

Confined

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Confined – “You are only confined by the walls you build up yourself” is a quote by Andrew Murphy that describes the life of cancer warriors and survivors. As the sibling of a 10-year cancer survivor of stage-4 neuroblastoma, I learned by watching that my brother, Ryan, had to make a choice daily whether to be confined or break free from the obstacles that cancer put in front of him. Ryan had to be isolated so long during his treatment and transplant that he became socially awkward. He is now a freshman in college, engaging peers and an active member of his campus community. Ryan suffered significant hearing loss as a result of cisplatin chemotherapy he had to have pumped through his body to help destroy the cancer beast. Ryan wears hearing aids, but he still misses parts of conversations, which is very frustrating. He has to work harder to be able to hear and actively participate in classroom discussions. Ryan chooses to not let these obstacles form walls around him; instead he continues to put himself out there and be an active participant.

I am so proud of my brother; he has chosen to live fully, to avoid confinement, and step out to share his journey with others so he can positively impact those around him. Ryan aspires to become an oncologist and make defeating the beast more tolerable in the future. He refuses to allow walls to build up and limit himself to be confined. He has broken free, and I look forward to seeing how Ryan continues to learn from the most difficult journey for the fight of his life to make the world a better place.

I also know that siblings play a big role in keeping a cancer warrior encouraged. For the past 10 years, I have also worked to make sure that I did not limit myself or allow myself to be confined. I saw first hand how easily confinement could happen in my brother's life and the lives of others who travel this journey. I stood alongside Ryan, and other survivors, and made conscious decisions daily to be free, to avoid building walls, and live my life to the fullest. It is true that no one fights alone. We, survivors, caregivers, friends, and family, have to avoid allowing walls to be built up during times of depression, sadness, and difficulties; instead, we must build each other up, so that everyone lives life to the fullest.