

**ESSAY PAGE****Challenges in my Life and How I Overcame Them**

My family and I had always been very self sufficient until three years ago when my mother's breast cancer spread to her liver, bones and plural cavity. Last semester she lost her battle with the illness and passed away. She was the center of our family and our Polestar that gave us our bearings. Because of the return of the cancer my mother had to undergo extensive treatment and stays in the hospital. My father is disabled from wounds he received while an Infantry Squad Leader in Viet Nam. He has a small VA pension and when we lost my mom's income I earned all my money for my needs and helped as much as I could with family expenses from my own business, Orion Services, a home repair and lawn service business. In order to have a car, I took a salvaged vehicle and rebuilt it with parts from junk yards. During this time I had to take my dad to the VA for treatment while I also drove my mom for her care several times a week. This caused me to really make the best use of my time and schedule my activities efficiently. I was not able to participate in many activities because of our finances but I found several things to participate in that did not cost money.

During this time I was diagnosed with pre-cancerous skin cancer which was the first cancer my mom was diagnosed with. I will have to have check-ups every six months for the rest of my life. I have ended my activities at the pool or in the sun and chosen other ways to be with my friends when I have some free time. Time management is the key factor in my life right now. The one activity I retained for myself was I made the football team at the University of Tennessee as a walk-on punter. I felt it was necessary to do this for myself and fulfill one of my dreams, especially at this time in my life.

My mother's and my experience with cancer has caused me to deeply ponder what is truly important in life and to really go for it. I sometimes envy the care freeness of some of my friends but I know that I have a maturity and appreciation of friends and life that they don't have yet. I know that I have to really bear down and focus on my goals and how precious time is. Peer pressure and other college pitfalls will not be a problem for me. The discipline and strength to face cancer has proved valuable in school and athletics. When you have experienced the fear of dying, a football tryout or a test in school is a breeze.

To honor my mother and to help me with my pain and grief, I volunteer at The Wellness Community where I mentor young children whose parents have been diagnosed with cancer. It is the most enjoyable and satisfying thing that I have ever done and it helps me with my own fear and grief as I deal with each of these young children. So I try to deal with all the challenges in my life right now by using all the skills I have and my great determination and will power and all the love my family has for me. My mother taught me that performing service for others brings you much satisfaction in life and I try to volunteer as much as I can in the community.