



## 2025 Ben Strauss Youth Program High School Essay Contest

# Meah Phelan

### *The Wicked Mutation*

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My life felt normal and the start of elementary school and then life took a turn for the worst. I can say my life is like entering the twilight zone and my mom is the tour guide through it all. I will say sharing the diagnosis with my sibling and I is heartbreaking and tragic to hear. The word cancer is the critical part and exploring the body and the young minds and the mixed emotions that happens with it all. I am in total disbelief and the emotional state of mind that is even happening as we move forward as a family. The body and abnormal cells are like looking through a microscope. Why does it look so different from the rest? My mom's cell has changed, like playing a game of catch me if you can. Will she catch it early or will it be too late? The different staging once cancer is confirmed includes factors such as the tumor size, whether it spreads to other parts of the body and the presence of the lymph nodes. I will say a biopsy usually requires confirming the diagnosis while removing a small sample of tissue or the cells under a microscope. I will say it like looking back where it all started. The journey as she travels and exploring the details of breast cancer and the

lump she discovers.

The world becomes so different for her and her appointments, the tears and the fears of chemo treatments and the biopsies is now her life. The results of chemo she had 54 treatments and the red devil is now destroying everything in her path as she fights. The tumor is now 7 cm. The size of a peach at the age of 30. The moment I knew something was different and it was. My eyes are closed but I can see everything and feel everything. Pretending it does not bother me but that is far from the truth. That I feel like I am living a nightmare hearing my mom talk from the other room. I have learned my mom was dealt a bad hand and has to deal with the aftermath of it all. Hearing the phone call my mom looked broken and the doctor said what was happening. Li Fraumeni syndrome is like playing a game of cards and the tp53 gene, the most important card, is missing from the deck. The genes my mom has are killer genes. Over 1000 families worldwide carry this gene mutation that causes it and there is no protein to fight off the cells so they divide and spread cancer throughout her body like a wildfire. There will be no more effective and stopping the growth of cancerous cells, no more repairing damaged DNA just the continued damaging DNA that divides and replicates. Eyes wide open lying on the bed as tears run down my face and thinking of this journey.

That mom started showing signs and symptoms. There have been moments waiting for my brother in speech sessions when my mom passed out from the chemo. She would look so tired and weak. The chemo is making her tired as the chemo is

killing the cancer cells throughout the body through the injection and which are given in cycles to allow the healthy cells to recover.

Despite this is life releasing the dragon and destroying everything in its pathway. When seeing my mom's hair fall out peace by peace and being heartbroken. Although my mom hair gone by the 3rd treatment piece by piece and hearing my mom making an appointment to get her first wig was the first time I saw her smile when looking into a mirror. Because there so many kind souls out there for cancer patients making them feel normal, a sense of beauty which I loved for my mom. The hospital stays got longer and looking at my mom makes me stronger. Since I remember my mom's bills kept coming one by one and my mom applied for a grant and was rewarded by the LFS community which helped my mom pay off bills and other ways. Since I remember my mom opening up the envelope and seeing my mom smile with tears and how happy she was. It was a sense of relief for my mom which was truly amazing for her. Since this new research understands its role in cancer identifying therapeutic targets and improving diagnostics strategies including studies on Li Fraumeni syndrome and tp53 mutant cancers. A research team at the Korean Advanced Institute of Science and Technology led by Professor Kwang-Hyun Cho has, developed a technology that can cancer cells to normal cells to a normal state offering a potential new approach to cancer treatment. This new technology will hopefully revolutionize the treatment of cancer causing less pain and suffering for the victims of cancer and their families.