

# True Beauty is Strength

*Morgan Greene*

For most people my age they have not come face to face with death. Whether it be directly or indirectly, they have not experienced much loss. I however have become very familiar with death and more importantly the preciousness of life. It began earlier this year in April. It was around this time that I was given my diagnosis. I was told that the results of my CT scan had revealed that I had a 99% chance of having cancer. A few days after that phone call, my biopsy revealed that I was not the fortunate 1% in the statistic. I had Hodgkin's Lymphoma stage 3A. Upon first hearing these words they carried little meaning or understanding, but what they did carry was a lot of uncertainty and fear. In my limited experience with cancer, I knew that it was often accompanied by death. There I was at 17 staring death in the face, and I was terrified. Of course later, I would begin to learn that the success rate of my type of cancer was very favorable. I had gotten one of the best kinds, if there was such a thing. Before finding out this news, I watched my grandfather pass away.

He had been struggling for about 6 years with Parkinson's disease and it had progressed so quickly, that his quality of life was very poor. Towards the end he couldn't walk without holding on to something and he was in constant pain. It was extremely hard on me to watch him go, but I was encouraged, because he was a man of faith who knew he was moving on to a place where he would not have to experience the same pain he had come to know for so long. I found myself in that moment to really be reminded of my faith and I don't know if it was because of my grandpa's inspiring faith throughout his life, or just the trauma of the experiences, but I was glad I began to focus what was going on around my faith. It helped to calm me and I no longer thought about the treatment I was going to undergo or the possibility of death, I thought instead about how I could continue to keep doing as many things as I possibly could while going through everything.

My first day of chemotherapy I had a calculus test first period and I decided that I needed to take it. I was not going to let a looming hospital stay stop me. So they scheduled my appointment around my first period and I went into school to take my test. Right after I left to check into the hospital for 3 days to do my first round of chemotherapy. That morning I was surprisingly more worried about my calculus test than what was to come in the hospital. It is because of this affect, that I found school to really become something I felt I needed to attend. I wanted to continue to get my grades, and see my friends and more importantly not miss out on opportunities. I was my class president that year and I had already ran and was elected to be the student body president for next year, and I wanted to fulfill my obligations under these roles. My teachers and parents especially always encouraged me to only do what I felt up to doing, and they were the ones who often had to remind me to slow down, but school had become my replacement for athletics.

I have always participated in athletics and I was in the middle of track season when I was diagnosed. I had to stop running and doing club soccer, due to the amount of fatigue and general state my body was in. I hated sitting out on the sidelines, even when I was healthy and suddenly I found myself forced to remain there. I soon, looked to school to be the arena for which I would challenge myself, and a challenge it was. I had a rigorous course load with 4 advanced placement classes and even without the medical challenges I was facing, it was hard, but now I was adding on a constant feeling of fatigue. For anyone that knows anything about the affects of chemotherapy,

they know that it drains you. I was no exception. I found it a daily struggle to find the energy to go to class and do things I normally did without feeling tired from them. This was a big change from before when I used to do all of these things on top of athletics, and other outside obligations. However it is because of these very challenges that I found myself more appreciative of everything.

Just this November I got a set of scans done that came back clear, and I was told that I am officially in remission. After about 6 months of treatment, I had finally made it. I had finished all of the chemotherapy and radiation and it felt amazing. It had also felt like an incredibly long 6 months, but it was finally over. Now, as I have finished my treatment, two of my fellow classmates are undergoing theirs. One was just diagnosed in October with Leukemia, and the other relapsed earlier this year and is still dealing with Non Hodgkin's Lymphoma. As I celebrate my end of treatment, it does not really feel like the end for me. I am watching my classmates experience the same form of adversity that I had to face, and I empathize with them in a way that no other person can. I have tried to support both of them as they are progressing with their treatments, and I have come to realize that because God has given me this particular adversity in my life I can be a light for others experiencing the same challenge. I am appreciative that I am now able to declare myself cancer free, but at the same time, I almost feel guilty that I am no longer going through the trial, but my classmates are. I know that this is not how I should be feeling, but I cannot seem to shake the subtle feeling of guilt. As my family and friends are celebrating my good news, my classmates' family and friends are facing terrible news, news that I am all too familiar with receiving.

Due to my experience with cancer, I find that I am now more thankful and receptive of what a gift it is to be alive. I know that I am going to live my life more fully than I probably would have having not experienced this, because it opened my eyes to the fragility of life and just how precious it is. I no longer look at a day at school begrudgingly, or even as an obligation, though it is, I choose to look at it as a gift. I had a brief time where I was not able to go and where I found myself missing out on some school, and after being removed from it I realized how much I took it for granted. As I watch the response of my high school community to the affects of cancer, I am encouraged by their graciousness and willingness to support not only me, but also the other young man and lady who are currently facing this same battle. Through my time being sick, those around me supported me. Family, friends, and other community members helped put together fundraisers to raise money to help my mom and dad pay for my medical bills, and while their financial support meant a lot, their emotional support meant even more. They were the ones who visited me and helped me to smile through the chemo. They were always there to lend a helping hand and offer prayers and love, and because of this love and support I was shown I know that the other two kids who are dealing with this same trial will be shown the same amount. It is now because of these events in my life that I find myself in the position I am currently.

I am into my senior year of high school and I have just finished soccer season. I was glad I was able to play this year as earlier I was thinking that I might not get the opportunity too. Within our season we did not have the best record, but it felt like one of the bests, in the fact that I was able to play. I was able to round off my last year with the team, and was able to obtain a 4th year varsity honor. With soccer having ended I am now looking forward to the upcoming track season and the opportunity to run again, and hopefully make it back to the state meet, as I was able to do both my freshman and sophomore year. More importantly as the student body president I am currently working with my class and advisor to partner with the Leukemia and Lymphoma society for a campaign to raise money for the organization and to raise awareness for the different blood cancers.

This is something that I am very excited for and passionate about as I have personally been affected and have watched as my two classmates have been affected as well. I believe that the campaign will be extremely powerful at our high school, because of how intimately we have come to these cancers. I have also just recently gotten a puppy. He is a black lab and his name is Murphy. I am planning to get him trained to be a service animal so that I can take him to visit children in the hospitals. This used to be my favorite part of my hospital stays. Seeing the dogs always make me light up, and it made me think about my dogs at home. I have just started Murphy's training classes, and I am optimistic that he will pass when he is a little older. Both training Murphy and partnering with the Leukemia and Lymphoma society, are things that I find myself doing to try to help give back to the organization and people who supported and helped me through my treatment.

I want all kids who are going through this time to feel supported and loved and to know that there are people who they do not even know who are working so hard to support them. I have come to realize how hard it can be to try to support someone going through this, as I have tried to support my classmates. It can be hard to know what to say, and while I have a better idea than the average person, because of my own experience, it is still hard, because everyone is different. A cancer battle is in no way the same from person to person. Everyone has different experiences with it. I know that from my own experiences I have found I am a stronger person. I am more determined and not as afraid of failure. I am emotionally more mature and have grown to accept myself more. One of the hardest aspects of the treatment for me was a lot of the physical changes, and primarily the hair loss. I had long hair that used to stretch all the way down my back and then I found myself with no hair at all. It was a time where I began to realize what beauty really meant. It was not about my appearance, not matter how much I had valued it and put time into it, it was about my character. Many people told me how beautiful I looked while I was going through treatment, and at first I didn't believe them, but later I would begin to see what they saw. A strong, kind, and determined young lady who lives life passionately and will not let adversity stop her.

# Life, Death, and Probability; Lessons Learned from a Mother with Cancer

*Noga Khen*

The world we live in is undeniably deadly; if one crunches the numbers, one discovers how everything in our daily lives will undeniably kill someone. One in around one hundred of us will die in car crashes, one in three hundred fifty-eight will lose their lives to gun violence. Almost one in ten thousand will be killed by a plane, one in twelve thousand will be hit by lightning. And yet my mother, the car-driving frequent-flying hiking enthusiast, fell victim not to any of the above; rather, she had been one of the three in one hundred thousand individuals to develop a tumor in her brain.

Just a few months shy of my eleventh birthday, my mother began complaining of a strange headache. She ended up being diagnosed with glioblastoma multiforme - an aggressive and mysterious brain cancer, developing in only three out of every one hundred thousand individuals. Officially declared the winner of the lousiest lottery possibly, she underwent an excruciating trial of surgery, radiation, and chemo - yet despite the hospital's best efforts, that tumor kept popping back up, like some sadistic round of whack-a-mole. In its third and final iteration, the cancer had been too heavily embedded in her head for a safe operation, so she was loaded up with a hefty dose of chemotherapy and a prayer.

In true childlike fashion, I kept clinging on to the hope that this time she would survive, that her tumor would keep shrinking and eventually disappear. I kept a smile on my face, walked the halls of my school with an enthusiasm later commended by my teachers who didn't understand that this joy may have not been genuine. Back at home, I would bury myself in busy work, filling up sketchbooks with bland-faced figures and perusing the internet, posting every single chain comment I came across with one simple wish: not wealth or fame or love, but a winning shot for my mother.

Nevertheless, while my mom may have been an anomalous individual, she was a perfect cancer patient. Seventeen months after her diagnosis, she passed away at the age of fifty-two, surrounded by her weeping family and seemingly indifferent cat. And, being twelve at the time, her youngest daughter stubbornly refused to grieve.

See, I tend to come across as one of those selfless types who insists on putting the feelings of others before my own, even at a cost to my own happiness. So when my father broke me the news that she was dying and offered me support, I turned him down. I kept insisting that I was fine, that he did not have to worry about me, that I would be all right. In a sense, I had not wanted to burden my dad with my own emotional troubles, not when the love of his life was heading west from cancer. Looking back, it is ridiculous for me to reject my own father's aid - a man who brought me into this world with the expectation that he would be by my side for all of life's challenges, including but not limited to the concept of mortality - but I suppose was too emotionally stunted to notice at the time. Nevertheless, even in the aftermath of her death, I was insistently "fine." I missed one day of school with the excuse of a "cold," and came right back to class, smiling as always. Teachers and classmates offered their condolences; I awkwardly accepted them, not knowing how to respond to the litany of "I'm sorry"-s or "I'm here for you"-s.

And holding my own emotions hostage did not fare well for my mental state. I was already a teenager, genetically programmed for mood swings and anxiety, and my refusal to acknowledge my own pain left me either feeling completely numb or full of self-loathing. I was afraid of my unsympathetic friends, expressed a wish to die at least five times a day (weather permitting), and ended up attempting suicide three times in seventh grade. I only truly let myself feel upset over the affair at her funeral, a year and a half after her passing; as we scattered her ashes into the Mediterranean, I cried for the first time over her death in well over a year. The memorial left me feeling a little less empty and a lot less self-hating, but it would still be at least another four years before I would finally shake the last cobwebs of depression off. Grief, as it turns out, is an unbearably long process.

It also turns out that fate is an unbearable cruel mistress, and sometimes your best efforts yield nothing. My mother was a healthy woman; she subsisted off a balanced diet rich with vegetables, attended belly-dancing classes, and had a two-plate rule of thumb for buffets. She never smoked, never did drugs, and drank in moderation; regardless, it was she who was chosen to develop a tumor in her head. It was nothing she did to cause it; her pre-existing condition had been nothing but pure, rotten luck.

And yet, even with an unfavorable prognosis, she never let life stop. In the year after her surgery, she continued to cook until her strength failed her, went on a cruise to Alaska with her family, visited her sister in Paris, and took up knitting. In between radiation sessions, she would sit down with several balls of colorful yarn, scarves and hats forming from her needles. I still have the pastel-colored cap she gifted me; it is proof that instead of moping around, she took the time to put in the effort and leave her family with reminders of the kindred soul she always was.

Lately, I have been contemplating my own mortality. Only a month ago, I was hit with a debilitating migraine, and spent the rest of the night in tears""not just because of the pain, but because I was truly afraid that I was to follow in my mother's footsteps. While the ache passed, the questions on mortality still lingered on what if it never did, and what if the glioblastoma that took my mother's life would be discovered in my own head. With only a year left to live, I am not sure how I would make the most of my time; hopefully, instead of being overtaken by my old depression, I could find it within myself to fit as much life as I could within those short months. Though, at the same time, one should not require a death sentence in order to live life. The future is uncertain, with no way of fully telling what happens next; I could easily be hit by a car or get shot in the face at any given moment, so why not make the most of what life is left in between? Why not write that book, apply for that job, enter that writing competition and poke at your old bruises? Death refuses to sit around and wait, so there is no reason not to do the same.

Paradoxically, my mother's death led me to appreciate life to its fullest: to realize the joy of living for today, accomplishing one's extraordinary goals, and planning for an uncertain future. She didn't let life slow her down until her strength failed her; I hope that we may all live our lives in that fashion.

# Cancer Unwrapped

## *Promise Mourar*

March 13th, 2011. For most, this day was just another Wednesday; However, for me this became the day I will always remember. I was an eleven year old girl who had never experienced pain before, but soon that would change. My world came crashing down around me in a matter of minutes.

The morning of was no different from any other. I woke up at the same time as ever, ate breakfast and went to school. There was no way of telling this would be the day my life changed. Several hours went by, and by the time lunch came around, my mother had called me out of class. It was her birthday, and I was under the impression we would be going out to lunch to celebrate and then I would be back at school. However, there was no lunch and no coming back to school.

I live only minutes away from my old elementary school, but for some reason those couple minutes seemed like hours, with the little talk between my mom and I and tears running down her face. I remember sitting in the backseat confused and trying to figure out what could have happened to make her cry. When we got home my mom had sat both my older sister, Briyanna, and I on the couch. When she finally gathered the courage to tell us, with a crackle in her voice, she said she had an MRI, and on that test they found two brain tumors, each the size of a softball, and would need emergency surgery. In this moment, I felt numb and confused. I did not know what these words meant. Was my mom dying? Did she have cancer? How did this happen? With all these questions running through my head, I was unable to put any of them into words. I could not help but just sit still, feeling the tears slowly run down my face. Even if I was able to process this and ask questions, no one would have had the right answer. All I wanted in this moment was for someone to pinch me and wake me up from this horrific dream. However, this was not a dream, this was my life.

Over the next couple days, my family would begin to prepare for the worst. Making good memories and staying positive to the best of our abilities. There was to be no talk about the surgery or what could happen. Therefore, I was still very confused and was not prepared for what was about to happen. Days went by, and before I knew it I was saying goodbye and sitting in a room praying to see my mom again. The next 14 hours seemed as if they would never be over. At about twelve hours into the surgery, we had a doctor come find us in the waiting room to let us know there had been some complications and things would take a little longer than expected. I began to panic. Thoughts like "I never said I love you enough," or "I never gave her one last hug" began to rush to my head. Two hours went by and the sound of a hospital bed wheels rolling down the hallway began to get louder. Finally, my mom was wheeled into a room where we could see her after the surgery. The woman I saw in that horrible and stiff hospital bed was my mom, yet it was not. Her head was shaved, she was pale and she had no emotions. This was not the same person I called "mom" less than 14 hours ago. I fell to the ground and began to cry. I was in disbelief that the woman I just saw was my mother.

She was then placed in the ICU where she would be in a coma for weeks and then learn how to walk, talk and write again. All things that I have learned to take for granted, she had to relearn to do. It was a long haul for my mom and our family. We all had to help and try to put on our best faces. If

not for her, for the rest of us. Still so many unanswered questions. Was she healthy now? Were the tumors going to come back? If they were, would they be bigger? My family was put under a lot of stress for months but the love we had for each other was greater.

As I put my story into words for the first time, I can not help but have tears in my eyes. Remembering the pain but also celebrating her life. The fact that now her second tumor is shrinking and she is in good health. I believe there are times where we get so caught up in how busy life can be, we forget how we got to where we are now. Growing up at such a young age has provided me with a sense of maturity and a way of handling situations that are not ideal. In this world we do not get to choose where we come from or the hardships that will be thrown at us, but we do have the control of how we react to events and how we move on from there. I have been able to recognize while, yes, this experience was not ideal, without it I would not be the person that I am today. I was an eleven year old girl who was forced to grow up in a short, painful amount of time, but this is my story. A story full of pain and sadness, yet more importantly a story of intense courage, hope, and love for people.

# Changing Times

*Zach Noel*

It was a bleak time for my family. My dad was between jobs, my sister was going into her junior year, and I was starting fifth grade. I was a small young boy, on the cusp of puberty, and I was growing up faster than I wanted to. Fifth grade was very scary for me as I realized that these were changing times. As a fifth grader at my school, I was given loads of responsibilities, or so I thought, that I wasn't prepared for. All I wanted to do was go back to fourth grade and continue playing Mario Kart on my gamecube. Little did I know, I was about to receive the worst news I had ever heard.

A few weeks into my fifth grade year, my parents called my sister and me down to talk with them. Both of us hobbled down the stairs and blankly stared at our parents. I knew something was up because my mom looked worried. My dad calmly spoke to us and said the four worst words I had ever heard before, "Your mom has cancer." My heart instantly dropped and my sister began to cry. My head was spinning as I slowly pictured a life without my amazing mother. Memories of her flashed in and out of my head until suddenly my dad looked at me and softly whispered, "It will be okay." How ironic would could it be that the four worst words I had ever heard in my life were followed by the four most calming words. My dad had a way of reassuring my sister and me that everything was going to be fine.

The next week of school was the hardest for me. All I wanted to do was spend time with my mom. I wanted to recreate the old memories and create some more fantastic ones. Everytime a friend would ask, "Hey what's wrong?" I would have to somehow spit out the same story again and again. My mom had officially been diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer. I didn't know how serious of a case that meant with me being so young. As my mom began her chemotherapy treatments, loads of families showed their support. They brought in pre-cooked meals, drove my mom to her appointments, and offered to drive me to and from school. Despite the overwhelming show of support, this was one the weakest points in my life. I remember my school having a walk-in freezer. When families would be so generous and bring us food for dinner, it would be stored in the freezer for me to pick up. This was devastating for me. Not only did it make me feel awkward walking past my friends with my families dinner for the night, but it reminded me once more of the torture my mom was going through.

As weeks turned into months, My mom continued to fight for her life. By this point, I didn't feel ashamed to walk past my friends with dinner, I was proud. I was proud because the food reminded me that my mom was still alive and fighting viscosly for her life. All of a sudden, I needed to face a new challenge. As fifth grade melted away and 6th grade appeared, I needed to get ready for middle school. Once again, I didn't feel ready. Even more responsibilities were ahead of me. Just as I was getting ready for my first day of middle school, my mom decided to drive me to school. Her frail bones could hardly seem to stand the speed bumps and hold on to the steering wheel. When I was about to get out of the car, my mom stopped and told me something I'll never forget. "Go have fun and have the best day ever. I love you." I hugged her as hard as I could and said "I love you too," back. I suddenly knew that my mom was was the strongest person I had ever met and even when death was knocking on her doorstep, she still cared so much about me that she put my needs

before hers. She worried about how I was feeling rather than herself. I will never forget that moment.

Sixth and seventh grade seemed to fly by as my mom was recovering. She was on the back side of this illness and we were ready to celebrate. After my seventh grade year, my mom had her last surgery and finished her road to recovery. We celebrated her success and went to Hawaii to essentially "reward" her. When all was said and done, I once again realized that times were changing. However, I welcomed the change. This change brought my family closer together. It made me who I am today. I feel like I would be nothing without it. As for my gamecube, someone else can have it. I don't want to go back to fourth grade. I want to stay with the changing times. Thank you mom, for showing me how to appreciate life and embrace your fears.

# A Letter to Myself

*Gracelyn Ward*

Dear Grace,

Trust me, I know how you feel. I've been there. Your entire world was just turned upside down. Your little brother was just diagnosed with cancer.

It happens in an instant. Then suddenly, everything is different. This is going to be a long, difficult journey, but you can do it. You are going to discover that you are so much stronger than you ever thought you could be.

There will be highs and lows. Some days you will cry. Others you will be angry. And on the worst days you will be both. You will be pushed to your limits and then some. Remember to keep going and never give up. Fight like you have never fought before because, even if you don't realize it, your little brother is looking up to you while he is fighting the battle for his life. Use him as an inspiration and let him use you.

Spend as much time as you can with your brother. Be there for him as much as you possibly can be. Learn to do what ever you can for him, but also realize there will be so many things that you will never be able to fix. Don't take things too personally. Sometimes when people have cancer they may not have the energy to spend time with you or they may need something you can't give them.

One of the most important things that you need to realize is that it's not about you anymore. And you need to be okay with that. Your parents need to give all their attention to your brother because he honestly needs it. You will find that people always seem to ask how your brother is doing, but never how you are. I know you might be offended by this, or even angry, but don't be. You are strong, and you have so much potential. Learn to be there for yourself and take care of yourself.

Although your brother is the one with cancer, it is going to affect your entire life just as much as his. This is something that people will never understand. They will look at you on the outside and see that you are fine. But the reality is that sometimes you won't be. Your family can't be there for each other because two of them moved to a different city to get treatment. It is understandable that you might feel scared, alone, and broken when some of the only people who get what you are going through are four hundred miles away from you. You are going to feel like no one gets you, but that's not true. Your entire family is feeling the same way that you are. Know that you are not alone and lean on your family as much as you can.

Thinking positive is good for your soul. It's okay to be sad, but don't let it consume you. Move on, make new friends, and try new things. This is a time of growth. You may not realize it, but your entire family is being put to the test. If you stay positive and maintain hope, you will get through this.

When a sibling has cancer, it really does change who you are. You will be someone who feels things on a deeper level and you will learn to appreciate what you have been given. Independence and maturity will be something you have to grow into much earlier than others. After all, you are

still a child too. Learning how to be successful on your own is a skill that will be so important for the rest of your high school career. Even when your brother goes into remission, you will still need to be responsible and independent, because as much as the cancer changed you, it changed your brother too. The attention he requires won't go away when the cancer does, so don't expect that. Your parents will do what they can for you, but you need to be successful on your own, so don't rely on only them to plan your future. It's up to you now, so make it a bright one.

Eventually, the storm will pass. He will finally be in remission, but none of you will ever be the same. I know it's hard now, and it will get worse before it gets better. But someday, you will wake up in the morning and realize that everything happens for a reason. You will be a completely different, stronger, better version of who you are now. So, don't give up, because this is what makes you strong.

Be brave enough to keep going,

Your future self

# For My Dad

*Elsa Bean*

Searching through the foil covered casseroles that infested my fridge, a yearning for a freshly cooked meal overcame me. Unfortunately, the extent of my culinary skills is demonstrated by the occasional quesadilla made on the stovetop.

"Hello." A baritone voice emerged from within the easy chair beyond the kitchen, rising through the sounds of sizzling cheese and my grumbling stomach. "What are you cooking?"

"I'm making myself a quesadilla. Do you want one?" I inquired out of politeness, knowing his faltering taste buds would deny him the pleasure of my savory concoction.

He inhaled deeply before coughing out, "I would love to have an Elsa-made quesadilla." I removed the cheesy tortilla goodness, slid it on a plate, quartered it, and placed it in his hands. "It's like you knew I wanted one," he chuckled with closed eyes using all of his strength to maneuver his hands to hold the plate steady.

I smiled wanly at him and wandered back to the stove. I stood there for a moment exhausted, wishing that my pain could be alleviated as easily as my hunger, wishing that I could understand why my father was susceptible to gallbladder cancer, but knowing that I, his sixteen-year-old daughter, could not change anything with my wishing. The only way I could help was by refilling his water glass, adding another blanket or taking one away, and serving him quesadillas that his stomach would reject.

Sometimes I felt like I could do more and pleaded to know how, but my father's response was always the same, "Don't let me deter you from what you need to do." I forced his idea of normalcy for his four months of treatment and two weeks of hospice care.

It wasn't until he passed away that my fabricated facade of moving through my life "normally" shattered, revealing both my grief and suppressed curiosity about the disease that took my father away. Each day I came home and collapsed into the easy chair beyond the kitchen. I sat overwhelmed with thoughts, desiring to share them with my father, but constructing the awareness that he would not be there to help me with calculus problems, simplify the use of interfaces in my code, or to share his perception of historical events from my history class. I became aware of the concrete knowledge that left with my father, but developed consciousness of the passion he had instilled in me for helping others. I had to blockade any similar loss of knowledge, first by indulging my own hunger for information, but then fighting the cause itself: cancer.

I applied to the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center's Summer High School Internship Program, with an intuitive hope of fulfilling my goal. While waiting for a response, I often questioned my chances of acceptance to a program that hosted academically successful, resume-perfect high schoolers who shared my desire for concrete knowledge. I knew I had something more: I wanted to combat disease so that no sixteen-year-old girl has to lose her father like I did.

I knew sheer knowledge wouldn't suffice. Sitting in classrooms gave me an opportunity to learn, but I lacked the ability to reach my goal of helping others. Each day I sat at my high school dreaming of standing in a lab dressed in gloves, goggles, and a lab coat.

One day my phone buzzed waking me from my daydream. I snatched it and checked the notification. It read: "Welcome to SHIP!"

I stood up. I ran out of the classroom with phone in hand, smashing into the wall, then hitting the green call button. With each ring I could feel my eyes losing the ability to hold back tears. The first drop hit the ground when she picked up.

"Mom, I'm going to work at Fred Hutchinson. I am going to fight cancer. I am going to fight for Dad."

# Andrew vs The Bug

## *Anthony Krueger*

Andrew and I were only born ten months apart but that didn't stop me from proudly wearing the title of being the eldest. We were products of a high school relationship that was never destined to go beyond high school. My mom was only 18 when got pregnant with her first child, me. She had graduated a year late in an alternative school where she began a job as a manager in a car dealership, a very male dominated field. Coming from a relationship where she was constantly placed as the inferior, this job truly forced her into becoming a stronger woman as she had to adapt to the rough working environment that comes with a job like this. Although becoming stronger, a toll was still taken on my mom. A harsh work life matched a harsh home life as she faced a divorce. She found her escape in substance abuse. My mom had hit rock bottom, but life was only going to get harder. My brother, age 4 at the time, demonstrated an increasingly alarming sickness. He would throw up blood, his eyes would roll to the back of his head, and he claimed that he could feel bugs eating him from the inside out. With every one of these occurrences, my mom consistently took my brother into the hospital. The doctors were cruel and condescending, claiming that if she took in my brother one more time then they'd call CPS. Despite these threats, my mom still came back weeks later. It's on this day that we found out my brother had kidney cancer.

It truly seemed like one minute I was in my hometown and the next I was in a large and loud foreign city, Seattle. My mom, my brother and I had been relocated into the Ronald McDonald house which was a large charity home for children with cancer. Our lives had drastically changed overnight. My brother was fighting for his life against "The Bug". The Bug was strong though, The Bug would crawl through my brother's stomach in the darkest hour of night and it'd leave him in the most intense pain. My mother was still so young and so fragile during these times. She went from a tough reality to an unbearable one. She knew she had to transform into the mother role she was always meant to fulfill. She became the rock of our small family and that began with a series of tough decisions, including quitting drugs on the spot. She had become superwoman overnight, with my brother being superman. And then there was me. Even though I was only 5 years old, I had to step into a man's pair of shoes and contribute to my small family and be the father of the house since my dad wasn't with us during these times. I've always had this quality to where I feel like I'm not physically present, that I'm a silent observer recognizing the emotions and actions of those around me. My mom and brother were under destroying stress and I knew that I could not contribute to any further problems. I had to shape my mentality into becoming a very mature and soothing voice that could constantly keep my family leveled. This experience was shaping all of us into stronger people and a truly inseparable trio. We grew emotionally intertwined, if one of us hurt then we all hurt. We had all become one single person fighting The Bug.

The Ronald McDonald experience was indescribably humbling and made us all so grateful for the little we did have back in town. We moved in between two other younger boys. On the right side of us, there was Creed. He had been inflicted with brain cancer and thought his stay at the Ronald McDonald house was a family vacation. On the left side of us was Gibby. Gibby was one of the most energetic kids I've ever had the pleasure meeting. Throughout our stay, the four of us formed a little bond that consisted of trading Pokemon cards on the daily. Neither Gibby or Creed survived their battle with cancer which truly put into perspective that this devastating disease could take

anyone in that building at any time, including my brother. Andrew was a fighter though. He fought and he fought until the day the doctors told us he didn't have to fight anymore. He had defeated The Bug. After receiving this news, my mom took us on a midnight drive throughout the city we never got to appreciate as we spent all of our time cooped up in that house and hospital. Seattle was beautiful and full of large buildings and flashing lights. I wished this had been the end of our journey, our happy ending. But, that night during that car ride I asked a question that my mom couldn't answer, "How do they know that The Bug is dead? How do they know for sure?" I wish this question was just a child's thought. I wish this question held no weight. Slowly but surely after arriving home, the doctor visits had started rolling back in. No one wanted to tell me the harsh reality, but this experience had made me sharper and I knew exactly what was going on. I felt my insides crushing once I found myself back in the Ronald McDonald house, home of sick kids.

Not only did my brother's cancer come back, it had spread throughout his lungs as well. We were back to square one, back in our room, back in this battle. The Bug had challenged my brother to a rematch. This second time around was more of a blur than the first. Although, I have some very distinct memories. Some of these memories are light and positive, such as meeting Beyonce and having her sign my freshly painted plate. Or playing the game cube in the hospital lounge. But it's the harsher memories that linger in my head the most; my brother throwing up over nurses because he could no longer stand the smell of alcohol wipes consistently surrounding him, a couple screaming in agony in the hallway as they learn that their daughter wouldn't be winning her battle, or how my brother had slowly become a shell of a boy. A kid robbed of a precious year of play, a kid who had become accustomed to appointments and needles. But, like before, he fought and fought and fought and won. For the second time in a row, my brother beat The Bug.

We had all evolved from a weak, small family into superheroes who could take on the world for we had truly taken the world on and came out on top. However, till this day the signs of this disease linger. Andrew still can't do what most kids can because of the treatment. This includes little things such as lifting heavy weights and of course, more severe effects such as not being able to have kids. Despite all this, my brother still lives life to the fullest. Now 16, he is a star track player and honor-roll student. My mom is now happily married to my stepdad and has had my two sisters; Alex (10) and Aleyah (4). I truly believe that my mom wouldn't have become the woman she is today without the way cancer affected her life. As for me, I still remain a silent observer of the world around. I'm now 17 with a part time job and college-bound attitude. My brother and I push each other every day into becoming the first members of our family to attend college. Although we're polar opposites, we remain and always will be best friends. Every year, our entire family runs in the Relay for Life marathon in honor of my brother and all the other strong families we meant during our stay. We still travel back to Seattle for Andrew's checkups and are reminded of the experience we went through and it always keeps us grateful for the little things and for each other.

# My Superhero

*Sarah Irion*

I always thought of my dad as this invincible superhero who could defeat anything in his path, and protect me from all the bad things in this world. But I learned at an early age that no one, not even the strongest ones are invincible, from cancer. I was six when my dad first became diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. He didn't fit the description of a person who got lung cancer, he wasn't an avid smoker, he didn't drink; nothing about this diagnosis seemed to add up. I remember when I was first told those words, I had no idea what they meant, and thought cancer was like a cold, it could get better. But then I heard the word six months to live and high chance of death, as my mom was talking to the doctor and I knew that this thing called cancer was something much more serious. In the first months, my dad didn't seem different, we still went to the donut shop together, him getting an apple fritter and me a maple bar. We still drove in the car listening and singing along to the radio while going to the grocery store. He still went to my dance recital and took pictures with his favorite camera, the only thing that changed was his lack of hair. Then that normal I always knew was gone, as he now sat in a wheel chair as we went to Kanas to visit his family. The flight attendants were telling me to call this button if there was an emergency, and in that moment, I knew that he was sicker then I first thought. Those half way normal moments were gone once we got back, as if they were just from my imagination.

My dad was now lying in a hospital like bed in our living room, nurses going in and out of our house as if it were an actual hospital. He could not get up and walk, or play catch, he could not even eat by himself. The strong superhero I once knew, was now weak and fragile. As if once touch could break him. The night of fourth of July we were all watching the fireworks on the TV in the living room. My dad asked me if I wanted to sit with him on the hospital like bed; I hugged him, but I chose to sit on the ground. That's the moment I regret the most, I would go back to that moment in a heartbeat and sit with him if I could. I would ask my superhero father every little thing about him, and write everything down. The last full memory I have of this time is the night before, the disease ended my superhero dads fight. I was lying on this Dora sofa as my mom was reading to my two little brothers, and I turned to her asking, "Is daddy going to die" it was as if my mind finally accepted the truth even though my heart did not want to. I fell asleep before my question was answered, though my mind already knew the answer.

The brain is a complex thing, some memories get erased from the mind as if they were never there at all, and some memories stay glued to your brain no matter how much you want to forget. My embedded memory was the day of my dad's death. I was watching Joel Osteen in the kitchen, when there was this scream, and then people were rushing into the living room in a panic. The paramedics arrived, but I never saw what happened next as we were rushed out the door to go the aquarium with a neighbor. I did not want to go to the aquarium as if everything was ok, I wanted to stay to make sure my dad was ok. That afternoon when I returned from the aquarium all of the equipment was gone, everything was silent, and my mom cried as she said daddy died. I could feel tears waiting to splash out of my eyes, and I was angry at myself for hoping he was going to live, the doctors for not being able to cure him, and I was angry at my dad for giving up and dying. But mostly I was angry that I never got to say goodbye, and tell him I love him. That was the worst part never being able to say goodbye, and what sucks is that there will never be anything I can do to

change that.

The funeral was a blur, all I really knew was all of these people were here, but they didn't have the aching pain in their chest, they didn't know how hard it was the past four months. All they said was your kids are young, they'll probably forget. They didn't see how much I had to grow up, and face the hard truth, how I had been robbed of my childhood. I didn't want their condolences and pity stares I wanted my dad back. I wanted to go to the park and have him push me on the swings, I wanted to laugh with him. I would give anything to go back and have just one more moment with my dad.

After my dad died it was hard to accept that he wasn't coming back. I had to remind myself everyday he wasn't at the grocery store picking up food, but he died and is not going to walk back in the door. Realization is hard because brains want to daydream about the impossible possibilities, but to accept my dad is dead and he's never coming back took a long time. Knowing my dad won't see me graduate, get married, teach me to drive, breaks me and sends me into tears. The heartache of losing my dad never ends. It's always there, the pain, the guilt, the suffering, the constant ache in the back of my throat that threatens the release of new tears. But I learn to live with the loss, and remember that my dad would have wanted me to enjoy and cherish every day. Growing up I believed my parents would always be with me every step of the way, so I never thought one of my parents would die. My dad dying from cancer taught me a lot of things from living life to the fullest to having no regrets. But it also made me realize what I want to be when I grow up; an oncology doctor. I want to prevent families from going through what I had to go through at such a young age, I want to save people from these horrible diseases that rob one from their entire life. I want to create a safe space for kids to go to when they feel no one understands their situation, because there are people who went through the same thing.

Watching someone die from cancer, I believe is the worst way to watch someone die. Cancer is not sudden and quick, but long and drawn out, where you see this whole, full of life person disappear into a weak, pale, almost deathly figure. You forget this person was full of life and happiness once. With cancer you can't blame anyone, because it's really no one's fault, though it took me a while to see that. Cancer makes you doubt your emotions, because on one hand you want this person to live but on the other, you just want them to escape the pain. Cancer takes deserving people away from this earth every day, and until a cure is found deserving people are going to continue dying and leave their family in heartache. My dad will always be my superhero, because to me he still is invincible, the cancer was stronger than him on earth, but I believe he is still fighting for me and my family up in heaven.

# It Is What It Is

*Jon Campbell*

It is what it is.

A short, five word adage that simply means live life in the moment, accept the hand you've been dealt. Don't worry, or complain, or even fear the future, just live for what is right in front of you. This how I try to live my life, all because of a stupid disease called cancer.

I was no older than ten and a half years old when cancer pushed its way into my world. My parents brought my sister and I down to the dining table to talk after telling us we could stay home from school that day. We were ten, we didn't pick up anything, all we knew was that our friends were at school and we were not. As my dad entered the room, the mood changed. It went from this bright, warm, beautiful day away from school to a dark, rainy day we were so used to. But it turns out this day wasn't just one day, it was weeks, months, years of life, all dark and gloomy, even for Seattle. Never once did I think three words, those three damned words, could change my life forever. "I have cancer." The words just slipped out of my mom's mouth.

Like a toddler gently falling over, the reaction wasn't immediate. It took five or ten seconds before we were all crying. And I, young, full of hope, was hopelessly confused. At first I didn't know what to do, so I just cried. And I cried some more. I was lost. For the first time in my life, I was anxious about something other than needles.

As the next few months went on, anxiety really broke me down. I couldn't go a week at school without breaking down outside during recess. I tried to hide from everything in the world. So I hid. I locked these feelings, these emotions in a box and tried to keep it away. With it went a piece of me, showing itself every so often in a nervous breakdown by the tree outside, that I still walk by after school, five long years later.

As summer rolled around, I started going with my sister-in-law and my mom to radiation treatment. A new thing to have set in my life. A drive to Issaquah, the Starbucks inside with my twin sister Abby, in law Joy, and her daughter Ella, and a drive home. It was a routine, something I could wake up to in the morning that I knew would be there. I was somehow enjoying trips to the hospital.

Months past and radiation treatment finished and next came chemotherapy. This was when it all turned real. Chemotherapy in my 11 year-old mind was basically jail with needles and medicine, all things I was not fond of. This was the start of the worst year of my life. Every day after school, if my mom was undergoing chemotherapy, our dad would pick my sister and I up from school and take us to the hospital so we could eat and be around our mom even though we were in school. Instead of socializing with my mom and my family I ignored it and played video games. You would think my dad would make me stop but I literally felt like I couldn't. The hospital was so depressing and I just wanted to take my mind off it.

So I did that one day. And the next, and the day after that. I did that every damn day I was visiting my mom at the hospital. I would go and play video games there until it became all I would do because it was mindless, it wasn't boring and it made all the horrible things I had been experiencing

over the past few months go away for a while. It was a cycle, and for me it worked, it kept me sane and it meant that I didn't have to express any of my feelings to anyone. Ever. We tried counseling and I had a panic attack there. I started having panic attacks at school, I just couldn't accept what was going on. I couldn't say how I felt, which meant I couldn't get any help, which meant the pressure just built up until it burst every week. My grades started dropping because I was crying every single time I couldn't focus on something specific, which included homework, but did not include videogames.

Without truly realizing or accepting it, things got worse. My mom eventually moved into hospice care and I still seemed to ignore her. I don't know why, but I chose to push this away and act around my mom like everything was normal.

After 18 months battling cancer, my mom lost a damn good fight.

People say that time is the only thing that can heal, and although they are right, some things will never fully heal. Looking back at this event, I am obviously still heartbroken, but at the same time I have grown. This experience, although not good has made me try to enjoy everything about life which I now see in my mom. She fought a disease for 18 months and allowed a 12 year-old kid to feel as if nothing was happening. Do you have any idea how difficult that is??? When my mom started losing her hair, she was upset for one day. ONE SINGLE DAY. She saw what happened and moved on. Dwell in the good, leave the bad behind, a simple strategy. You can't change everything in life, so just accept it and enjoy it or leave it behind. Two options.

Earlier I said I try to live up to this idea, and although I'm getting better, I am definitely not great at this. Like I said, I still have some anxiety issues and worry a lot. I try to manage every aspect of life and get angry when I can't. I try to learn, improve, and grow every single day because of my mom. I hate the fact that I didn't get to tell her this but she really is such a great role model.

I lived like nothing was different and when things were different, I pushed them away. These differences weren't people, they were things like hospitals that a 12 year old shouldn't have to experience. The reason I didn't see any difference is because my mom was just that tough. She went through hell for 18 goddamn months, nothing changed except a few physical aspect due to the treatment. You couldn't tell she had cancer except maybe be a lack of hair on her head. You could talk to her about literally anything during chemotherapy and it seemed like we were at home, or enjoying lunch somewhere. My mom didn't complain about cancer and how much it sucked, she simply played with the hand she was dealt. I try to live up to this but I see how insane this task was, to go through 18 months of hell and not bat an eye is absurdly difficult. I try to live up to it, and it's the one thing I want you to take away. Push through the worst of the worst, be happy. You are alive and breathing. Whatever you are struggling with, push through it, be happy, because in the end It is what it is.

# No One Fights Alone

*Brianne Cliett*

About a year and a half ago, my oldest brother, Taylor, the healthiest guy I've ever seen in my entire life, was diagnosed with Melanoma skin cancer. I remember that day as clearly as if it was only a moment ago, we had gone to my grandma's house to see my aunt Nancy. She was visiting in Yakima for the week and was staying with my grandma. My dad asked me to walk back home and get his phone for him, we only live a few blocks away so I agreed. I walked those few blocks home and in my parents room was my other brother Jordan, he was sleeping so I tried not to wake him as I walked over to the nightstand next to the bed and unplugged my dad's phone from the charger. I explained that dad had sent me and he went back to sleep. As I walked out of the house, my dad's phone started to ring. Taylor was calling. I don't see him a lot because he lives in Seattle with his pregnant wife, Erika. When I answered, my brother said "Brianne? Where's dad?" Now that I think about it, I heard the uneasiness in his voice but hadn't noticed it at the time. I told him that dad was at grandma's house and that I was getting his phone for him. Taylor said that he was going to call my grandma's house phone and we'd talk later. We hung up and I walked back to my grandma's house to find my whole family was out in the backyard, except for my dad. He was in the living room, pacing rapidly. I looked at him curiously and he seemed worried. I don't think he even noticed I was in the room. I walked up to him and he tried to shoo me away but, being a teenager, I didn't listen.

At that moment, my mom came into the living room and looked at my dad with the same look I gave him. About 30 minutes later, my dad finally got off the phone with Tay. He sat down in one of my grandma's wooden chairs and put his hands over his face. Once I saw my dad's eyes tear up, I started to worry. My dad looked up at my mom and grabbed her hands. He looked at her and then at me. I asked him what was wrong. He said "He went to get the big mole on his neck checked out and they found that he has Melanoma, a type of skin cancer." My mom burst into tears. I just stood there, in shock I didn't know what this meant. I've never had someone so close to me have cancer before and no one had actually explained what cancer can do to someone and I wished I had at the time.

Over the next several months, my mom, dad, I, and my other brother Jordan went back and forth between Seattle and Yakima. Taylor attended many appointments at the Seattle Cancer Care Center. I was the only one not allowed in the room. I just sat in the waiting room for hours waiting to find out everything that was happening in that room, everything the doctors were saying. Of course since I'm the kid, no one would tell me what was being said in that room after every appointment. There is nothing more terrifying than knowing your brother had a deadly disease eating away at his body and not knowing why or how long it would be until it would be out of him or if he was even going to survive.

A few months afterwards Taylor was scheduled for a surgery to remove the tumor from his neck and chest but, the doctors told us that once the surgery was over he wouldn't be able to use his right arm for a while. He assured me he'd survive through it. The surgery took over 5 hours, longest 5 hours of my life. Once he was done, we had to let him rest there for few days so his wounds could heal enough for him to leave. We spent those few days in the hospital. They had a family area close

by his room we could stay in. Those days passed by so slowly it felt like forever but when he was finally free to go home, they told us that he would have to come back in for a scan to make sure they had taken all of the tumor out of his body. About a week later my niece was born, although Tay could only hold her with one arm. The days seemed to speed by at that point, getting better with every day that past. Ellie was an amazing baby, cried very little, didn't have any problems with eating. It was almost as if she could tell what a struggle Taylor and Erika had been going through and wanted to help them be less stressed.

When we went back to the doctor the first couple of times, they didn't find anything. We started to think it was over, that Taylor was free of cancer. My mom, dad and I went back to Yakima thinking everything would be ok. Until one night, when he was home with Erika, he started getting sharp pain in his stomach. He went to the doctors and they scanned him again. The doctors found another few tumors in his chest and said he needed chemotherapy. We got the call and were told by Erika to wait for a while before coming up, by then it was October and I was in school and I couldn't afford to skip it. At least that's what my parents said but I think they just didn't want me to see Tay in that sickly state.

On that weekend, we headed up to Seattle to see him. I wasn't sure what to expect, I was just told to be prepared to see him with a lot of water weight. When we arrived at the hospital, I was terrified, what was I going to see when I walk into that hospital room? As soon as he saw me, he smiled and said "hey B, how have you been?" It was a real smile; I didn't think he was able to do one anymore. I felt so reassured and ran over and hugged him. I felt that he was going to be ok, but life doesn't work like that; it doesn't have that happy ending we wish it did like in fairytales. We spent the next few months commuting back and forth from Yakima to Seattle. He was at UW Med and everyday he had visitors to come see him and cheer him up. There was always someone right next to him. My family took over one of the rooms that families could wait in while the person was treated. It kind of became our home while we were there. We only left to go get food and see Tay. At one point my parents had planned to take me out of school for a while because it looked like Tay would get better, it only ended up being 2 weeks.

On that day November 13th, 2016, the night before my parents wanted me to sleep on a real bed so I could actually get a good night's rest. They told me to go sleep at Taylor and Erika's house. I tried but the bed didn't help much. My mind was only thinking about Taylor, Was he sleeping ok, was the chemotherapy working? I felt so helpless, I didn't have money to pay for his medicine or doctors, I didn't have experience to help keep him calm, I couldn't even think of life without him. I got a little bit of sleep but on an hour or two. I woke up that morning and as soon as I got up I went to take a shower so we could leave for the hospital as soon as possible. When we left, we had no idea what we would have to endure in the next 30 minutes. When we got there, everyone was crowded around Tay's bed. My dad looked up and walked over to talk to us. The look on his face said everything. He would be gone soon.

My dad said to us "The doctors asked him if he wanted quality or quantity, quantity would be putting him under and prolong his life to find a cure or quality, to let him go to the next life and spending his last moments with his family. He chose quality." Everyone was saying their goodbyes. I was shocked, angry, scared, sad, so many emotions at once. My sister looked the same way, holding my niece tight against her chest. I ran into his room as fast as I could. I looked at him and he... smiled at me. He literally smiled in the face of death. How could he be so happy? How

could he have chosen this? I ran to him and looked at his weak, yet smiling face. I couldn't believe it; god was going to take him from us. My dad walked up behind me and said "go and give your brother a hug." I didn't hesitate, I hugged him and the tears burst from my eyes. It all hit me at once; this was the last time I could hug him, that I could talk to him, that I could see him. I had to step back and let him say goodbye to Ellie. He took her and hugged her tight. He asked to take one last picture with his daughter and his wife. We all pulled out our phones and cameras, anything that would take a picture. As we all gathered around him to say our last goodbyes, I could only think "This can't be happening. He can't go this easily. He's survived worse than this." I held his hand and he squeezed it as his eyes started to roll back and his heartbeat started to fade, he looked at my dad and said "It's ok, I'm not afraid." Everyone was crying around him. He took one last breath, popped open his eyes, looked at everyone and said, weakly "I love you, I love you" he just kept repeating until the light was gone from his eyes.

There was just a lot of crying and comforting for a while and each person got to be alone in the room with Tay for a couple minutes. During my time, I looked at him, held his hand and said "I love you Taylor, you are the best older brother I could ask for. I'm so sorry I couldn't do anything for you." I just kept saying it over and over. I didn't even notice my dad walk into the room to come get me. I never thought I would lose my brother at only 26 years old. I went back to school 2 days later, it was the last thing I wanted to do but I had already been gone too long. I put on a smile and everyone kept asking where I had been. If I told them, they'd only worry about me so I just said "Some family problems."

They discovered afterwards that he had multiple tumors in his chest. He would never have survived. I still miss him; there is never a day I don't think about him. It's been about a year and a half since he passed. My family has been strong, some days are better than others but we never give up. One person in particular has been the biggest help to me. When I'm upset he never lets me forget the good in life. He has taken away the frustration and anger, made me happy again. I never would have made it through this without that nerd, my family and my friends.

# You Must Be This Tall to Ride

*Meghan Walker*

My life is a rollercoaster. I'm just sitting in the cart for this rickety old ride blindfolded, never knowing when the next dip or loop will occur. Some dips are more memorable than others, such as the summer of 2014. The year I had been diagnosed with Adrenal Cortical Carcinoma, and began an nine-month long treatment. I only really remember the beginning and end of my treatment, but those memories and experiences changed me, and if they were for better or worse is up for debate.

It was July 2014. I had been told that I had to go immediately into major abdominal surgery to have my tumor removed. Everything was moving so fast, and before I knew it I was flooded with exhaustion and my mind was racing. As I recovered, I waited to learn if I needed chemotherapy. The wait was distressing, the fear ever-present. But as much as I wanted to know, I think the pain I felt after being told I needed chemotherapy was worse. The chemotherapy I was scheduled to take destroyed my body. My hair fell out, I vomited often, and my limbs were so weak I could barely walk. At times, I couldn't even sleep and I would just lie in bed staring into the darkness of my hospital room. I couldn't even entertain myself because looking at screens and listening to music made my nausea worse. I hated taking baths or showers because of how careful I had to be about the machine that was plugged into me. There was always so much preparation and it had to be done every night. A protective sticker here, a warning about water there, it was unbearable. I feel that maybe if I had been able to enjoy anything that I used to, it would have been easier on my mind and my soul.

I plummeted into depression. I couldn't do anything to ease my suffering and I felt like a worthless burden. Barely anyone ever came to visit me, and I think that's what hurt the most. I had friends, but none of them came to see me more than once. Crying and spiraling into hysteria became a norm for me in and out of that lonely hospital room. I only had my parents, but turns out they were all I needed. They weren't perfect but they were always there for me, encouraging me at every turn. I wish more people had done as they did for me, but being bitter won't help me now.

As I said before, there weren't many comforts for me during treatment. One of the few things that brought me joy were when the art therapist would come to visit me. Art was a big part of my life, and it still is, but during this time I struggled with practicing the subject I loved so. I rarely ever made anything anymore, and it killed me inside. The art therapist helped me with my struggle. She would paint, sculpt, and even discuss my art with me. She kept my art, and my innovativeness, alive.

Once school began, I was still in treatment. I was only two months in by that point. It was my freshman year of high school, and I was so excited for it. I was told from the get go that I didn't have to try and go through with schooling while being treated, but I was determined. Driven. I could only go to the school about two days every month or so because of my weakened immune system. Regardless, with a tube in my nose and bag in my hand, I went through with a four-period schedule starting at nine a.m.

I only lasted until winter break that same year, and I tried. Oh boy did I try. I've been told by my mom that she knew it was time to pull out after this one event with my math homework. I was really

struggling, I just didn't understand it. I asked my mom for help, and she did. However, once I moved on to the next problem, I had completely forgotten everything. I didn't want to stop trying. I wanted to essentially run myself into the ground until I was caught up with my classmates. This only ended in tears. Many tears that coupled with severe nausea and pain. I was defeated.

By this point I had finished round 7 of my 8 chemotherapy treatments. I only had one round to go, but the accumulative deterioration of my bodily functions, and the continued treatment of my oral chemo became overwhelming. I was at the end of my rope and felt that nothing more could be worse. But once I had finished my chemotherapy, I was plunged into radiation treatments. They weren't too bad, as I could listen to music and fall asleep during treatment, but the after effects were awful. My nausea increased and I was tired all the time, often falling asleep in the most uncomfortable positions. The doctors had stopped me from taking oral chemo because it had started to do more harm than good. In the end it took several months to recover, and even though the treatment was coming to an end the effects were not. I returned to the hospital multiple times with infections. I couldn't eat, drink, or use an N-G tube so I was forced to have IV nutrition. I was miserable.

Although I often couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel, I knew it was there. The thought that this all will be over soon is what stopped me from giving up. I don't look back on this time fondly, especially since I don't remember most of it, but the things I learned from it are invaluable. I faced death with a courage I never knew I had, and learned how precious life is. How time is short and anyone's life can be brought to an abrupt end, even a child's. Ever since then, I've been riding this roller coaster of life with my eyes open, savoring and experiencing every moment to the fullest. Now I look to the horizon as I begin my ascent towards college.

# A Whole New Life

*Annalise Haines*

The moment they told me I had cancer, I knew my life was about to change. I was twelve years old and in the seventh grade. For a couple months, I had really bad back pain, to the point where when I would turn in bed, my back would hurt like crazy. One day my legs started feeling really numb. I just thought my legs had fallen asleep while sitting on the floor. The day after Veteran's Day started out as a normal Wednesday. As I started to get out of bed, I put my feet on the floor, and tried to stand. I collapsed and had to hold on to the wall on my way to the bathroom. I thought to myself that I was just a little weak, but was unsure why. I took a shower, got dressed, and started to walk down the stairs. I almost collapsed three more times. I finally gave in and called my mom over to help. She helped me walk to the kitchen, and sat me in a chair. She called my dad to come pick me up to take me to the doctor at the local urgent care center.

When we arrived at the doctor's office, my dad practically had to carry me into the waiting room, because my legs wouldn't cooperate. They asked me if I would like a wheelchair. I resisted, but my dad insisted. (Little did I know that that would be my best friend for the next nine months). The nurse wheeled me into the X-ray room, and I had my first scans. A few minutes later, they came back with the results. They could see several large masses down my spine, and wanted me to go to Seattle Children's Hospital as fast as possible to receive an MRI. My dad and I drove to Seattle and got a snack at McDonalds. That was one of the last real meals I would be able to tolerate for a long time.

When we arrived at Children's, I was wheeled into the emergency room and the doctors came in and talked to me for a little bit. After they determined the information that they needed, they left to schedule an MRI.

I was scared for my life. All I could think about was that I might die. I kept crying about it and told my dad that I was probably going to die. He looked at me and said that I was going to die, but in ninety years. I laughed for a moment, but then went back to crying again.

Once the doctors came back in my room they told me I had an MRI appointment at 10:20 that night. My dad then called my mom at her school where she teaches. She was to pack an overnight bag for all of us. She called my grandparents to come up to watch my two younger brothers, and then she met us at the hospital.

Then my true fear came to reality. The nurses wheeled in a cart full of needles and IV supplies. I began to cry, even more than I was before. For my whole life, I had been terrified of needles, and now they were going to poke me. I was so nervous. They told me it would not hurt too bad, but I was convinced otherwise. They counted to three and jammed the needle into my skin. I screamed in pain and tried to get away, but was unsuccessful. Once they were done, I feel they were happy to not have to deal with a squirming, crying twelve year old.

My dad and I waited a while longer when the doctors finally came back in. They said that a new MRI appointment had opened up for 2:30. The nurses then wheeled me down to the MRI machine.

It was huge. They loaded me onto the table, and started up the machine. All I remember about that was it was very loud even with headphones on, and I had to hold very still. It took about forty-five minutes to send me through, and once I was done, I was so relieved. They wheeled me around to the other scans next, including a P.E.T scan, another X-ray, then placed me back in my ER room. When we arrived I was so happy to see my mom there. I cried with tears of joy to see her! She hugged me and told me everything was going to be ok. We sat together for a while until it was time to go get anesthesia for my surgery.

Like every person does after getting anesthesia, I was determined to stay awake for as long as possible. The next thing I remember was peeking out of one eye to see where I was. When I saw the nurse, I quickly closed my eye, but she caught me and said, "I know you're awake." She wheeled my bed down to the ICU to meet up with my parents. They were glad to see me again, since I had been away for five hours. Mom said, "They know what is on your spine. It's a type of cancer called Ewing's Sarcoma." I was in shock. All the stories I knew about people having cancer ended with death. I began to cry again, which put me to sleep.

I woke up again, but this time it was midnight, and I was starving. My mom heard me and gave me a banana, and some popsicles. I was very surprised that my mom would give me sugar in the middle of the night. But I kept quiet and ate my snacks. In the morning I would have another surgery to get a port-a-cath inserted into my chest that would make it easier to receive my chemotherapy treatments and do blood tests.

I woke up the next afternoon, very confused about why the sun was already in the middle of the sky. My dad came over to me and said I had already had the surgery to get my port. I made a funny comment, "I feel like there's a tube in my neck," and clearly, there was. My dad still jokes with me about that now. I guess I hadn't looked in the mirror.

I was finally moved to the Oncology (cancer) ward, instead of the ICU. Every time that makes me think of I See You, instead of the intensive care unit. This room was way more appealing than the ICU. There were more things to do and not as many nurses watching over me every second through the windows. We waited and waited for someone to arrive to transport me, but instead the head of oncology at Seattle Children's, Dr. Hawkins, asked if he was allowed to push my wheelchair. He moved me into my new room and helped get us settled.

My favorite part of the room was the TV, where I had a free range of shows to watch. So most of my time at the time at the hospital was spent watching Food Network or the Disney Channel. I also had a lot of time sleeping or playing my favorite video games. They say it is typical for teenagers to basically want to sleep through most of their treatments.

Many months went on, every day different than the last. I ended up not being able to attend the rest of my seventh grade year because of low blood counts and being exposed to germs. I worked with a school district tutor once or twice a week to keep up with my studies. From November to June I ended up with sixteen NG (nasal-gastric) tube replacements for nutrition and medicines, about fifty port accesses for blood tests and chemotherapy, many meltdowns, and two code purples. A code purple is when they ask security to come and help deal with the unruly patient or parent. I was the unruly patient! I had fourteen planned inpatient stays in the hospital, sometimes two nights, sometimes five. Several times we had emergency visits when my temperature would rise too high.

Mom and dad took me to the hospital almost every other day for clinic visits and checks when I didn't have to stay overnight, for blood transfusions, platelet transfusions, and then six weeks of radiation treatments at the University of Washington. These weeks were particularly exhausting.

During treatment, I needed things to keep my mind focused on the future. I worked on planning a Make-A-Wish trip, and getting ready for a cruise to the Western Mediterranean that had been previously planned with my extended family.

My favorite moment ever in the hospital and one of my favorite moments of my life was what happened in February. While we were staying at the hospital, my mom heard an announcement over the speaker for in-patient families. It said that Starlord and Captain America were in the hospital playroom. I typically wouldn't leave my hospital room, but I was curious to see what was going on. We ran down to the elevator with my IV pole trailing behind. I was stunned! Right in front of me was Chris Pratt and Chris Evans, my idols from many Marvel movies! They were visiting the hospital thanks to a Superbowl bet. The superheroes were supporting opposing teams for the Superbowl and promised each other to come visit their own local charity hospital, depending on the outcome, Seahawks vs. Patriots. Even though I was shy when we met, they asked me a bunch of questions, told me jokes, and signed my action figure toys. Then, we took a picture together. That photograph has been shown in so many places like the Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon, Popsugar, CNN, MSNBC, the Today Show, and Imgur. That day was one the best days of my entire life that I will never forget.

Near the end of my treatment, I was getting ready to turn thirteen. My parents felt that was an important milestone and wanted to go BIG, especially with what I had been going through. With the help of our local church, friends, and family, we had a birthday carnival. We invited the entire seventh grade class. We had a bounce house, face painting, carnival games, pizza and cupcakes for approximately three hundred people. It was an incredible night!

After I finished treatment, I was able to enjoy my summer like a normal teenage. When I started eighth grade, I rocked the bald head, and it has been two and half years since I finished chemotherapy. I only need to visit the hospital every six months for post-cancer check ups. If you met me now and didn't see my scars, you might not even know that I've had cancer.

Although my days at the hospital and at home were very rough, it changed my life for the better. There were many downfalls, like losing my hair, feeling nauseous almost every day, and not being able to go out of the house much of the time because of low blood counts. Even with all the negatives, this life experience has opened up many new opportunities and introduced me to many people that I never would have met without this happening to me. I hope to inspire more kids in the future. Even though there are hardships in life, they can always make you stronger and make you realize that each day is a gift.

# The Hospital Cafeteria

*Grace Petrusek*

Now the most comfort I have is thinking what food I will be able to snatch in between appointments. I think back to the years before, when I would be excited to come here with my mom, because the cafeteria had a frozen yogurt machine with a small selection of candy toppings in the back corner of the cafeteria. It was exciting. People who were wearing mint shower-caps on their heads were filling cardboard containers with mini corns; others with masks and cards around their necks were running to the shelf of pre-made sandwiches. When I went to Sacred Heart was one of the only times I was able to pick whatever treat I wished for. Candy, slices of cakes, pie, and especially frozen yogurt was what I would think about when going there. After a stop at the cafeteria, having filled my paper bowl to the brim with vanilla and chocolate yogurt and all available chocolate candies, I would sit happily in a waiting room with the frozen treat dripping down my elementary school polo as my mom went into a far-off room to receive radiation. I was too young to understand the depths of the reason I was there.

Now, I am in the hospital with my mom again, six years later, trying to stretch the time between my own appointments. A pulmonary test, heart examination, blood tests, and a meeting with my oncologist occupy my day ahead. We have been waiting for my blood results for half an hour in the whimsically decorated children's oncology/hematology waiting room. I beg to go to the cafeteria. Recently, my mom has never turned down a moment when I ask for food, so she rushes us down to the cafeteria. What I hope for is the variety of fresh sushi they have delivered every morning and stacked in the clear shelves at the heart of the cafeteria. I had missed being able to eat sushi during my treatments. Before my first treatment, I would buy sushi every time I stepped into the hospital for an appointment or test. Vibrant combinations of green, pink, red, yellow, and white rows of sushi rolls would sit in their clear boxes, displaying their playfulness to hungry onlookers. I distinctly remember looking for my favorite rolls that had thinly sliced pieces of ripe avocado covering the top of the rolls the last time I could. For some months, I was not allowed to eat any of it. It was raw, which is one of the many things one has to avoid when receiving chemotherapy. I hold the clear case of matcha green rolls up over my head to show my mom, who is pulling garbanzo beans with a large spoon from the salad bar. She smiles nervously at me. This would be my first time eating my favorite food since my treatment began. It has been three months since the last round, and the first week off my antibiotic. A small, timid nod from her sends me into an exited frenzy. I anxiously await for what I remember so fondly of this sushi: the zest of the ginger, the salt of the soy sauce, and the creamy delicacy of the combination of fresh fish and avocado.

I turn around to see bags of colorful candies hanging in columns. Gummy bears, Whoppers, Sour Patch Kids, and Peachie™Os are packed together on small black hooks. Whenever I saw candy I used to always want it. Now it does not seem as appealing to me. My taste changed among my rounds of chemotherapy. I did not want sugar anymore, nor do I want it much now. Before, sugar was a comfort food to me. The first time I walked up to the children's oncology/hematology unit my parents and I bought chocolates from a Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory booth. The fudge comforted me in the car on my way home following the discovery of my diagnosis. When I was worried about what the future held, my friends brought Peachie™Os to my house to cheer me up. However, when I received get-well presents of candy from friends and family after my first round of

chemotherapy, I was no longer interested in the sweets that I loved before. I laid in my bed with piles of unopened candy on my bedside tables. Now for the first time in several months have I had the urge to eat candy, but, I pass by the section of sugary treats.

As my mom and I buy our treats, I think of all the ways this cafeteria has helped me through chemotherapy. After the first night of the first round of my chemotherapy treatment I was no longer able to look at the inpatients menu provided. I could not order from or look at the menu without having a nauseated feeling from the flashback it gave me from that rough night. Ever since then my parents would run downstairs to get me anything I was willing to eat while in the hospital. They would bring their scalloped potatoes, chicken strips, soup, and many other foods, trying to keep me healthy enough to carry through the several rounds I had to endure.

After my mom pays for our meals, she rushes us to the elevator around the tight corner, where the entrance of the cafeteria is. We shuffle into the rectangular elevator with several other hospital personnel, trying to keep their food from bumping into others by holding their items close to their chest. As soon as we reach level three I sit on the outside of the waiting room on the lopsided, dark blue cushion, meant to look like a wave, and readily open my clear container, unfastening the small button keeping the sushi sealed and fresh. With my chopsticks, I prepare my first roll. I gently lay the thinly sliced ginger on top of the roll and with a quick dip into the soy sauce, pop the piece, in its entirety, into my mouth. The first taste of the previously forbidden food is like my first breath since treatment, allowing my senses to know I am okay.