



SHELBY CUMMINGS

MATT STAUFFER 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."

"After careful and studied review of all the evidence presented.....it is the decision of this medical team that you be sentenced to the death penalty."

I sat in silence, stunned, but all around me the sentence sent shock waves through the room. Next I listened to the lists of poisons and extreme doses that would be given with the possibility of a short-termed parole. Yet the sentence of death would never go away.

I had a choice, take the sentence that was given or fight for my freedom. I chose the freedom and I have been fighting the battle for eight years. In that time I have gone through countless surgeries and hospitalizations, graduated college, became a teacher, gone through chemotherapy and radiation, married my true love, and had a beautiful and healthy baby girl. I refuse to take the "sentence."

I believe that when you are born you have the responsibility to make something of yourself, find a dream, and work towards it. I was not going to let anything get in the way of my dream. I planted seeds of hope for a future in my mind, and that is what keeps me going. Positive thoughts and focus on the dream gave me direction and a goal to move towards when my mind was mush from all of the poisons that had been injected. Even if I did die, I was going to die fighting for life rather than giving up and dying for a "dead" life.

My cancer was not cured, but it is not growing. I like to tell people that the cancer is asleep and that I hope it never wakes up. I truly believe that negative feelings create an environment in which the cancer will grow and spread. Your attitude has an affect on your well being.

Find a dream and live life to the fullest, the life that has been given to you.