

Professor Grayson
Composition 102
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Cancer

Cancer is a disease that has affected my life, and lives of the ones around me. My mom had thyroid cancer and my grandmother died of skin cancer. Cancer brings a lot of things out of people. It makes people want to be heroes, while others feel sorry for themselves, some people just get quiet and angry, and I'm not talking about the people who have the illness. I'm talking about their families. I've learned that dealing with cancer in a family structure is messy, everyone takes on a different role and copes with the illness differently.

When my mom was sick I was six years old, my two younger sisters were three and one years old. My older sister Lindsey was sixteen at the time, and she took on the role of taking care of me and my siblings. My dad works from six in the morning until six at night so he wasn't able to take on all my mom's responsibilities. My mom really didn't want anyone to have to take over for her, but like everyone with cancer learns you get worn down, whether it's from the disease or the drugs, you have to rest. So once my mom was hit with the reality of her disease my sister stepped in. The thing I always forget is I have two older sisters not one. My parents were both in other relationships and each had a daughter, before they got together. My older sister Jesse used to stay with us on the weekends. She is my dad's daughter and she had a magical talent of manipulating situations. When my mom was sick, and she wasn't the center of attention for once she stopped coming as frequently. Unlike Lindsey who gave up her free time to drag her siblings around to sports and CCD, she disappeared.

My sister Lindsey was a sophomore in high school, so she wasn't always there to play mom. I had the pleasure of trying to be abducted my neighbor. Okay maybe not abducted. But she tried to brainwash me, she thought I needed saving. My parents are kind of hippies. My dad wears oversized-tie dye t-shirts, my mom has long beautiful hair, and they had seven children. From the outside looking in we look insane. We are, but this neighbor lady was the opposite of my loving hippie parents. This lady yelled at me for ripping bread before I ate it. She told me animals rip there food and I'm not an animal.

This women's name was Laura and she had a daughter my age named Jessie. I was not friends with Jessie. I was the chubby little girl who followed her around while she played with her Kaya American Girl doll, and I watched. Laura would invite me over for play dates that neither Jessie nor I seemed to want to happen, but I couldn't tell my mom because she was always sleeping or running around doing things for me and my siblings, so I went. I remember Laura scolded me for not picking up after myself one day. I ran into the bathroom because I had to go and I left my doll on the floor. It was things like this that drove me crazy. It was like she thought she was my mother. She wanted to change me, but I was a stubborn six year old would not deal with it. So I started lying.

Any time I went over there I would lie about my siblings, my parents, and the idea of us moving, my older sisters and how they were fabulous princesses, just normal simple lies

obviously. To her these lies were just proving to her how big of a basket case I was. She would confront me about it. I remember once she was driving me and Jessie home and she asked me "why do you tell so many stories". I wasn't fazed I went on and on about how I was going to be a writer one day and I had to test the stories on someone. Luckily for me Laura and her daughter moved to New York, maybe I gave them the idea to move.

Someone I know was a saving grace for my mother during this hard time in her life was my nana. My nana, Margarita ██████ was almost a nun. So I almost didn't exist. Luckily for me Matt ██████ went to England when he was in the air force and after two years of sneaking behind her father's back, they married and came to America. My Nana would always take us off my mom's hands when her and my dad had to go to the doctors. Going to my nana's house was a regular treat. She would let us eat lunch on the ground in front of the T.V., she would do crafts with us, dress us up like proper English women and get my papa to take our pictures. When we were with nana everything was better. I remember the day my mom and dad had to tell us my mom had cancer and had to get surgery. We were at my nanas and I was in the big blue chair I loved so much. I remember my mom crying and giving me a hug and stickers. I don't remember what the stickers were for. I remember one was a noodle riding a skateboard smiling.

When I was a sophomore in high school my nana died from skin cancer. When this was happening I was playing the role Lindsey once had to play, except instead of my nana around to help I had my mom struggling to keep it together. My nana was my mom's best friend. We live three minutes from my nana's house and if my mom ever needed anything she knew she had someone to turn to for help, guidance, or a babysitter. After my mom recovered from her cancer, she got C DIFF, a disease that almost killed her. To this day she still gets infusions for it. So to say the least she is not the epitome of health. One thing I noticed about my mother is that she does nothing to help herself. She is a typical mom. Check on everyone in the family and make sure they're okay. No one really ever checked in with her, except her mom. Lindsey and I always try our best to help, to encourage my mom to take time for herself, but the most I've ever see her indulge is buying herself a laptop for Christmas two years ago.

When my nana got sick, the doctors thought she was just a little sick, she just needed a spot removed. They took it out and we thought all was well. But then it spread, and it spread, and it spread. Until the small woman who could once envelop my body in her two arms was a thin cage for her internal organs. My dad is a hospice nurse on the weekends. I never really understood what that meant, until the hospice nurse came the night we lost my nana. The thing I regret the most was my nana never really knew me. She knew me when I was little and when I was a teen angst mess. I remember when I said goodbye to her, I hoped then more than ever that there was a heaven, and there was somewhere she could see me when I was a version she could be proud of. After I said good bye, I went and I watched the movie Mermaids with Cher because my nana loved Cher and I needed a distraction.

When my mom lost my nana she took every distraction she could get, she worked more, put my sister eva in dance, and basically tried to fill every waking moment of her life with a distraction, a task. I tried getting her to do things for herself, but she never wanted to. She once told me she wanted to be more like my nana. My nana sacrificed a lot for my grandfather, for my family. She sacrificed the country she loved, she sacrificed her family, she sacrificed the future

she thought she had being a nun. I fear my mom will live her life like my nana did sacrificing everything for her husband and kids.

Cancer is gross. It's shaped my life in confusing, heart breaking ways. It's opened my eyes to reality. I saw what my sister had to endure then I lived it. Everybody always tells me how lucky I am living in a big family, but it makes everything so much messier. So much more complex. My aunts and uncles are still fighting over what to do with my nana's house. A house my papa still lives in. Cancer makes people petty, strong, weak, sad. Cancer is gross.

Grayson Eng 102
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Assignment 5 Part 1

The Good and Bad in Everything

My childhood ended early. Heroin was my life. We now have a love hate relationship. Heroin has torn my family apart, it has killed friends and ruined lives, but it's also provided me with food when I was hungry, a roof over our heads when on the verge of getting evicted, and most importantly my life. That's right, if heroin didn't exist I wouldn't be writing this essay.

My father is a very quite, emotionless, and can be described as a closed book. He ran away from his home in Peru when he was 20, sold everything he had, and got on a plane to Florida in the late 60's, early 70's. He hasn't visited or spoken to any of his family in Peru since then, that may give you some sort of idea as to what my father is like. Just recently him and I have been reconnecting after not talking for many years and he told me a story that shocked the fuck out of me. Well like many latin immigrants back in the day, my father was in a gang in Florida, this I knew since I was little, but get this, the only reason my dad every moved to NYC in the 70s was to drive a case of heroin and marijuana from Florida to people up in NYC. He said he was really willing to do anything to get to New York City, that's where he always dreamed of living, and so he fucking did! I liked the mentality, do whatever It takes to achieve your dreams. This was super significant to me because if my dad hadn't have taken that trip, and delivered that heroin, he wouldn't have met my mom, and I wouldn't be alive! I think about this all the time, how crazy it is that the man who is completely against drugs, even weed, did this.

I myself was first introduced to heroin when I was about 11 years old. I've lived my whole life with older brothers and cousins who never hid anything from me or sugar coated anything. I still never forgot what my brother told when I asked him, "what is that?" pointing to baggies of white powder that he threw on the kitchen counter. "This is rent! This is heat, this is water, this is money!"

He wasn't wrong, once they started selling, was the last time the electricity or water was ever turned off in our apartment! Hallelujah! Not even my parents objected to what was going on. I bet they were just as happy as I that we no longer had to wake up to the joy of having no running water to shower. At the time I thought nothing bad of heroin, I mean look what it was doing for us how could I not love it. Not long after that introduction, they had me selling too. They would pre package a bunch of doses of that China white and leave them with me at home while they were out working, or "working". Looking back on it, that was totally irresponsible and unsafe for me, but It was the same four "family friends" each time so we knew they were cool. Each interaction went like this, one of them would knock on the door, Id let them in, they tell me how many bags they wanted, id give it to them, they'd give me money, and boom that was it. Ten dollars a dose, easy math for anyone to do. And that was the extent of my relationship with heroin for about four years, slinging H out of our apartment at the age of 11-14.

Then everything changed, one night in 2009, we (my family) came home from dinner to be greeted by what seemed like a dozen gun wielding police officers/agents screaming at us to, "PUT YOUR HANDS ON THE CAR!" Oh joy our apartment was getting raided by the NYPD.

I honestly can't say that fear or panic ever came across me, I knew from talking to my bro earlier that we were dry, all out, and that meant there was nothing in the house for the police to find. And that's exactly what happened, nothing illegal was found on the premises. I felt cocky, I knew nothing was going to happen, we were invisible! It's like we cheated death and it was the greatest rush ever. The only downside of that incident was witnessing the police give my dad a real hard time. He had no idea what was going on and since his English is poor he couldn't understand what the cops were demanding.

My family members saw the police raid as a sign from God and that was the last day we associated with heroin. Within a few months we sadly moved out of the Heights and across the Hudson river to Dumont, New Jersey just in time for me to start High School. Dumont was the exact opposite of Washington Heights, we went from the city "ghetto" to a predominantly white suburb and what surprised me was the fact that heroin was still just as available here. This wasn't a problem for me though. "Don't knock it till you try it" is what I always heard growing up, so of course I've done heroin before. The only time, was on New Years Eve in my old buddy Juan's room. I mean come on it was New Years I had to try something new. I won't say much about it because I don't want to glorify it in any way, but the most important piece of information was that I puked almost immediately after snorting it. And anyone that knows me, knows throwing up is like my worst nightmare, the worst feeling in the world to me, so therefore, never again. And since then I've never wanted anything to do with it.

Up until this point I thought heroin was great, it had gotten us a lot of money and in the grand scheme of things, brought my parents together, which resulted in my amazing self being born. As you can probably tell I try to look on the bright side of every situation and/or play devils advocate.

2015, Senior year of High School is when I went from loving H and all that it brought me to hating it. That's when heroin started to become really popular with some people, even a few of my friends. It's crazy to think about how widespread heroin, from a ghetto in NYC to a 1 mile x 1 mile suburb in New Jersey, it's everywhere. I knew heroin could kill people, and I knew the horrible withdrawal affects that come with it, but it was easy to disassociate myself from the fact that it was happening to people, until heroin started affecting people I knew, people that I loved. All the bad news seemed to hit at the same time. I got word from my mom that her brother, my uncle was pretty much dying from years of heroin and alcohol use. He received a liver transplant from a donor and even then was in horrible condition. He has close to no quality of life but is luckily still kicking. Others I knew, weren't so lucky, one of my best friends Mila Kostinodva went missing in 2014. She was a regular 18 year old girly girl and aspiring model. She said she was running away from home and that's all I thought for a year, that she actually picked up and left and started a new life wherever she was. Fast forward to June 2015, the horrible news surfaced that she had actually overdosed on heroin at my former friend's house, and that he had taken her body and dumped it off a cliff overlooking the Hudson river and kept it a secret for a year. This hit home for me, she was one of my closest friends and after that incident especially, I no longer had a "love" for H. Situations are completely different when they affect you or someone you know or care about.

This is a huge societal, political, and health issue. I feel all these incidents might have been preventable. The Libertarian in me thinks all drugs should be legal and the government shouldn't be telling anyone what to ingest or inject. But the more practical/ civilized side of me says that it's probably wise to ban drugs that induce actual brain chemistry changes that lead to physiological addiction, such as coke, heroin, meth, etc. as they rob the addict of the ability to

choose whether to continue or to stop using, but in no way agree that a proper solution is incarceration apposed to treatment. But in the end the fact is, people are going to do whatever they want to do, people are going to do drugs whether they are legal or not, so why not regulate the drugs, makes sure they are pure and safe, and educate people properly on drugs, no propaganda, inform people how to be safe if they do decide to take drugs. Its no secret that prohibition of drugs doesn't work, so if societies views on drugs were different, and drug laws were different, the criminal black market would be eliminated, which would lead to reduced crime, and safer drugs being manufactured. Maybe some of my friends would still be alive or not serving jail sentences, when on the other hand maybe my life would be completely different (for the worse), who knows if I would have even been born. To sum up the problem, I quote Gino Brown from New Jack City, "I'm not guilty. You're the one that's guilty. The lawmakers, the politicians, the Columbian drug lords, all you who lobby against making drugs legal. Just like you did with alcohol during the prohibition. You're the one who's guilty. I mean, c'mon, let's kick the ballistics here: Ain't no Uzi's made in Harlem. Not one of us in here owns a poppy field. This thing is bigger than Nino Brown. This is big business. This is the American way."