

First Place, Bob Schulze Award for Prose – High School

“Eleven Letters”

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Eleven letters. That’s all it takes to create a ripple in the lake of consternation. You never think something can erode you until it washes up on your shore. Life-altering events are the whirlpools that drag you to the sandy floor and beg for your gasping breath. Like a footprint seared in the trodden sand, you always seem to recollect the setting of significant events as if they are ingrained into your reminiscence.

It was a nippy and frigid December evening. The sounds of the frozen wind howling and the drip of deteriorating icicles created a vortex of tranquility. My Shenandoah, however, was about to be shattered by a squall of reality. A knock came to my brother’s fine-grained door, and my mother entered. She approached me and my brother wearing a halo of reassurance above her raven black hair. She gazed at us with her cerulean blue eyes and brave countenance and then said the eleven letters that resonated an echo of perturbation within us: I have cancer. Those letters ricocheted off the fresh snow colored walls and blew buffets to our utopia. It was as if time had been frozen. The room chilled and ice seemed to trace my spine. The numbing ambiance, however, melted in the cornucopia of my mother’s warmth. There seemed to be a conflagration that enveloped her determined features. She promised us that she was going to fight her battle without treaties or white flags of surrender, and she was going to decimate her foe with deep animosity. That promise was sealed with copious amounts of devotion and tenderness, never to be broken.

Her fight was a grueling one, and it chipped her strength into splinters of defiance. She went through eight rounds of chemotherapy, six weeks of radiation, and even had a port inserted into her chest. Her immunity dwindled, but a smile was always plastered on her face. Her robustness illuminated the true capability of courage, and it seeped into the lives of those around her. Her thirst for victory was unquenchable. Even as her hair diminished, her resistance waxed to a zenith. She started off wearing a wig but felt ill at ease under the mask of inauthenticity. The way she emanated bravery by displaying her true self still reverberates with me today as if it was etched into the shore of my evocation. Her water colored eyes and sand dune skin holistically embodied a lake of valor.

Her fight ultimately persisted for twelve months, until one transformative day, she explained to me that she had won her war with cancer, solidifying her victory over the malignant vessel. That’s when I ascertained the most empowering eleven letters ever amalgamated: I’m a survivor.