



## ROBERT FRENCH

### 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."*

Don't panic! Panicking is to your absolute disadvantage, as is worrying, fretting, and being any more miserable than need be. Cancer is difficult enough without panic. Take a moment and relax. Let me know when you're ready...

Very well. Feel better? Yeah, me neither. Panicking is a very easy thing to do. It's easy because it seems like the right thing to do. After all, cancer can be a terminal illness, and "terminal" means...well...the end can be drawing neigh, which is exactly my point.

We mustn't allow the situation to take advantage of us. It's our tough luck that time with our loved ones may be limited. Wouldn't it be great to be able to alter that misfortune? Yes, it would be terrific, but that's not within the scope of human power, so that's a bad place to look for happiness. Instead, use what you've got before you. Quality is the key word. I know it looks like a terrible key word. We as humans desire longevity, but cancer does not take kindly to that concept. The cancer can only win if we let it beat us. It has endangered our longevity, yes, but it cannot scathe quality.

There is a popular poem about cancer that begins with the lines "Cancer is so weak, it cannot destroy love, hamper friendships..." and so on. Cancer can only attack our bodies, so we have to take advantage of the fact the humans are much more than just our bodies. Love, laughter, memories. Hold these intangible things close.

If we panic, and focus on that which the cancer moves us to focus, we'll lose what little time we do have. Don't do that. That'd be bad.

In the book, "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy," the main character is encouraged to "keep his towel about him" as he travels the universe as the last surviving citizen of planet Earth. It had been blown up to make way for an interstellar highway, you see.

Likewise, we must keep our wits about us. Breaking down in a fit of hysteria is exactly what the cancer would have us do.

My chemistry AP teacher encourages the class to see him as an opponent. In the story of our High School career, he is the antagonist, striving every day to run our GPAs into the ground. In order to achieve what we want, we must beat him by doing well on his tests. It's very difficult to keep up with those tests. I often ask myself, "How did I get suckered into this class? This is too much! I can't deal with it." But, like with cancer, I have no choice. It's there, I can't make it go away, but I can make the most of what I've got, and that, my friend, keeps me sane, healthy and happy.