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### Hardships Into Growth

Before, I deemed myself to be a rather intricate, reserved and passive, individual. Unfortunately, a major in psychology would classify me as an introvert. I would do what was asked of me at any given moment and in every occasion, I ventured in my comfort zone. I would seldomly speak my mind, even when my thoughts or ideas seemed to outweigh others or could've potentially inspired the people around me. I'm not saying I wouldn't speak at all, but I spoke the bare minimum instead of sharing my morals and beliefs with the world. I kept my mind and soul hidden, for no other soul or mind to experience or relish in similar or different thoughts as I. In essence, I was trapped in a shell. Quite a comfortable shell if you ask me, and I had no significant urge to succumb to the cage I was knowingly kept in. This was before I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer.

In March 2018, I had strep throat like any normal teenager around that time because of the windy spring weather in Texas. Unlike other regular doctor check-ups, this time the physician felt a lump on my throat when examining me. He exchanged indifferent looks with my mother and I immediately knew something was wrong. My life passed me in a blur after that, and I was left puzzled, questioning the simplest happenings on Earth and the reasons for it. After going to multiple doctor appointments and hospital check-ups, I felt extremely strange and felt as if I was categorized as a "human with cancer" and the rest of the population was in a

completely different atmosphere as I. It felt abnormally wrong walking into the elevator and pressing the button to go to the “cancer floor” in the hospital. On that floor, it was an entirely different environment, as if that floor floated outside of Earth all alone away from the rest of the “normal people.”

To this day, I still find it abnormally strange to have had cancer, the emperor of all maladies. But to my surprise, it was cancer that cured me of my own disease, brought me out of my shell, and threw me into the open to fly with the other dreamers of the world. Unfortunately, I got this disease during a poor time in my life. It was in the middle of the second semester, I was taking all dual and AP classes, so the class work was rigorous and I had just finished my sophomore basketball season, my first season playing in varsity. It wasn't what I expected, and the season had changed my outlook on life and my overall feelings of myself. My confidence level was a record low, I had never felt that type of feeling ever before and I didn't know if I even wanted to continue playing the sport I had fell in love with as a child. Because I was part of the younger group of girls on the team, I got little to no play time. I despised the coach the whole season and bottled up my emotions inside of me to not let the other girls know how I felt. The coach would only put me in the last minutes of the game and it made me feel terrible about myself. When I was notified about my health status, I was currently on a city basketball team and was planning to travel multiple times during the summer in order to get my confidence back and regain the love for the game I had before that sophomore season. Because of the doctor visits and the surgery I had to go through, I had to cancel all of my plans and focus on the surgery.

Since I had a significantly large tumor on my thyroid, it was highly dangerous and possible that the cancer could have spread to the lymph nodes surrounding the area. For this reason, a total thyroidectomy was the procedure that had to be done. I thought about the money

and bills the numerous hospital visits and surgery would cost, but I knew what needed to be done. Some of the major complications were that I could have lost my voice since the vocal nerves are extremely close to that area. For 17 years I had kept quiet, hadn't used my words at all, and was on the verge of not being able to express to anyone how I felt. I could've been stripped of one of many life's simplest pleasures, talking, and it angered me thinking how I had acted so ungrateful with it. Luckily, the surgeon didn't cut any of my vocal cords and the surgery was a complete success.

Today I still have to go to annual checkups and visit MD Anderson in Houston, and also take thyroid medicine every day in the morning to replace my thyroid. It's a small price to pay for everything that's came out of it. After that day, I've opened myself up to the people and life in its entirety. Despite not being able to have the basketball summer I wanted, I had a complete opposite season from my sophomore year and had more confidence than I ever had before. I refrain myself from keeping my conceptions on the world hidden in my mind only. Today, I like to define myself as the fine line between an introvert and an extrovert. You can't quite take the socially awkwardness out of someone, but you can rescue them from their shell. This unexpected event has shaped me to be a person who strives to be in uncomfortable situations because that is where one learns and truly grows within themselves. I am no longer mediocre, and I always aspire to do more than just the basic duties asked of me. Cancer was no doubt a challenge I faced, but it is also what lit a fire in my soul that made me the lively, hardworking person I am today.