



2025 Ben Strauss Youth Program High School Essay Contest

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The Bright Side of Grief

The emptiness that followed me after my mom's passing shaped me into the person I am today. I carry her death with me every day, reminding me to be the person she raised me to be. She taught me many lessons in the time I had with her. When my mom died, I continued and still continue to learn lessons from her. She influenced every value I have today. Whether that be her absence or her influence on my life. Having a parent die at the age of eight can change you in so many ways. I am such a strong person because of her. Not only because of her passing but because of what she taught me. She was the strongest person I know. I watched as the fire inside of her slowly burned out, but she continued to smile and showed her love for the ones around her. Although she is stuck in the past her presence is always impacting the future. She valued kindness, hard work, honesty, and empathy.

When you grow up with a mom, she is your biggest supporter and role model. Her death did not stop her from being my role model and biggest supporter. She showed me I could do anything I put my mind to. She showed me I am stronger than I ever realized. We celebrate the fact that she was in our lives not mourn the fact that she

is no longer here. Her death had left a void in everyone who was in her life, a void that I was constantly struggling to fill. I will always struggle navigating the world without her guidance and support; however, her absence has taught me that even though she is no longer here physically that does not mean her presence is not installed in every aspect of my life and who I am today. She taught me to be resilient. Life can be extremely unpredictable; you must always be able to adapt to challenges thrown your way. You must always find strength and power in the moments of sadness and grief. Every opportunity you have needs to be cherished and embraced. Every moment you have in life is precious and can change in an instant, live your life fully. A vital part of my life suddenly disappeared in the blink of an eye. Forever changing my perspective on life.

Everyday I live life hoping to honor her memory by living life with the love and compassion she gave me. Her impact showed me how to be extremely emotionally available and understanding. Losing a parent is an emotional journey that ultimately caused me to feel every affection deeply. I will always feel a deeper connection to my family after her passing, the love and open arms she always had for everyone I will always cherish and pass on. Nurture the bonds you have with your loved ones. The foundation of my character came from everything within her. While the pain of losing her will always be a part of me, the happiness of knowing her is more powerful than all. Not only did she teach me how to love, she taught me how to grieve, how to care and most importantly how to laugh.

Although I may be jealous of the girls around me with mother daughter relationships, I am happy to have experienced one so great for 8 years, I was able to

learn values at such a young age. Despite the fact that I still flinch at the sound of girls talking about their relationships with their moms I remember that I carry her with me every step of my life. I did not get the chance to build a relationship with her as a teenager but she was the best mom I could've ever asked for. I can only imagine what an amazing mom she would've been had she been in my life longer than 8 years. I often find myself having feelings of loneliness and lack of guidance when it comes to womanhood. This causes me to be independent and self-reliant. I crave the connection and support that comes from having a mom. This motivates me to seek out that connection from others, who offer me love and guidance. I have learned lessons that one could not teach themselves, lessons that come from hardship and grief.

My mother's spirit lives within me, shaping me more and more everyday to be the best version of myself. The pain of losing her will forever be a part of me and who I am, I chose to honor her and who she was through me. I hope to reflect on her life through her kindness, compassion and much more as I navigate through the world without her.