

~ Dr. Sanjiv Kapil Scholarship Fund ~
Mission Blue

The word cancer alone can make someone's heart drop. After I was diagnosed with cancer, I've never heard the word the same. I now listen with intent whatever follows. While the word may be commonly conveyed negatively, I see hidden beauty within it. My cancer journey has taught me a lot and for that I am grateful. I know without the experiences it brought me I wouldn't be the same person I am today.

During the winter break of 8th grade, I was experiencing exhaustion and a lingering cough. My family and I didn't think much of it until New Year's Eve. That night I wasn't able to breathe properly. My family took me to Leesburg Waterman's E.R. There, a tumor and a collapsed lung filled with fluid were revealed in a chest x-ray. I was quickly sent in an ambulance to the Orlando Hospital for Children. While admitted to the PICU, fluid was drained out of my lung through a chest tube. Later, a biopsy revealed that the tumor was cancerous. In January of 2016, I was diagnosed with T Cell Lymphoblastic Lymphoma-stage 3 cancer. I was 13 years old.

For two and a half years I followed treatment and doctor's orders. During this time, my mom never left my side. I knew that what I was going through was hard, but her watching me go through it was harder. While my mom was with me in the hospital room, my sister and dad were home. My dad worked and my sister went to high school. My sister's responsibilities grew because she had taken my mom's. My family taught me what true love is during this time. They taught me that love is selfless, enduring, and patient. My respect and appreciation grew for them.

At one point during treatment, I was a wheelchair user. I didn't look like your average teenager. My cheeks were swollen from steroids, I was thin, bald, wearing a mask and very loose clothes. It was difficult to convince me to leave the house. When I did leave the house, I experienced stares and being confused for a boy. This gave me the experience of being physically different and having to depend on others.

I was in and out of the hospital during treatment, therefore I missed a lot of school. When I began homebound for the first time I had trouble comprehending the material because I was dealing with chemo brain/fog. I remember having difficulty with simple math like subtraction. This scared me because I thought I wouldn't be able to have the same comprehension skills again. With time, I was able to understand things better. I completed the 8th, 9th, and 10th grade through homebound. I attempted to return to school sophomore year but a month in and I had another fallback. I returned a junior year and completed the academic school year.

Math was my favorite subject in middle school. I was placed in algebra honors in 8th grade. I felt proud because I was doing well and I was taking a high school course in middle school. So, when I left school I became worried about falling behind in math. I did eventually. In

2017 I asked my mom for a math tutor. My mom found one through my aunt, she had heard good things about him. Mr. Nelson was the tutor, upon meeting with Mr. Nelson he agreed to tutor me without charge. This was a blessing. I would meet Mr. Nelson a couple of times a week, sometimes after receiving treatment. With Mr. Nelson's help, I was able to adjust back to high school math. My family and I are thankful for his help.

I encountered many acts of kindness towards my family and me during this time of desperation. I received 'feel better' cards from my middle school avid class. I received balloons and a stuffed animal from my dad's boss. People I didn't know prayed consistently for me. A paramedic brought me a cookie and prayed for me. A nurse prayed with me before a big surgery. The acts came from people and places I didn't expect. Nevertheless, I was always grateful.

In the future, I hope to pursue the medical field and become a physician. Careers that interest me within the medical field are; Pediatric, Emergency, Oncology, and Internal Medicine. Before I became sick I didn't have much interest in the medical field. It was during my treatment that my interest grew. During my treatment, I paid attention to how the nurses and doctors cared for me. I watched, asked questions and learned. For example, I learned a port must be flushed with Heparin between each use. I learned this because I witnessed my nurses do this to my port. I found myself wanting to know more. Although I value my hospital experience I know it was just a glimpse of a very broad medical world. I look forward to gaining more experience in the future as a physician.

I know as a physician I will be able to give back. I will meet new people from all walks of life and treat them to the best of my ability. I hope to take part in mission trips to help those who don't have access to medical help. I believe I am here to serve others and through medicine, I can do that.

I've always known I wanted to pursue higher education than a high school diploma. My parents are immigrants from Mexico, they have made huge sacrifices for themselves and their family. I want to be able to show them the fruit of their labors. My parents have set the example of perseverance in my life by working hard. They motivate me to persevere in my studies and value the opportunities presented to me. College is key to my success. I know I will benefit greatly as well as my family from earning a college degree. It will allow me to earn money so I may be able to meet a self-sufficient wage. I could also set the example of being a college graduate for the next generation of my family.

My parents didn't graduate high school because they had to work to provide for their families. Although my parents are hardworking they know financial assistance is needed for my education. This scholarship would aid my college expenses. The money would be mindfully used for courses towards my degree. My family and I would be grateful and honored if we were chosen.