

Hannah Chong

Sometimes I wonder “if only...” It’s a thought that often occurs throughout our head daily. Whether it’s a trivial thought such as, “If only I’d gotten off work earlier...maybe I could have beaten the afternoon rush hour,” or a more poignant thought such as, “Why did such a terrible thing happen to such a good person”, it’s a question that we will most likely face every single day of our lives. Often times, it’s quite useless to wonder “if only” but sometimes, it makes us realize some of the good things in our lives that might have been overshadowed by the bad memories.

The biggest “if only” question that *I* ask myself is this: “If only I hadn’t been diagnosed with leukemia.” It doesn’t matter if there’s any point or use in asking this question because I know the answer. It’s a question that I have to ask myself daily in order for me to realize the importance of what this illness has taught me. If I’d never been so sick and hadn’t experienced the side effects/consequences of this illness, I would NEVER have come to realize some of the most wonderful moments that any person could experience.

I had always been driven to succeed academically, and to me, I was more concerned about not graduating with my class than actually recuperating and getting better. After taking much time off from school, I returned only to be faced with ACT and SAT exams, college applications, and graduation requirements. Of course, I was behind and a little dismayed at all of the work that I had to accomplish but somehow, I managed to graduate with many honors, two International Baccalaureate certificates, and a few college scholarships. After attending Boston University for a term while majoring in pre-medicine, I decided that I had gone too far away from home too soon after having completed chemotherapy. After all, I had left home for Boston just one month after having completed my chemotherapy. The few months that I stayed at home after leaving Boston were very difficult because I had to face many decisions. I was also very disappointed in myself for not being able to stay in Boston and I was also very discouraged by the fact that I wasn’t cut out to be a doctor. Of course, I blamed everything on being sick. I thought that I could have been able to stay in Boston and gone to medical school if I hadn’t gotten sick but gradually, new opportunities have opened up for me and I have a new sense of direction. Instead of working towards

becoming a doctor, I'm now working on becoming a child life therapist. I've job shadowed a child life therapist and have decided to major in psychology and minor in special education with the hopes of eventually working with sick children in a hospital.

I've always believed that things happen for a reason and I know that I was diagnosed with cancer for a special reason. Oddly enough, having had cancer has shaped me quite a bit and many of my memories, both good and bad, are centered on it. It's now easier to see the real qualities of life that so many cancer survivors rave about and I know that in some way, I have the power to give hope to a lot of people who may be struggling with cancer.

The "if only..." thoughts may come and go but ultimately, I'm just glad to be here and I'm glad that I was able to make it through such a difficult experience with a renewed sense of faith, family, and friendship. Besides, I only wonder "if only..." when I have nothing better to do and being a college student with a full schedule of classes along with a very loving family and many new friends, I don't have much time to do anything!