



**Susan Minns  
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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: the most dreaded word in the English language, especially when you're standing face to face with your doctor, after weeks of rigorous medical testing. You always think "I'll never get that", or "That won't happen to me". So how do you react when it does happen to you? What thoughts are running through your head? Hopefully you'll never know. Unfortunately, I do. And in hindsight, for reasons one cannot possibly understand having not experienced what a cancer survivor has, I can truthfully say that having cancer is not only the worst, but also one of the best things that has ever happened to me.

In 2004, I underwent a treatment regimen consisting of chemotherapy and radiation therapy for Hodgkin's Lymphoma. As a junior in high school, I was forced to rely on a tutor to maintain my studies and sacrifice the social life that was so important to me at that time, on top of harsh treatments. At that time, I felt as though life couldn't get any worse; then it was over. I, once again, became a normal, healthy teenager. In 2006, the unthinkable happened: life got worse, worse than when I thought I had hit rock bottom in 2004. My cancer was back, and it was time to embark on another grueling cycle of chemotherapy and radiation therapy, although this time would also include a bone marrow transplant. So much for being a normal, healthy college student.

Despite the obvious implications of being diagnosed with cancer, I don't feel that the experience has bestowed upon me only a negative impact. My time spent in the medical setting has lead me to make what will someday be one of my most important life decisions: to become a nurse. Prior to my treatment, I had no idea what I wanted to study in college; that quickly changed. I was fascinated by not only the wealth of knowledge that each one of my nurses possessed, but the underlying compassion that each nurse put into their patients' care was simply remarkable. They were always there with a warm smile and positive attitude, making their patients' experience that much less agonizing. Not to mention that I have learned more about the field of nursing through the endless hours I have spent in the hospital than I could ever be taught in a classroom.

After my treatment, I knew I wanted to be a nurse. What attracts me most to the field is the thought of someday being able to touch someone else's life in the way that so many nurses have touched mine. I want to help people to see the light of what may seem to be the darkest situations. I hope to work in pediatrics where I can help children overcome whatever medical obstacle they are facing, and go on to live a healthy life. Despite the inevitable tragedy that accompanies working with children, I know that the undying will of my patients to beat their disease and my ability to help them do so will outweigh the heartbreak of the less fortunate cases.

Now comes the "worst" part. Although undoubtedly the most driving force behind my deciding to continue my education in the direction of nursing, being treated for cancer has also been the biggest hindrance in my achieving this goal. I have been forced to withdraw from my sophomore year at St. John Fisher College to undergo treatments. As a result, I will be spending my upcoming summer compensating for my absence by taking classes. My treatments have also taken a financial toll. With my mom and me not working as a result of my illness, our family's economic situation has been slightly demoted. Add to that medical bills, appointment and prescription co-pays and countless trips to the hospital. For this reason, I have decided to sacrifice my living on campus at college and live at home, commuting to classes in the fall. And this is all on

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top of all the "worsts", that need not be addressed specifically, that accompany having cancer.

I prefer, however, to focus on the positive aspects of my experience. Sure I have come face to face with a life-threatening illness, twice actually, and had to give up part of what are supposed to be the best days of my life to the demon. But I can with great assurance declare that what I have endured and the people I have met in the process are in large part responsible for the person I have become today. Fellow cancer patients I have met along the way have shown me an attitude that has been indispensable to my ability to endure the unfair hand I have been dealt. They have taught me that life may not be fair, but there is nothing you can do about that, so you might as well enjoy each day and spend every moment as if it might be your last. The unbreakable character of these patients has kept me going at times when I thought it impossible, and patients such as these are whose lives I hope to change in becoming a nurse.

I think anyone that has heard the words "You have cancer" would agree that the disease is the worst thing that has ever happened to them. However, what I have learned from my experience is not to focus on that, but instead to focus on the benefits I have extracted from it. The nurses I have met along the way have inspired me to follow in their footsteps, and the other cancer patients have lead me to a new perspective in life. To this day, and as my treatments continue, I strive to reflect the unyielding resilience and optimism possessed by these people by living my life to the fullest, and making the most out of each priceless day I have.