



**Airyque Ervin
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Winner – 2007 Matt Stauffer Scholarship
Essay**

Our founder, Doug Ulman, often says that cancer is the best and worst thing that ever happened to him. What do you think when you read that statement?

Cancer helped me to decide my goals for the future. Before I had cancer, I didn't know what I wanted to be or do. My cancer had its best and worst moments in my life. I don't know where I'd be today if it weren't for my cancer. I especially would've never thought I'd like to become a 3D Animator.

I was diagnosed with two types of leukemia; both T-Cell Leukemia and Myeloid Leukemia at the same time! It's a rare case only three a year and the hospital that I attended, UCSF, has only seen this type of case once before. My doctors didn't know what to do. They told me if I had waited to see someone for two more weeks, I would've been dead.

The downside of having cancer was putting a hold on my education. I had to take time off from school to recover from the severe treatments that were administered to me. I also had to give up my business of 5 years and being a puppeteer of 4 years for my church. Over the course of time in the hospital, I entertained myself by playing video games and watching movies on the hospital channel. Many of the movies were animated films and I started to think about a future career in the animation field.

One of the best moments I experienced from my cancer was the ability to relate to other cancer victims. I actually felt what other people felt like in commercials about cancer, so I decided to do something about it. My treatments were ending and I had to get a bone marrow transplant. No one in the registry was a match. Neither was my family, so we decided to host a bone marrow drive.

I knew the chances of me finding a donor for were slim to none, but that's not why I did drive. It was to provide chances for other people in the world with cancer to have another shot at life. My family and I, along with the Solano Children's Cancer Foundation (SCCF) hosted the first needless bone marrow drive of the 2006 year. I appeared on the ABC News special Beyond the Headlines with Cheryl Jennings to create even more cancer awareness in my community.

The drive was a success. We added 100 new candidates to the bone marrow registry. That same year, my cancer initiated a fund raising golf tournament for the SCCF. Raising the money helped the foundation to fund trips to the zoo and other fun activities for children with cancer and their families. There will be another tournament this year as well.

After these events the utmost best thing ever happened to me. The doctors decided to use my oldest sister to be my donor. She was a "Haplo-match," which means she wasn't a perfect match. I had a 30-50% chance of rejecting her bone marrow caused by "Graft vs. Host" disease (GVHD).

The transplant was a success and I finally started isolation. During this stage, I really began to focus on my future now that I know I'll live. I started reminiscing about what I thought in the past of becoming an animator. What really gave me my final decision was when Disney's Pixar came to the hospital and played the new movie (at the time) "Cars". I was ecstatic and couldn't believe my eyes of what I'd just seen. I wasn't able to meet with the crew that came because of isolation conditions, but I knew then what I wanted to be.

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My cancer was unexpected and has had its ups and downs just as Doug Ulman's statements says, "my cancer is the best and worst thing the ever happened to me." I can relate to that statement because my story is similar. It makes me feel fortunate to know that such a statement can have such an impact on my life and career.