

The Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults
Matt Stauffer Memorial Scholarship

Essay Topic: The Impact Cancer Has Had On My Life

In February of 2002, at the age of 30, I was diagnosed with invasive cervical cancer. At my annual check-up in December, my Doctor had praised me for my eating and exercise habits, so it was a huge shock to receive that letter just a few weeks later. I had been on vacation with my daughter when my test results came back, thinking I had absolutely no reason to be concerned about the results.

In January the colposcopy and biopsies were performed. AT that point my Doctor assured me that we were probably only dealing with “precancerous” cells and that I shouldn’t worry. In February, I had surgery to remove these suspicious cells. It wasn’t until two weeks after surgery that I found out that it was actually carcinoma, and that it was extremely invasive and rapidly spreading.

I will never forget that day. Sitting in my Doctor’s office, hearing his words and seeing the lab reports. He carefully explained to me how the surgery had gone and how the infected tissue was much more extensive than he had estimated. I was told that because of the amount of cervix that had to be removed, I no longer had enough of a cervix to carry a baby beyond the first trimester, and that I needed to have a hysterectomy. My ability to have more children was gone, without warning. I was not at all prepared for this type of news. Here I was 30 years old, I had been divorced for almost ten years, and I was raising my daughter alone. I had always wanted more children, but my career had kept me too busy to make that a priority. I felt completely numb and alone.

After that day I had to make many decisions about my life. Facing cancer taught me a huge lesson about myself. At the time I was running a home-based business in sales and managing a golf course. I delayed the hysterectomy until after the important golf tournaments were finished and I could train someone else to do my job. I had spent years making my career my top priority. Cancer taught me to stop taking for granted the precious time that we have on earth and how important it is to spend that time with those we love. Spending time with my daughter became my first priority.

My new career goals have developed because of my battle with cancer. I have chosen a profession in therapeutic massage because it will allow me the flexibility to spend more time with my daughter, while using my talents to help other people alleviate pain and manage stress. Cancer was a wake-up call to stop living as a workaholic under constant stress. I am grateful for the chance to have a new beginning in my life.