

2025 Ben Strauss Youth Program
Middle School Essay Contest

Sadie Swetkowski

In The Fight For Someone I Love

Honorable Mention

I never thought my whole life would change so fast. My dad woke up in pain in the middle of the night on Halloween. He noticed a bump on the left side of his hip. He assumed he pulled something when walking with my friends and their dads trick or treating. He went to urgent care with my mom the next day and the doctors said it could be a hernia or a lymph node. They told him to get it checked out at Bryn Mawr hospital. All weekend he said he was fine, but I knew deep down he wasn't. I get scared when he acts like everything is ok, because then we can't help him.

My dad and mom went to the hospital and they didn't get good news from the doctor. They said he had to go to a specific department on Thursday.

Thursday comes around. They took samples of the bump, which made the bump turn purple. My dad said it felt like a staple gun when they took the samples. The doctors said they would give him a call about it on Monday.

My dad works at my school, so he drives me home. In his classroom at the end of the day, I remember seeing the happiness drain from his face when he took the call. His voice was full of apprehension. I was very confused when he told me to hold his hand on the way home from school. At this point, I was uncomfortable and scared.

This isn't even the worst part of the day. I remember my parents telling me to sit down at the table. My mom started crying her eyes out as my dad told me he was diagnosed with lymphoma. I cried rivers that night. I didn't go to my after-school activities. My mom got calls from so many people asking if everything was ok, which didn't help the situation at all. I cried myself to sleep that night.

Who knew my life could change in a single day?

There have been a lot of changes in my life since cancer has taken its seat at our table. We have been blessed with so many amazing people who have helped over these past months. They have walked our dogs, cooked meals, and supplied us with many gifts. My cheer team had us wear green bands in honor of my dad's cancer saying, "In the fight for someone I love." On nights before my dad's treatments, I would sleep at people's houses so my parents wouldn't have to worry about me in the mornings. I also could get extended time from my teachers for assignments on these nights, which took a lot of stress off of me.

Even though all of these things are very nice, they wouldn't have to happen if my dad didn't have cancer. He gets tired really easily, especially after a full week of work. He isn't able to stay for my whole cheer competitions, which makes me upset because he used to. The thing that has been really hard though is spring break. We usually go on a trip during spring break, but we are unable to because my dad is getting radiation the whole time.

I like change, but not this much.

My life has changed a lot since November 11, 2024. I have to work around the house more because my dad is usually sleeping and resting 80% of the time. I have learned a lot more about cancer and cancer cells (especially in science which was a hard lesson). I now see a therapist and a school counselor to share my feelings. But the worst thing about cancer to me is that it has taken over my dad to the point where he can't even do day-to-day activities. He gets tired when eating dinner, playing lacrosse in the backyard, and even watching a show late at night. I don't like to see my dad struggle like this. My new job now is to tuck *him* in at night, when he falls asleep early. It is hard to watch sometimes, but I have to stay strong for him, just like how he tries to stay strong for me.

Unbelievably, it's been almost 5 months with my dad having cancer, because it feels like it has been in our lives forever. But we've got this. Things may or may not get better, but you must stay strong for the people you love.