

About a week before Christmas in 2020, I awoke at about three o'clock in the morning, drenched in sweat yet freezing, rolling in pain, dry-heaving from nausea. This was not a strange occurrence for me. I had been having similar symptoms sporadically for about 8 months at this point, attributing the ailments to stress due to juggling sports, coursework, and the social complexities of my freshman year of highschool semi-post-coronavirus. I could not have been more wrong.

Later that seemingly ordinary day of Christmas break, I got Chick-fil-a before swim practice. During practice, I again experienced nausea. Throwing myself out of the stinging chlorinated water onto the soaking concrete, eyes watering, I hobbled to the fence. I gripped hard on the rusted post as I heaved and heaved. My coach was most receptive when I requested that I be allowed to go home upon seeing my complexion and being a witness to the unsightly occurrence. For the rest of that week I did not go to those two swim practices a day. I vomited nearly everything I ate, waking at odd hours and groaning in pain nearly every night.

Shortly after Christmas day, I told my mother that I believed I needed to be hospitalized. Concerned, she drove me to the emergency room, in which they ran urine and blood diagnostics on me. The levels were in dangerous zones. For the next month, almost every test imaginable was run on me, all inconclusive. My case was examined by nearly every department of the hospital and even by external aides. Meanwhile, the untreated symptoms only worsened. My days grew long and hard. Regardless, my mother inspired me to continue my coursework, always assuring me that I would overcome my illness.

Eventually, after a rheumatologist's suggestion, I was sent back into surgery for a second biopsy of a lymph node's tissue. A few days later, doctors came into my room with disheartened faces. "Stage 3 Anaplastic Large Cell Lymphoma, the first we've seen presented so peculiarly,"

they told us. Many anxious eyes searched my mother's and my own, but they found stony expressions. We were speechless. My mother and I later that night agreed that those words were strangely relieving, as the issue was finally known.

Treatment began immediately; I was no exception to the symptoms. The sores in my mouth and throat from the chemotherapy became so advanced that I was unable to speak or eat. I lost my hair, shed 30 pounds, and experienced the worst depression of my life. Eventually, despair from my perceived doom became acceptance. I decided that I would try and leave this world with a little light. After some contemplation, I made it my resolution to be a beacon of positivity and hope to others experiencing cancer and to showcase the experience to the world. I began to upload videos documenting my journey to YouTube. Scrolling through the positive comments from both interested people and fellow patients I was simultaneously elated by the positivity and made melancholy by the heartfelt comments relating their own experiences to mine. I finally felt a little less alone in my skin.

In this newfound positivity, I believe that my body became inspired to fight back, as I had found a purpose for myself. After just a few rounds of chemotherapy I rapidly improved. My PET scans soon came back clear. Shortly before Christmas, a year after the start of my journey, I was able to stop treatment. Now that I have looked death in the face, I try to treat every day as a gift and treasure. From my experience battling cancer, I have come to realize that there is no greater joy for me than to inspire hope in others in the most despairing of situations. For this reason I would like to pursue medical studies, specializing in pediatric oncology. My parents, being financially split between 6 children, won't be able to help fully cover the cost of my endeavor, my dream, to be a doctor. This adversity pales in comparison to the hardship of my experience with cancer, so I take it as motivation to work evermore harder to achieve this hefty

goal. Having gone through that dark experience, it gave me lucidity to my desire to give of myself unto others who are going through something similar; to be the light in their life.