



2025 Ben Strauss Youth Program High School Essay Contest

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I Was Selfish. Didn't Want to Share!

First, I would like to say thank you for giving me an opportunity to share my personal story about how cancer has impacted my life. As already stated in the essay instructions, cancer hit not only my mother and I, but also impacted our entire family, friends, school & sport activities, and my mother's career. It hit our lives like a devastating war bomb.

It was July 2022, I was 14 years old, when we got "the call!" My mother was driving me to softball practice. We had to pull over, my mother had the doctor's call on speaker. After hearing the news, my mother was numb, did not really know what to do or say, as she drove to softball. I, on the other hand, was annoyed and in a panic because my mother spent so much time on the phone with the doctor and had to pull over making us late for softball. This was an all-girls softball team sponsored by the Phila Phillies in South Philly, all I cared about was getting to ball on time for tryouts!!!

So, I guess we can start there, from the drive on I-95 to baseball on a hot summer night! All I know is from that day on, my mother was taken from me! "Me, myself, and I" were left alone with not much adult help. For example: My first day of high school, the



biggest day of my teenage life, 09/07/2022, my mother was not there for me. I had to get a ride to the bus with my "grumpy" grandfather on the first day of high school. I was sad, scared, miserable, stressed, and full of hate. It was not just one day with my mean grandfather; it was 3 months of a ride to the morning bus with him yelling at me and giving me a tough time right before school every day. May I include, the bus came every day 6:12 am, that is right 6:12 am! I was waking up every day 5 am for school, getting ready "all by myself," making my lunches "all by myself," doing my wash "all by myself," cooking my meals "all by myself," struggling with homework "all by myself," and dealing with teenage high school drama "all by myself" for about a year.

To shed some unfair light on my home front, my father passed away when I was 10 years old, 2018. Now in 2022, my mother has cancer. I did not understand really what this meant, all I know is for a year my mother could not be there for me. She had a harsh treatment and recovery. Took an exceptionally long time to heal. She was always crying, could not move much from surgery, had lots of complications from surgery. My mom was always at doctor appointments and cancer support meetings. My mom was sad, scared and crying a lot all the time! This impacted my own mental health!

My outlet to all my life stress and sadness is cheerleading. I had an entire cheer season without my mom. Had to beg for rides from other cheer parents, and the girls on the team started to exclude me from friendships because their parents found me more of an annoyance because they "had to help me with cheer rides" rather than having compassion for me because of my situation. One father on the cheer team approached me and told me "How lucky" my mom was that she could skip cheer competitions, etc!

That made me run into the bathroom and cry! I started to hate the only thing I loved,
CHEER!

Another thing cancer took from me was money. My mom was out of work for three months and she was always complaining about medical bills and that I could not get Starbucks or order out food, like a cheesesteak. My mom could not cook or clean the house, and I tried my best and that was not good enough! My mom would have to pay for a housekeeper to come scrub the bathrooms.

The one thing that i can take away from my parent having cancer and my personal experience is that it has made me a fighter and very independent. I was diagnosed last year with a blood disorder called "Von Willie Brands" which requires a lot of doctor appointments and treatments at St Christophers Hospital, which will carry on to my adult life forever. I think to myself "if my mom can do it, so can I!"

Again, thank you for giving me an opportunity to express myself regarding what I experienced during my mom's cancer journey. There is so much I cannot put into words, and I feel like no one will ever understand, but thankful my mom is still here today with me.