

2025 Ben Strauss Youth Program  
High School Essay Contest

# Malia Vittoria

## *HR - Positive*

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*HR Positive breast cancer.*

**“Hormone receptors are proteins found on breast cells. They pick up the estrogen or progesterone signals that promote cell growth, including cancer cell growth if they contain the receptors for those hormones.” (penn medicine.org,)**

Six hours of working in a hot, condensed snack bar in the middle of July sweat dripping down my back yet, all I could think about was the news that awaited me back home. It almost made me nauseous, the suspense of what was to come. I couldn't wait any longer so my boss let me off early. The drive home consisted of me praying to God and pleading with him to make sure my mom would be okay. I prayed that the lump would be benign and the doctors were worried about nothing. As I got home I got the call; My eyes swelled, and my throat dried as my mom explained “It's cancer, Breast cancer.”

People try to convince you that everything will be okay when in reality you are slowly losing the only person who truly cares about you. You have a front-row seat to see a person's body defy them in unimaginable ways. Their identity disappears and they are a hollow shell of the person they used to be. The smile lines turn dejected and all you see is pain. The worst part is



not being able to stop any of it. There are no warning labels that come with this. All you really can do is sit and watch as the person you used to know deteriorates right in front of you.

Most kids whose mother has been diagnosed with breast cancer have help from the other parent, financially and emotionally. However, for me, it's just my mom and I trying to navigate the world together. It's always been just me and her. One question that pondered in my mind was "How could something so terrible happen to someone so innocent?" I couldn't stop thinking about that. It built up so much anger and hatred inside me "Why my mother?" repeated over and over in my mind. Something I could never surpass was that no one truly cared about my mom the way I did. I helped her walk when she couldn't. I would take care of her when she was sick. I even helped her into bed and dressed her when she couldn't do it herself. She had been through so much and gave everything just for people to push her off to the side. It made me believe that people only "cared" once they found out she had cancer.

Looking back I now know that isn't true. We've both had supporters during this rough patch. For instance, my cheer team had decked out in all pink for breast cancer awareness night. We wore pink breast cancer socks with ribbon tattoos on our faces. Our booster club even had personalized tee shirts dedicated to my mom so we could wear them on breast cancer night, which the team still wears to this day. Many families have donated food and money, they've also given my mom resources like Facebook groups, Unite for her, and many other platforms to help her maintain her mental and physical health. I don't think my mom would be where she's at mentally without them.

All the turmoil my mom has faced, the chemo sickness, hair loss, fatigue, fainting spells, and isolation, she has never missed one of my cheer competitions. Even when mom felt her

worst she made the long drives and stayed hours on end in a hot high school gym just to watch me cheer my senior year. We would argue on whether or not she would go because of just how sick she was. She never gave in and always came anyway. My mom would reschedule doctor appointments just to make it to important cheer activities. She is the strongest woman I know. I told her that she could've stayed home and rested yet she was always there no matter what. My mom never let cancer get the best of her, cracking jokes left and right not only to make herself smile but to me as well.

Although she still has a long way to go, the hard part is over. On February 18th the doctors will perform a double mastectomy that will take a few weeks to recover from, and then she will start radiation. My mom's biggest fear is that she won't feel feminine anymore, but I don't believe that's true. Through it all her beautiful smile never left her face. Appearances don't make you a woman, it's the experiences you've lived, and no one can take that away from you. At the end of the day, hair is just hair, a smile can still be feminine, and beautiful actions create beautiful people. I call myself rich with everything that's happened within the past few months. Seeing my mother gain her spark back makes me feel like I've won the lottery.

## Work Cited

<https://www.pennmedicine.org/cancer/types-of-cancer/breast-cancer/types-of-breast-cancer/hormone-positive-breast-cancer#:~:text=They%20pick%20up%20the%20estrogen,%2C%20or%20just%20hormone%2d%20Positive.>