

Cancer is Heartbreaking, But Life Changing

Madeline Everette

Cancer. One word, many different forms. Melanoma, Breast, Lung, Lymphoma, Leukemia. These are only 5 out of many different types of cancer. Growing up I wasn't aware that there were many types and stages of cancer. I just knew of cancer as a disease that no one wanted to have. That's what I was told my whole life, and 4 years ago I understood why.

My mom, Sarah Everette, is an oncology social worker at Baptist Health Hospital. She works in the Cancer Resource Center and sees cancer patients all day long. Hearing the sad, heart wrenching stories of people dying every day from my mom I was convinced that nothing that horrible could happen to me. I thought cancer was a rare disease and not that many people would get it, nothing less die from it.

About 5 years ago, my grandma was diagnosed with endometrial cancer. I just knew it as she had cancer. When she was diagnosed, my grandma told me and my siblings that everything would be alright. My mom told me that my Grammy was tough and that this was just a little battle. Appointment after appointment, chemo treatment after chemo treatment. A continuous cycle that was my grandma's routine for months. I was in 7th grade, so I wouldn't say that I was scared, but when she started losing hair I was confused. She started to look sicker and she started to lose energy. I was 12 and had no clue that my grandma was dying. December 18th. I woke up ready to go play my basketball game, only to have my parents waiting for me at the end of the stairs to tell me I needed to come to the hospital to say goodbye. I remember just being shocked, and wanting to go to my game. Fast forward to the moment I said goodbye. Telling her I love her, then crying on the hospital floor made me aware of what my mom meant when she told me those stories. Cancer is heartbreaking.

About a month after that my uncle was diagnosed with mantle cell lymphoma. Another obstacle for the family. I wasn't quite sure I was done grieving my grandma's death, but it didn't matter because I had to be there for my family. Babysitting my cousins, cooking dinners was just two of the things we had to take on. Appointments and chemo just like my grandma. Hair loss, again just like my grandma. My uncle Chris was a strong man and he fought till the end. My uncle died June 21, 2019, the summer going into high school. And a month before that I lost my grandpa to natural causes. 3 family members died before I even entered high school and that hurt me more than I could explain to anyone.

Before 7th grade, I could not tell you one fact or one kind of cancer. I wouldn't have been able to tell you how cancer affects one person. But now I can tell you that cancer made me who I am today. I now am grateful for my mom's job, for she is providing a place to talk for those who are battling cancer or know someone who has cancer. I now am so grateful for the time I have with my family and friends, for I am now aware that they can be taken at any moment. I also have volunteered at Gilda's club because my family wants to be that safe place for families when they are going through hard times. Cancer gave me obstacles. Cancer took important people in my life away from me. Cancer made my life horrible. But it also changed my life. And for that I'm thankful.