going to die too.

My pop pop was my favorite person in the world. I wasn't daddy's girl or a mommy's girl, I was my pop pops girl. I even changed my last name to honor him. I lived with him, my mom, my cousin, my aunt and my mom mom. Out of all my family, he was my favorite, and I loved being around him. When he passed away, I didn't really understand it at first, but I knew everything felt different. It wasn't the same anymore. My mom mom and I never had a strong relationship, she was always closer to my cousin, and after my pop pop was gone, we just grew even more distant. I don't think that will ever change. Losing him was the first time I ever felt sad, and I still feel sad thinking about him and it's been 10 years, 10 years and I still miss him, nothing's the same.

Then, when my mom got cancer, it felt like it was all happening again. I thought I was going to lose her too, and I didn't know what to do with that kind of fear, so I pretended like nothing was happening. My mom isn't just my parent, she's my best friend. She always knows how to make me feel better, and she's the person I can talk to about anything. The idea of losing her was too much.



Her treatment lasted a long time, and I didn't get to see her for almost three months. She spent a lot of time sick in her room, and then she had to go to the hospital for a stem cell transplant. That was when I thought I would never see her again. I remember her telling me she would come home, but I had doubts. She didn't like me thinking negatively, so I wrote a post-it note and put it on the fridge. It said, "my mom will be the 99%, not the 1%". It felt like forever. Every single day without her, I worried. I wanted to help, but there was nothing I could do. I just had to wait.

When she finally came home, I thought everything would go back to normal, but it didn't. She wasn't the same mom. Before, she was always happy and full of energy, always talking and laughing. Now, she was quiet and tired all the time. She couldn't even lift more than two pounds. Most of the time, she just slept. It was really hard to see her like that.

But over time, she started to get better. She's been going to physical therapy, and I can see her getting stronger. She's not back to the way she was before, but I really hope she will be one day. I just want my old mom back, the happy, fun, and talkative one.

Even though this whole thing has been really scary, I'm just happy I still have my mom. I miss my pop pop every day, but I still have my best friend, and that means everything to me.