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Throughout high school I was a typical teenager. I had a good family, a good home, and a school and friends that I loved. I kept myself busy with schoolwork, swim practice, and hanging out with friends. I had a good GPA, everyone liked me, honestly, my life was great. Did I notice this, really take advantage of it and be thankful for it? Never, not even once. I lived my life day-to-day. I did what I had to do to get things done, and saw the majority of people skin deep. I lived to make myself happy. However, on the tenth of August 2000, my life would change forever. I would never see things the same again. I was diagnosed with brain cancer, I had multiple tumors in my head, neck, and back.

My summer before the diagnosis had been mediocre. I threw up a lot, couldn't really get a good sleep, and missed out on a lot of things since I had to take naps. My swimming was poor, and my summer school project which was community service done to tutor young, disadvantaged youths, was ruined by my constant bouts with nausea. Even my summer vacation to the beaches of Cabo San Lucas was wrecked. I hardly left the hotel room because I was always resting, and when I did go out I had to have someone help me, as I couldn't walk on my own.

When my family and I returned to Phoenix an immediate appointment with a neurologist was made. I thought I had taken care of this problem by seeing two other doctors, both saying what I had was textbook migraines, and I needed to learn how to live with them. However, this neurologist had a different opinion. Even before her examination was over, an MRI was scheduled for later that day. Upon completion of the MRI, I was escorted into a room where I was greeted by tears. My mom, dad, and my grandma, three of the people I care most for, were sobbing. The doctors told us about my condition, medulloblastoma, and showed us the MRI images and diagrams. We were then briefed on the surgeries, chemo, radiation, and hospital time that would be coming up. Then, I was immediately taken into intensive care and told to prepare myself for a long stay and many surgeries.

Fifteen days and four surgeries later I was sent home. My main surgery, the craniotomy, removed 98% of one of the two large tumors in my head; the other surgeries were the biopsy, the insertion of the porthocath and a shunt, a tube which goes from my head to my stomach, emptying all pressure and liquid into my belly, eliminating the cause of my nausea and

headaches. They told me that the rest of the cancer would be treated with radiation and chemotherapy, and to go home and enjoy myself before that process started.

My first chemo session lasted six weeks. Everyday I would go to the Phoenix Children's Hospital and get my chemo and then immediately walk across the street to the Good Samaritan Hospital to receive my radiation. The radiation after chemo was necessary because the chemo medicine helped the radiation kill the cancer. This process went on for the next six weeks and came to an end with a MRI to check the results of the chemo/radiation.

While the chemo and radiation were taking place, I missed the first semester of my junior year. I had to quit swimming, quit everything basically, and stay at home and rest. People came to see me, my school sent stuff, my swim team even dedicated the season to me, putting my initials on the sleeve of the team's shirt.

Upon the finish of the first session I had a MRI. The results were good. My back and neck were clear, one of the brain tumors had disappeared, and the other had been drastically reduced in size. The substantial pain and sickness that comes with radiation and chemo had paid off. It was working, and hopefully everything would be all right. After that, things got somewhat back to normal. I went back to swimming as much as I could, and my teachers came to my home to work with me on my classes. Eventually, I got strong enough to go to my classrooms and work with my teachers at the end of each day. I was getting better, but all the while I knew that more treatments and chemo was just around the corner.

Beginning with the second semester, I went back to school on a regular basis. My doctors said that I would miss most of that semester as well. But I never missed any school except for when I had chemo sessions at the hospital. I went twice a month for two consecutive days for six months. Those two days were very, very difficult. After six months of that routine I had another MRI. The results showed no changes. This was a little disheartening with all the time I put in, but who was I to complain. So the doctors decided to add three more months of chemo.

Meanwhile, school was ending, my grades were good, and everything I had missed had been made up, except for my math class, which I would take care of in summer school.

In my last month of school, I received the "A.M.D.G." award, an award given annually to the student who stands for everything the school represents. Summer started, and the agenda included, math to make up my credit, swimming to get back in shape, and my old summer job.

Being out of school made the chemo easy and I hardly thought about it, except that I enjoyed seeing my doctor and nurses whom I had befriended over the past year.

My summer job was something I really enjoyed and was glad that I got to do it again. I taught swim lessons to little kids at my USS swim club, something I had done the past two summers. My summer was going great and I was having a blast.

Before I knew it summer was over, and I was due for an MRI. It happened early, one Saturday morning and the next step was to wait. My doctor was usually very good at getting the results to me right away. But these results seemed to take forever. I was scared, I thought that maybe something really bad had happened and that he was checking into it, but in the end, all was well. It turned out that all the cancer was gone and I was done with my treatments. I have to go back every three or four months for a check up and MRI, but that is nothing compared to the past. Plus, the timing couldn't have been better. School was about to begin, I was feeling great and best of all, I had beaten cancer.

As I write this essay, I am happy to report that my year is going great. I haven't had to go back to the hospital, and my classes are going great. I made the swim team and even was elected co-captain with my best friend. I was nominated for homecoming king and at my USS swim team's banquet was given the "2001 Swimmer of the Year Award." My life is going great, cancer is done, my senior year is on its way, and everything is back to normal.

My life has changed. I value time both with others and even by myself more than ever before. I feel as if I have been tested and rose to the challenge. I tend to think in broader terms than before. I no longer live my life day-to-day. I truly look forward to the rest of my life knowing how close I came to it not happening. Going to college is the next big step in the rest of my life. I have thought long and hard about this decision and feel very comfortable with my choices.