

# Beautiful Pain

*Cecilia Wroblewski*

Cancer. A word that is screamed, spelled, pronounced, explained, even whispered in pain.

My brother is 13 years old, and in his barely-longer-than-a-decade lifetime, he has had 25 surgeries. Using simple math, he averages one surgery roughly every 190 days. Every 190 days. Cancer, more specifically kidney cancer, played its devastating role in one of his most recent surgeries, in May of 2018.

May was an exciting time for my brother because his middle school track season was in full swing. Being a small 7th grader, my brother was always placed in the short, feasible 100 meter dash for his weekly track meets. In the week leading up to Saturday, May 19, 2018's track meet, my brother complained of a side pain on his way to a Tuesday track practice. He decided to sit out of running that day, and just hang out for with his friends. With my brother's repertoire of health concerns in mind, my parents cautiously decided to think nothing of this mysterious pain, because my mom's a doctor, because it appeared so quickly, because my brother didn't seem too uncomfortable, even with his pain.

Saturday's track meet came around with my mom down in sunny Renton watching my brother run. A beautiful day to run. A beautiful day for pain. Unknowingly finishing his last 100 meter dash of the season, my brother burst into tears and made his way to my mom in the bleachers. My mother was immediately concerned: Why was my brother crying? What happened in those 100 meters? Had my brother fallen without her noticing? My brother tried to show her the reason for his tears, but his pain was on the inside; it was the pain of cancer's invisibility cloak. Whisking him home with a bottle of ice tea, my brother was taken to our gym's hot tub so he could relax and soak what was currently being diagnosed (by my mother) as a muscle strain. But a hot tub can't cure cancer.

Fast-forward to May 22, 2018. I am at Seattle's Centurylink Field, singing the night away at Taylor Swift's reputation Stadium Tour. A beautiful night in my book. However, without me knowing, my brother is sobbing his night away at the Seattle Children's Hospital emergency room. A beautiful night for pain.

On the way home from the concert, my phone buzzes. I receive the most nondescript text from my older sister at home, reading: Dad and I are home, don't be alarmed by one of the car's being gone. While strange, I was too tired to decipher this meaning, and once home, I immediately fell into bed. But at that exact time, only 15 miles away, my brother was being prepped for an emergency surgery with my mom at his side.

For ten days, my brother lied in a hospital bed, recovering from his eight hour surgery. Surgeons removed his right non-functional kidney that was leftover from his kidney transplant seven years prior. That kidney was metastasized with cancer, a type of cancer called renal cell carcinoma. The probability someone under the age of 15 has it is 1.8% chance. My 13 year-old brother, with 23 surgeries in total at the time, was 1.8% "lucky," and thanks to his rare form of cancer, added on another surgery to the amounting list- and a total of two months in recovery.

Yet in those two months, my brother smiled through his persistent pain because he was a champion; he was the rarest definition of resilient. His pain spread from cheek to cheek, but he carried it perfectly, even though my brother could not swim, dive, run, walk, or even sit comfortably during those summer months. And my brother's smile during recovery is when I first saw beautiful pain- pain from cancer isn't beautiful by itself, it's only beautiful if bared bravely.

And that's what I came to tell you. With National Cancer Institute's estimated 1,735,350 people diagnosed with cancer in 2018, I cannot even attempt to say I understand or can fathom the pain these individuals and families faced this past year; my heart is breaking for you. However, with my little brother's hopeful, resilient face in my mind, I encourage the over 1.7 million people to look at every aspect of their life: certainly not every moment is worthy of a smile, but a smile can change that single moment, so maybe give it a try. During my brother's most pain-filled days in the aftermath of his kidney cancer, I had one goal for those 24 hours: make him crack a smile at least once. And no matter how excruciatingly agonizing it may have been to bare that grin those days, my brother's eyes would light up and cancer's dark grasp disappeared; it was suddenly okay again, even if only for mere seconds. His smile made those days beautiful.

From watching my brother, I saw how he never let cancer get the most of beautiful days- he decided that it didn't deserve those successes. Bare a smile just once, and show cancer that you are a resilient champion. Show cancer how its pain can be turned beautiful; beautiful pain.