



## The Battle Against Cancer By Emilia Hamburg

High School is demanding and stressful. At my school, we take six classes a day, participate in as many extra circulars as we can fit into our schedules, and average a minimum of 40 community service hours a school year. We don't only juggle the simple demands of school and the extracurricular side of school. No, there are social pressures as well that each teenager deals with on a daily basis trying to curve their anxiety as they look for just the right group of people to sit with at lunch. On top of all that, teenagers also juggle familial pressures and stresses. Each and every teenager I know manages a parent constantly bombarding them with reminders to do a specific task they have not yet been able to get around to or a parent who is constantly trying to get them to improve their grades as their B just will not cut it. Given all of that, how could there be any more room in a day or even in a teenager's mind to wrestle with even just one more thing?

For Sam, his junior year, there was one more thing: cancer. Cancer can attack anyone and everyone. In the midst of a pandemic, already isolated, Sam found himself now having to battle cancer. Originally, he had gone into the hospital because he had thought he had pulled a muscle in his hip. There he discovered it was not a pulled muscle, instead he found out he had Leukemia. This diagnosis occurred in January of 2021. Leading up to that diagnosis, Sam was living a full life where he was working hard to earn his pilot's license, playing music, and participating in sports. But that all changed as he found himself stuck in a hospital bed, feeling lonely as he had to deal with the new restrictions that hospitals placed on allotted visitors due to Covid-19. These rules only allowed him to see one parent at a time

Sam began his treatment almost immediately after finding out his diagnoses, but he had not yet accepted his new reality. He was in a place of denial. In the hopes of cheering him up, Sam's parents created a plan to sneak his sister into his hospital room to give them a chance to talk in person rather than through a screen and hug each other. From that moment on, he found himself finally able to accept the position he now found himself in and tried to make the best of it. Once he had accepted his new path, he was able to accept support from others. People were persistent in showing him how much they cared about him. Everyone wanted him to get better, and were there for him no matter what. That support came at him in all directions, whether it be from his family, the kids at our high school, or people he had not spoken to in ten years. Everyone was there ready to support him in whatever way he needed.

Through his time with cancer, each day was hard, but some were worse than others. Sam's worst day throughout his whole battle with cancer was the day he found out he had a hemorrhage in his back. He spent three days in the worst pain of his life. Being in and out of consciousness he can only recall his doctors telling him that due to the surgery he is about to undergo, he may never be able to walk again. After he had the surgery, he woke up and was completely paralyzed for three weeks. While there were days like these, that couldn't have been harder, he also managed to find a day of bliss and joy. His best day was the day he got to leave the hospital. After he had been in remission from chemo, he was moved to the rehabilitation wing of the hospital. This wing was intense, hard, and draining as they were trying to build the strength back up in his muscles so he could hopefully walk again. Although he did end up departing the hospital in a wheelchair, he was able to leave. That day was the first day in three months he had been outside in nature. For the next couple of days. He found himself outside and alone, surrounded by only nature, with no technology in sight.

By being appreciative of the small things, Sam was able to find good in a sea of darkness. He used that positivity to push himself forward and reach his goals. He is now walking and back at his high school. He will be graduating this June, with the class of 2022, the class he was always meant to graduate with. Through this whole battle, Sam stayed true to himself, by always viewing his glass as half full. He has learned to be grateful for everything that he has, never taking advantage of the small moments; instead, allowing those to be the most precious. He has also seen how his relationships and friendships have flourished as he now values each and every interaction he has, trying his best to never turn down an invite.

This past summer, Sam was a Junior Counselor at Camp Simha, a camp that serves disabled children. Sam went because he wanted to help others that were worse off than him. Staying true to his positive personality, the biggest thing he has learned through this experience is to always keep a good attitude no matter how horrible things may seem in the moment. Going off of that, his advice to anyone who may encounter a similar situation to his own is to of course keep a positive attitude, but to listen to things that you need in your life, to allow those things to give you the motivation and drive to get through the moments where you may feel lost, stuck, or hopeless.

Sam faced cancer and he beat it. He experienced the hardships of being a teenager first hand and did it with a smile. Although it was scary to rely on others to make decisions on his behalf without his involvement, he understood everyone had the same goal and intention: to make him a cancer survivor.