

Essay by Sarah Pumphrey

Over the past years I have participated in raising awareness and funds for cancer research and support programs through the American Cancer Society Relay for Life event and St. Jude's letter writing campaign. The Relay for Life event is held every year throughout the country bringing communities together to raise funds and awareness about cancer. It allows you to celebrate survivors and remember those you have lost.

The St. Jude letter writing campaign was introduced to me via my all-star and school cheerleading squads. The letter campaign requires you to identify and write letters to family and friends asking them to donate time and financial blessings to St. Jude. The funds raised are used to pay for medical care so St. Jude can continue to provide medical services free of charge to pediatric cancer patients. I have supported these projects because I have watched my grandfather lose four siblings and a sister-in-law to cancer.

Participating in these projects made me feel extreme gratitude for the blessing of good health, and hopeful that a cure for cancer will be discovered in my lifetime. I choose the word "gratitude" to explain my experience because after seeing the way cancer can ravage the physical body, I am more thankful to God for the blessing of good health. Some cancers are a direct result of chosen behaviors such as smoking and drinking, but most cancers are random, unexplained, and don't discriminate based on age, sex, color or religion. I choose the word "hopeful" because I believe that with awareness, proper research funding, and all the advances in technology that a cure for cancer will be discovered in my lifetime.

Ironically, as fate would have it, in September 2017 my younger brother Jacob, who is only 15 months younger than me suddenly began experiencing double vision and headaches. We all assumed he probably just needed a new contact lens prescription. Needless to say, we were floored when he was diagnosed with a cancerous metastatic brain tumor and had to undergo emergency surgery and 30 rounds of radiation to his brain and central nervous system.

Thinking back, I remember how hearing the words "cancer" literally brought me to my knees. How could my active, athletic, and healthy brother possibly have cancer? He was not sick. What could have caused this? Was he going to die? These were just a few of the questions that raced through my mind. What had begun as a service project and a way to commemorate the lives of my great aunt and uncles had suddenly become an unimaginable and painful reality in my immediate family. We were all stunned. All the other daily issues in our lives suddenly became insignificant. My focus and the focus of my family united towards getting my brother the best medical care. We were able to do this because my parents were blessed to have medical insurance, flexible employers, financial resources, reliable transportation and a network of supportive family and friends.

Through this experience, it became even clearer to me why organizations like St. Jude and American Cancer Society needed my continued support. Additionally, it highlighted to me the need for outreach and support services specifically targeting teens with cancer, as most of the

programs and resources in place are geared towards pediatric and adult cancer patients. I know firsthand how tough being a teenager can be, so imagine being a teen with cancer. This feeling of “isolation” led me to found “With- N- Reach” a nonprofit organization that will provide resources to help meet basic household needs and provide some relief for families of teens struggling with cancer and other critical illnesses. With-N-Reach just received its 501 © 3 designation from the IRS in September, and I am excited and determined to make a meaningful impact. Now more than ever, I understand the true purpose and meaning of *Serviam*. I am committed to dedicating my time and resources to finding a cure and providing on-going love and support to other teens and their families confronted with this dreadful disease.