



13<sup>th</sup> Annual Ben Strauss  
High School Essay Contest 2026  
**Honorable Mention**

# Meah Phelan

## *Walking with the Devil*

This leads to many of us having a love or hate relationship with our bodies. Furthermore, we might struggle with our appearance, but often it might run deeper than that. We spend so much time appearance, the external relationship in life, but surely it's my mom that requires the love and attention that she needs. We all have our stories but I am here to share my mom's story of her own journey. The reason I wrote this essay is because my mom's story is unique with some killer genes. We often talk about the impact cancer has on our loved ones, our partners and caregivers , but rarely do we talk about the opportunity to hear firsthand effects it has on a child like myself.

My mom was first diagnosed with cancer when I was in elementary school. I learned to build a relationship with the Lord and even on the darkest days I can still get through anything and to be strong just have faith. My mother is my inspiration , my superhero, my bestfriend is my guiding light through everything. The fight of mom's life she had 54 rounds of chemotherapy , which was estimated would take 2 years to finish. Chemotherapy is like a tornado that destroys everything in its pathway taking everything from the good cells to the bad cells. Overall, my mother took on cancer like a champ. As I grew older and viewed this experience I noticed how abnormal everything was. There is no smooth sailing in this world , it is only that someone else faces the



winds in place of you. My mom didn't want to see the gruesome impact cancer had on her. She wanted a normal childhood for me and my brother and my older sister.

All I wanted to see was her delightful smile and to hear her laugh. Throughout the entirety of my life I remember my mom being sick with breast cancer and endometrial cancer and the battling continues. During her cancer journey, my mother taught me life lessons that I carry with me everyday and always. I learned to be strong and the healing process will take time and patience. I was told that my mom had cancer not once but twice and a rare gene which is damaged. Throughout my mom's entire treatment she worked and knew it was important for me physically and spiritually. However the end of the battle, the struggle, the chaos and the pain. I believed the victories and my mom's accomplishments; she won her battle not once but twice.

Finally, I feel like chemo was her ticket for victory and power and it gave me hope when the day finally came. The phrase "life after cancer" signifies more than trying to get your life back to normalcy again but cancer survivors will never be "normal" again. I will always wonder if my mom's cancer will return and the return to the hospitals. My mother battled aftereffects of the toxic drugs, the ones that saved my mom's life. My mom fights day to day to keep healthy. We make the most out of it and know that life can change in an instant. I speak for all the children that can't speak for themselves about this disease. I have learned to appreciate the little things in life and to be more carefree like my mom. Although cancer sucks, it has brought me closer to my mom and what matters in life.

What matters is truly living and making memories with loved ones. My Generation struggles so much over things that don't matter like who has more followers

on Instagram. My mom's experience with cancer allows me to live a better life than I did before and for that, I appreciate what I have learned from my mom's journey. Although my mom already "passed" her scans and no evidence of the disease I would be praying for. My mom took numerous pills to keep the monster out of her body. Therefore the trust you have between your physicians and their patients like my mom places their health in the hands of a doctor and trust she has built over time.

Above all, Li Fraumeni syndrome is rare and caused by a tp53 suppressor gene mutation which my mom has. A normal TP53 gene, which makes a protein that helps stop abnormal cells from growing. Although everyone has the tp53 gene that prevents cancer, my mom has the mutated version that causes cancer. When a mutation occurs in the tp53 gene, abnormal cells can divide uncontrollably and become a cancer. Li Fraumeni syndrome can't be prevented but it helps with early and consistent cancer screening and treatment can limit the syndrome's impact on your life and your family's lives. Research estimates that over 1000 families worldwide carry the gene mutation that causes it. That means less than 50,000 people in the United States have Li Fraumeni syndrome. Li Fraumeni syndrome March 20th Day and honor my mom and bring awareness.