



## My Friend With Cancer By Emilia Hamburg

Cancer is something we learn about in biology class. It is something we know exists. Something we keep at an arm's length, never believing it will make an entrance into our own lives. When cancer chooses its victims, it hopes we will surrender to it, however, most choose to battle and fight it no matter what our circumstances.

**My friend Mark was** diagnosed with cancer in mid-January of 2021. His whole world changed in a flash, along with the lives of his family, and his best friend, his younger sister. She is a 16-year-old sophomore in high school and has had to put her life on hold to be there for her brother while he battles Acute Promyelocytic Leukemia (APL). Although she was about to leave for a semester in Israel, her plans quickly came to a halt. Now she has had to go through the stress of catching up on a month and half of schoolwork, a radical change in her family- all while her brother is in the hospital with a life-threatening illness.

Due to the pandemic, Mark and his sister have been separated more than ever before as the hospital only allows parental visits. She was lucky to see him in person two times in the past four months. Being unable to often see her best friend, her brother, she cherishes the moments she does get with him on FaceTime or in person.

Understanding the severity of her brother's illness and how difficult his life is now has affected her life as well. Of course, she is turning to her friends and family for support, but as an avid dancer she is using dance to help work through many of her feelings through this difficult time. Through all of this hardship she has used dance as a distraction, putting all of her emotions and energy into her movement, allowing her stresses to seep out rather than having them sequestered deep inside.

Of course, the **Pandemic** has made many lives more difficult, with the added complications of school closings and the **resulting isolation** that all teenagers are feeling. Mark's sister has been adjusting to a new schedule, one where she is more independent and necessarily more self-reliant. She has also had to adjust to a new family dynamic where her mother is less available, and her father is more conspicuous in her life.

Not surprisingly all these new changes have affected her schoolwork. However, it has brought to light the need to change priorities, and especially the importance of appreciating all that we **have, particularly** the people that we love.

This whole experience has taught her that she can count on her friends and talk to her family when she feels overwhelmed, sad, or worried. Watching her brother go through cancer, she has learned a countless number of lessons that have informed her outlook on life. She has learned not to take the time she has with her loved ones for granted; instead, to cherish each and every moment she gets with them. She also has learned to look for the silver linings in a bad situation rather than strictly focusing on all the negativity. She has learned how strong and amazing her brother is.

Clearly a teenage cancer diagnosis affects an entire family, not only the patient but parents, siblings, grandparents, and relatives. The effect on a sibling is often very profound as well, changing family dynamics, relationships, school and goals. Although, **Cancer** seems like an impossible illness to fight when you are in the audience watching others go through it, when you are faced with the battle, you realize how strong you are and how your support team is standing right alongside you cheering you on helping you fight this battle. So,

at the end of the day you're not alone fighting a fight that seems impossible to win, you are now fighting a fight that though challenging, can be won. Especially when a great sister is by your side.