



2025 Ben Strauss Youth Program  
Middle School Essay Contest

# Messiah Jenkins

## *Cancer Essay*

## **Honorable Mention**

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I am currently in the 8th grade, and I attend the Philadelphia Virtual Academy. This essay is based on cancer and how it impacted me and my family. Let me start by saying this is a subject that all families can relate to in their own lives today. Cancer is also a scary reality for not just the person but their families as well.

Cancer, what is cancer exactly? I am glad you asked. Cancer is a disease in which abnormal cells divide uncontrollably and destroy body tissue. Now I will be honest: I have had a few family members battle cancer and win. However, this specific family member just hit our family a little bit differently. It is funny how life works sometimes.

My cousin's battle with brain cancer not only affected him. It really rippled through our entire family. Altering our lives in ways we could have not imagined. When diagnosed with brain cancer . It was like weight on our shoulders and gravity was just pulling us down. We were in complete disbelief but up for the fight as we knew it would be a battle.

The man that we all knew to be family-driven, hardworking, and loved. Had to face his new reality in life, it was truly heartbreaking. For months he underwent treatments, surgeries, and rehabs. Giving us several types of emotions every time there was something new. As a



teenager, I could not imagine seeing my parents go through something so traumatic. The reality was harsh but our hope and faith was high. We watched him deteriorate physically, mentally, and emotionally. To me it just seemed like cancer took over more than just his health.

I wondered to myself. How could this happen to the glue that held our family together. He was always planning family events or gatherings. Always just showing up for others and being the voice of people, he believed in when they did not believe in themselves. An outstanding father to his children. I really admired this journey. My cousin was always in good spirits. Always saying dry your eyes, I am fine. No matter what he looked like or was going through, he still was the one to encourage us to be strong. How could someone be so strong while not only fighting for your life. You are fighting for financial security for your children and family. This was truly a strain on him and the family.

My parents, often the silent supporters, were burdened with worry trying to balance their concern. For my cousin and our own immediate family. It was a time of uncertainty for sure. Joy felt so distant during these challenging times. Through it all we all learned to love our loved ones and stick together. I learned that tomorrow might not be the same as your yesterday so cherish every moment of life.

Cancer changed everything but it taught us to cherish the small moments in life. One day for us all life will be just a memory, so we try to create as many good ones as possible. My cousin fought brain cancer and began to recover. After a year and a half battle. It was an immense joy to me and my family. To watch my cousin reclaim his life. As cancer had nearly taken everything from him, it was defeated.

Was truly inspiring and a reminder of the strength we all have even in our darkest moments. This experience was not only challenging. It also brought our family closer together.



Two weeks ago, my world changed forever. My cousin, someone I grew up with, laughed with, and shared countless memories with, lost their battle with cancer. Even though I knew the illness was taking a toll, nothing could have prepared me for the final goodbye.

I just wrote about how he fought cancer now he is deceased. Watching someone you love fight a disease like cancer is heartbreaking. There were moments of hope, where we believed they would get better, and moments of despair when the reality of their condition set in. Through it all, they remained strong, braver than I ever could be. Even in pain, they tried to comfort us, making sure we knew they loved us until the very end.