



2025 Ben Strauss Youth Program High School Essay Contest

Sam Carden

A Disease That Can't Be Fixed

My father finds joy in fixing things. He loves helping others around him with troubles or issues with their furniture, plumbing, lawn, and mechanical things. You'll find him in the bathroom fixing the shower or the mold problem that infests the ceilings. You'll find him in the backyard sanding and staining wooden furniture he thrifts for cheap. You'll find him in the front yard mowing and trimming the greenery to make his house pleasing to look at. The place you can always find him is in the garage where he works on his car to make it brand new because deep down, he knows he will never feel "brand new" ever again.

Cancer is something I have always been acquainted with. It invited itself into my home when I was little, and I have been living with it for as long as I can remember. It was something that haunted the hallways and echoed in the hollow walls of my home for eternity. Cancer struck my dad when I was three years old, causing him to get surgery and forever be changed from that moment forward. Cancer would possess my father and make him do things that he didn't like to do. He would argue with anyone who was in his way, sleep all day and night, and collect prescriptions to make him feel better. I thought that my dad had won that battle with Cancer and that I would never have to look it in the eyes ever again, but it proved me wrong. This time,



Cancer created a war within my home and immediately took over my father, not holding back. My father couldn't swallow, he couldn't talk, and then he couldn't eat. The unknown is what scared my family the most, and we never knew if he was going to make it out of this war.

As months passed by, my father recruited new sidekicks: Feeding Tube, Chemo, and Radiation. They were a tag team trio who would help my father take down Cancer once and for all. Eventually, the Cancer shrunk in size, and Feeding Tube was not needed anymore. However, Chemo was still fighting strong and never wanted to give up. During these times of illness and reflection, my father still found ways for his life to be back to normal. He still found importance in fixing the things that were around him. He thrifted more pieces of decor and furniture, and soon enough, our family had enough tables and clocks that we could be mistaken for a bunch of clock smiths and table enthusiasts. His brand new obsession has been updating and remodeling his car. He spent loads of time and money to make his boring and plain car look cool and flashy. This is something that he cares about because it helps him stand out, not because of the unique battle that he is going through with Cancer, but because he has a breathtaking new ride that he can drive around town. When all of these passions were being built, Cancer was breaking down and soon was defeated.

One day, my father's doctors told him the sad truth. Cancer is coming back for more, and it is something that he is going to live with forever. Instead, Cancer will be traveling inside of him and show up at our front door whenever it wants to. This upset my father and my family because a battle that we thought he had won will never be over. This is still something that he will fight with, and he will never ring that bell of success and accomplishment ever again.



This new eternal battle with Cancer has never stopped my father from being his true self. He found new joy in spending time with family and his passions. He is still himself and is kind towards anyone that he meets, cracking jokes with strangers, and making better connections with his children. He learned to accept and love the things and people around him. He realized that the people closest to him were the people who were going to help him fight this battle; they were the pistons to his engine. His family would soon become his motivation in the mornings. His spirit shows me that every day is worth living, if not for me, then for those who love and cherish who I am. Even though Cancer is something that my dad and my family will live with, we will never let it control our lives. We will be stronger than this infesting disease, and instead, we will do what we do best. We will never give up, and if something comes our way, we will get through it and try again.