



**13th Annual Ben Strauss
Middle School Essay Contest 2026
Honorable Mention**

**Alexander
Reyes**

The Years Taken by Cancer

I don't really remember a time when my dad wasn't sick. I was three and half years old when my father was diagnosed with stage 3 colon cancer. I don't remember a whole lot from back then because I was so young, but my mom will never forget the day my dad called her when she was pushing me on the swings at the park by our house. My dad told her he was leaving work early to drive himself to the hospital because he was in so much pain. Now, I am twelve years old and have a better understanding of my dad's cancer, but sometimes I wish I didn't have to understand what cancer was.

From the time I was three and a half up until I was nine, my dad's cancer had come back about three times. During these years, my dad has gone through two major surgeries, two different types of chemotherapy, and radiation. It wasn't until I was in



fifth grade when I “snapped out of it” and saw the world in a different way. I started to notice my dad going upstairs to sleep a lot and I noticed the huge scar he had on his stomach. I began asking questions about why my dad wasn’t feeling well and my mom and I had a long talk about it. I remember my mom telling me that dad had something called cancer and that it doesn’t make him feel good all the time and that he was taking medicine to make him feel better.

During the summer in between fifth and sixth grade, my dad did another scan and we got the news that the cancer had spread. He went through another surgery that summer, but unfortunately, it did not go well and the doctors were not able to remove everything. Soon after that, he had to start treatment again. At that time, I still didn’t fully understand that my dad’s cancer was getting a bit worse. I remember my mom crying and I felt confused, not really knowing what was happening around me. My mom and I started going to events at Gilda’s Club and I also went to Camp Kids that summer. Gilda’s Club helped me understand more about having a parent with cancer. I also got to meet many kids around my age who were also going through the same thing as me.

My dad is still going through treatment and goes to the cancer center every three weeks. Sometimes I get to go with him if I have a day off from school and I get to see how the nurses take care of him. However, I have many different emotions that I go through. I feel frustrated and sad that my dad has cancer because there are many things he can’t experience with us, mostly because he doesn’t feel well. For example, he can’t go to my soccer games because they are outdoors and he cannot be out in the sun too long or his skin will blister. Whenever we hang out together, we sometimes have to cut it short because he will feel sick or tired all of a sudden. We also don’t get to go on many trips or vacations as a family, or sometimes we need to cancel things.

Although cancer has affected my family in a negative way, we have also learned so much from it. We have learned to be grateful for every day we have together and to be grateful that his treatment has been helping him. I am grateful for being able to hang



out with my dad when we play video games, watch anime and go to the comic book shop. The most important thing that has come out of all of this is my dad's positive attitude. Even on his worst days, he still stays strong and has a smile on his face. This has taught me that even in the worst of times, it is important to stay confident and think positively.