

Blink of An Eye

You know the saying that your life can change in the blink of an eye? Well, I blinked and my heart felt like it was ripped out from inside of me. Cancer: the disease caused by an uncontrolled division of abnormal cells in a part of the body. The dictionary definition. The doctors tell you the diagnosis, the treatment plans, plans for surgery, symptoms, and most of the time, how long you have left to live. But, they tend to leave out the part where you will feel lost, devastated, and heartbroken. Cancer broke my family's hearts in the matter of seconds. My sister was diagnosed with cancer last January.

My sister's name is Brittany. She was 24 years old with a one year old baby girl when she was diagnosed. While pregnant, there was a lump on her thigh for months. Not realizing it could be anything serious, she pushed it off. On March 3, 2014, my niece Phoebe was born. It brought happiness to my whole family. She and her fiancé brought a beautiful baby into the world. Once Phoebe was old enough, my sister decided it was the right time to get her leg checked out. She went to Staten Island University Hospital and she was sent for an MRI. They told her and my mom that it was nothing to worry about but, it would be best to remove the tumor. She proceeded with the surgery to remove it. She had about a 3 inch horizontal scar on her upper thigh. When the surgeon went into surgery, he had to remove a small portion of the muscle because it was attached. That was the first bad sign.

The surgeon came out to the waiting room and told my mother that the surgery didn't look too good, and he had to remove part of the muscle because the tumor was attached. The surgeon went on to tell my mother that he believed it was cancer. She then went into the chapel across from the waiting room and began crying. They sent the tumor out to be tested for cancer and which kind it could be. My sister and my mother went to the doctor's office three weeks later for the results. Right after New Year's, the doctor came in and said that it was cancer. He said he had no idea what cancer it could be, but it was sent out to experts and they could not conclude what type it was. He suggested another surgery would be necessary, to go in and remove the entire muscle, and also wrote a prescription for 5 MRI's for her entire body and a PET scan. He said he would perform the surgery, but my mother insisted on bringing her to Memorial Sloan Kettering.

The day my sister came home with the news, I remember my mother not being able to tell us what the doctors said. I already knew what she was going to say without her even speaking. The whole situation felt unreal. My sister, my best friend, the girl I grew up with, looked up too, fought with, and loved my whole life was diagnosed with cancer. Those words felt so weird coming out of my mouth. I tried saying it a couple times to myself to make it sense of it, and face the reality but every time I tried, I began to cry. Cancer is something you see on commercials, and ads, with people dying and suffering, and sometimes it feels like it won't affect you, you see what people go through, but you don't feel the emotions. Cancer is something you can't understand until you or someone you love is diagnosed. Sometimes you take moments or memories for granted. You tell the people closest to you how much you hate them, or how you wish you would go to hell when you're mad at them, but you never realize what you say in the heat of a moment. These are the times when you regret and wish you didn't say all those mean things to the people you love. All of the pointless arguments, and moments of us not talking to another meant nothing to me, because when I heard this news, I never knew when it was going to be the last time to see my sister. I even thought about all the laughs and inside jokes we used to share, and I thought to myself how much I wish I could re-live those moments to see her smile again. I used to think that the people I loved were invincible, that I would have them around forever, but that isn't the case.

When we brought my sister to Memorial Sloan Kettering, they concluded that she was diagnosed with a sarcoma. Most of the oncologists were unable to understand what she truly had. The inner part of the cancer was a sarcoma, which was aggressive. The outside of the tumor had a mild non-aggressive cancer, which was unknown to them. They listed her as an unknown cancer, but treated her for the sarcoma cancer. My sister went to Memorial Sloan Kettering on February 2, 2015 for her second surgery. My mom and sister went to Manhattan overnight in order to stay for the surgery the next morning. I had to stay home with my dad and older brother Anthony. I missed my sister so much. I didn't know what was going on, or how the surgery was going and it made me feel so scared. The thought of not knowing if my sister could be in pain made me feel helpless. I knew she was in good hands, in one of the country's best hospitals for cancer, but being I love her so much, I felt like I couldn't do anything.

My house didn't feel like home, my family was depressed, and everything turned upside down so fast. I was so happy to find out the news that my sister's surgery

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2016 Gilda's Club NYC "It's Always Something" Teen Essay Contest

Page 2

was successful. She has a scar about 9 inches long vertically down her thigh, so big that you cannot see the scar from the first surgery. She was alive, that's all that mattered. She came out healthy, without even needing chemo-therapy or radiation. Even though, she felt pain sometimes, she wouldn't want people to know she was hurt, she was so strong about it, and it inspired me.

Cancer is a word I will never see the same again. Cancer is an enemy, it is a nightmare, it is a monster, but it made me decide my future. I want to become an Oncologist and work in Memorial Sloan Kettering when I get older. I know that people suffer, and I want to be the person to help them. I always wanted to go into the medical field, and now I know which direction I want to go in.

Therefore, defining cancer is something that is uneasy. It's hard to explain, it's hard to put into words, because every emotion comes from the heart. When my sister was diagnosed with cancer, my entire family had cancer. It was something that affected all of us. As of now, she goes every six months for check-ups, and I still feel nervous every time I go with her. There are always chances of cancer coming back and you never know the possibilities. She is 14 months cancer free. The way I learned to define cancer is by telling a story. Cancer is a story, every cancer patient and/ or survivor has a story to tell. Whether the story is good, or bad. Even though I personally didn't have cancer, it felt like I did. Cancer is a journey. Although, we did not pick this road, I'm sure we were all meant to go down it, and together as a family.

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