

Dear Cancer,

Although you've shattered countless hearts and turned people's worlds upside down, including mine, surprisingly I would like to thank you. However, before I explain my gratitude, I would like to describe my agonizing experience with you.

It all started the summer before my freshman year and my brother's senior year. My family and I had just come home from a trip to Chicago, and I was suspicious something was wrong between my parents the whole vacation. It wasn't anything too obvious, but I always caught my mom zoning out as if someone had torn her heart out of her chest while my dad had seemed to always display a fake smile. After we returned home, my parents sat C--- and me down to talk. Instinctively, I thought we were in trouble because it was either that or something extremely detrimental had occurred, and I didn't want to think the worst.

"I have stage two breast cancer," my mom revealed as her voice cracked.

My mind became hollow and my heart sank what felt like miles into my stomach. Frozenness had taken over my body while my ears were brimming with outcries from the words that had just invaded my world. I couldn't bear to look at my parents or my brother because seeing them in such excruciating pain would put me over the edge. The thought of potentially losing my mom and not being able to make her pain go away was something I would never be able to forgive you for, Cancer.

Fast forward a year and a half, when my mother rang the end-of-treatment bell. Although through the chemotherapy, surgery, and radiation there were many dark days that felt hopeless and my hatred for you was at its maximum, seeing my mom ring that bell with immense strength ignited a sense of appreciation for your destruction. Without you, my views of life and the way I lived would not have changed for the better.

If I could put how you changed my life into a few words, I would say that you made me say YES. You improved the way I lived by making me say yes to things I would have usually said no to. I began to say yes to the more simple yet unappreciated things in life whether it was going for a walk with my mom or staying in for a family movie night. I learned to love the little things in life because those minuscule memories seem a lot more impactful when you don't know how much time you have left with those you love, and in my case, your built-in best friend.

Along with teaching me to say yes, you also opened my eyes to try new things. You made me realize that nothing is permanent in life and something can change in seconds, resulting in years of recovery. Because of you, I went out of my comfort zone. For example, I tried out for the table tennis team and taught myself to play the piano again because I may not have ever gotten the chance had I waited in this unpredictable journey of life.

Therefore, thank you Cancer for spawning a new person inside me. Your evilness made me stronger in ways unimaginable, and I grew as an individual because of it. Although it took me many months to realize it, the pain you put my family and me through was the best thing you could have done for us. Your actions brought my family closer together and we all learned to embrace the little things in life with a smile. I began to say yes because of you; I will forever be thankful for that.

Thank you,