

Senior year of high school was supposed to be friends, boys, my first job, prom and parties. Not chemotherapy, home schooling, doctors, hospital visits, surgeries, blood transfusions and blood counts.

I was afraid. Something was not right, I was losing a lot of weight, coughing, throwing up, itching everywhere, no appetite and constantly feeling very tired. My mother decided to take me to my doctor. They thought it was just another cold. A cold would have been preferred, but unfortunately a cold was not the diagnosis. I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma in November of 2009, but before I found out I had cancer I went through many obstacles.

Obstacles like: Brookdale Hospital, a diagnosis of Bronchitis. I began to feel frustrated and miserable. I wanted to know what was going on with me. Making the situation worse, the medication the doctor gave me for the asthma made me more ill. As a result, I was rushed to Downstate Hospital and there they told me I had walking pneumonia. Downstate Medical is where I spent the worst two weeks of my seventeen years of life. Discomfort from being stuck with needles every day, woken up at all hours of the night and dealing with an I.V. was a nightmare.

The I.V. was necessary for the medications and the two blood transfusions. If I did not get them I could have died. This made me feel scared and concerned. During this time, I received five different I.V.'s, because my veins collapsed due to the fact that I have small veins. In addition, I had to get a biopsy of a bone marrow in my lower back twice and they both came out negative. I was miserable. I cried every night, and I could

not sleep. My stress was building. I was missing a lot of school days, work (that I had to make up), activities, and I had to quit my job.


After I left the hospital I was feeling a little better and I went back to school. At this time my mom found out that she had cervical cancer. She had problems of her own and still had to take care of me, my three sisters and brother by herself. Then a week later she got laid off. We were struggling. We went through some rough and tough times. Since my mom had no money our lights were off for a week, we hardly had any food in the house and we hand washed our clothes because we could not afford the laundry.

After about two weeks my mother went to NYU Medical Center to get a hysterectomy operation. My siblings and I basically had to take care of ourselves for that time. When my mother's operation was over and she returned home, she was in pain. She put on a brave face because she did not want to worry any of us.

The Change

My experience has been crazy! I never heard of this kind of cancer before I got diagnosed, so I decided to read about it and some other cancers. I found out about a lot of things. This experience gave me more knowledge about different kinds of cancer and what is needed to cure the cancer. I also learned more about the immune system and how cancer can occur and that by having Hodgkin's disease a patient has an increased chance of developing leukemia.

Since my veins were poked so many times and I was having trouble with the I.V., I had to get a port. The port made is easier for them to take blood and give medications. At the same time, I had to start chemotherapy. I had to take a lot of pills and all kinds of medications. One of them was steroids. They taste nasty, it gives me bad gas and it gets



me bloated. Sometimes it impacts my stomach and I get very sick and throw up. I also cannot eat certain foods because of the steroids and my taste buds are different. I have all kinds of cravings at different times of the day. These medications changed my appearance a lot. My hands got dark and so did my face. I got marks all over my body because of the medications and they may never go away. At first, when I looked in the mirror I did not recognize me at all. I did not want to go anywhere or talk to anybody about how I was feeling.

The big hurt came from something on the outside. Something I really loved about myself before all of this was my gorgeous hair. When I started losing my hair I had braids in my head. Soon it started to come out in clumps. After about three weeks I had only a little left so I shaved it off and went out to buy a wig. Going wig shopping was not easy at all. It took some time for us to pick a perfect wig for me to be comfortable in and for it to be the right price. Since my mother did not have that much money I had to settle for one that has real/fake hair. The wig ended up looking nice on me and I accepted it. This was a big change in my appearance and life.

Since I was now bald and looked a little different I did not want to go anywhere. I was not totally comfortable to this big change in my life. My friends were all concerned about me. It took me some time to tell them what was going on and that I had cancer. I only told them I was sick and could not go to school. I finally got somewhat comfortable to tell them I had cancer. Once they found out they were all sad and crying. Some even asked if there was anything they could do. At this point, I wanted to respond, "YEAH we could switch bodies." Inside I screamed this phrase, switch with me over and over. In reality, I said no, I am fine and will never forget how that question bothered me. I


experienced that when you are sick, people start acting different towards you in both good and bad ways. All your family that you hardly ever spoke to wants to be concerned and starts calling you, giving you advice telling and saying everything is going to be okay. Personally, I think they were just worried about me dying.

Then I have some friends that act like they care about me but really do not. They never came to see me in the hospital and never called me. You start to realize who really cares about you and who is really a friend. I have some people that do not want to be near me because they think that I may be contagious. I just ignore their childish and stupidity.

I had a boyfriend but we stopped talking. I did not like the way I looked plus I was very embarrassed of my appearance and I had very low self esteem. I also did not want him to have to worry about me and my situation when he was going through his own problems with his family, so we decided to be friends.

Before I knew I had cancer I had planned on going away to visit a couple of colleges, going on my senior trip and many other things. None of this happened. When I first started chemo I grew very sick and developed an allergic reaction in my legs that caused me to have a fever and infection in my belly. I had a belly ring which I had to take out even though I just got it, which was disappointing.

New Years Eve: a time for celebration right? I spent the New Year in the hospital bed instead of with my friends having fun. I missed out on many senior activities in my school and I had to put school on hold. The illness changed my life drastically making me feel very isolated. I am even getting home schooled because I cannot risk infection. I cannot go out with my friends, go to parties or get my tattoo that I have wanted for a while.



I had to stay in the hospital for two weeks until I got better. I could not walk nor had an appetite. My mother had to help me get up and walk me to the restroom every time I needed to go (and I had to go frequently) she also had to bath and dress me. I felt like I was a baby again I could not do anything for myself and I felt helpless, so helpless that I broke down to my mother and told her I felt like dying. I felt like I could not handle having cancer and I was not strong enough. With some time, that passed. I grew stronger and realized I could make it through.

This experience also changed me in many positive ways. I look at things from a whole new perspective now. When I see people that are disabled I do not judge or look at them any different. I know how it feels and I have been in their place. I finally understand the saying "don't judge a book by its cover".

Strength is contagious. I learned that being strong is good for you and other people because it can give them the strength they need. God works in a peculiar way sometimes, he put a girl in the same room as me and we were the same age. She was very depressed and sad that she had cancer. I was there to comfort her and I let her know that I was going through the same things and I understood how she is feeling. The next day she was discharged. My new friend was glad that I was there for her to speak to; she gave me her email address and now we stay in touch.

I am now finishing my chemotherapy cycles. After I am finished, I will finish high school, graduate and go to college. My senior prom is coming up in a couple months then my graduation. I am hoping that everything goes well so that I can attend both of these functions. Now that I have cancer I am a changed person. I am more patient and I realize that people go through things for a reason.