



MICHELLE CURRIE
MARILYN YETSO MEMORIAL AWARD RECIPIENT

Essay Question: "Create a message of hope - in the form of an essay, poem or short story - to a young adult with cancer or impacted by cancer through a parent's diagnosis or death."

Cancer. Cancer is one of the ugliest, meanest, and threatening words there is. It is scary and intimidating. Although cancer has had an intimate relationship with my family—cervical cancer, liver cancer, cancer of the spleen, lung cancer, and skin cancer have ripped through my family for generations—it still seemed far away. It was the last word I expected.

When I got the shocking news that my seemingly fit and healthy 54-year-old mother had cancer I immediately made plans to move home. I did not think I would ever live with my parents and rely on them for my day-to-day expenses again. Indeed, it was the last place that I thought I would be at twenty eight. It has been hard to suddenly move back to New York, yet I am so grateful that I have. Although I am the lucky one, getting to spend each day with my mother, it is truly a team effort and we are all doing part.

I had the impression that in times of crisis, families come close together and all of their other problems disappear. My sisters, Jessica and Tracy, my mother, my father and I continue help each other through this challenging episode, but we also continue to argue, push each other's buttons and say hurtful things from time to time. At first, I wondered if there was something wrong with us. I have always loved and cherished my family, but I've come to see that I am truly blessed. It is our love for each other that has allowed us to come up with a plan as a family to care for my mother and help her overcome cancer. I've come to realize that there aren't any "normal" families, yet that doesn't mean that each family isn't perfect.

Through support, love, and will, my mother's cancer cell counts to continue to drop. The process has been unnerving at times, such as not finding out it was stage IV breast cancer until almost two months after they found an abnormal amount of bloody fluid in the lining of her lung. As of now, her chemo will be reevaluated after a CAT scan in May, to determine the next steps. It seems as though she may be in remission, but that can always change. Although I am surrounded by so much uncertainty, I feel more at peace and more like I'm headed in the right direction than I have in years.

Cancer, although ugly, can bring out beauty in the most unexpected places. Although mean, cancer can show you the most generous of spirits and hearts. Although threatening, this disease can instill serenity and peace. Although scary, can impart confidence and inspiration you were unaware of. And, although intimidating, cancer can bring forth the fiercest determination. Cancer is an ugly word, but when the illness and the struggle are viewed as giving birth to generosity, serenity, confidence, inspiration, and determination, it can be approached, embraced, and ultimately, conquered.