

Dear Cancer,

Do you remember me? Of the many you have affected, of the many you have hurt, of the many you have scarred, of the many who you have taken from their family, do you remember me? I am the fighter. I am the victim that didn't succumb. I am the force you could not defeat. I am the first born child you nearly stole from a pair of hopeful parents. I am the person you nearly killed, but failed to. I am the survivor. I am Jasmin Castro.

The scars you left behind, scattered throughout my body, inside and out, will never leave me. The trauma and insufferable pain you caused my parents are still visible. Behind their hurtful smile, worry and stress makes its home. The pain you served on a silver platter fed my entire family. The aura of suffrage you created still haunts them to this day. The memories of the crying, the praying, and the hopelessness of not being able to help me still lives with them. The paranoia of your return, the fear of "again", haunts us all. You are my biggest fear. Yet, I already conquered you. I won. You lost. If I had to fight you again, I would come back stronger than before. I will always beat you.

Do you remember me now? Although I don't care to remember you, in fact I don't want to remember you, I do want to remind you of the pain and distress you caused my parents and my life. I was only one year old; a baby. I had not even begun to understand life when you heartlessly tried to take it from me. My parents tell me the story of when and how they found out I had you. They remember it clearly. It was the day their life changed. It was the day my life changed. I picture myself in the hospital room with them. I feel like I can see everything. My mom with the look of fear and sadness. With just one word from the doctor, everything in her life had just been turned upside down. I can see my dad trying to be strong. He tells my mother that everything will be alright. That together we will get through this. Meanwhile he worries. They

both cry.

I was my parents first born, and like any other parent, all they wanted was for their baby to be healthy. They faced everything together, never gave up, and continued to be hopeful. The amount of pressure a disease like you puts on a family, and the emotional endurance they must have, is enormous, but my family looked after each other and supported me through it all. I had to go to chemotherapy for three hours, five days a month, for eight months. My mother stayed at my side during my procedures and treatment, while my father went to work to pay for our living expenses. My father had to work while thinking about me, while my mother spent her time at my side wanting to help but not being able to. For months we lived like this. My parents grew tired of the situation. Their relationship suffered. The need to find someone to blame grew strong among them, but in the end they found strength in each other. You caused a lot of pain to my family and friends, but with love and support they got me through it. We were too strong to lose to you. I was too strong.

Chemotherapy was a price I had to pay to conquer you. It was a weapon to fight you off. We went to war for my life, with every chemotherapy session being a battle for survival. In the end I did win, but your ruthless intentions and years of experience left their mark. You left me physical scars, emotional scars, hair loss, profound deafness, and even vision loss. You are the cause of my insecurities in everyday life. You are the reason I have problems being social and making friends. You are the reason I struggle in school. At times, I ask myself if everyone else can understand what I am saying because of my speech impediment. I question whether they wonder about me and why I am the way I am. I wonder if I am understanding information, classes, life, the way that I should. You left me these scars. You left me these reminders of you.

I don't recall when I had you, but along with the scars you left behind, my mom tells me about the time in my life when you were an unwelcome guest. They knew something wasn't

right with me as a baby. The symptoms I had were not normal. Unfortunately, with so much unknown, and the hope from first time parents that I was ok, you kept growing inside of me. By the time they realized something was wrong, you had made a home where you were not wanted. Ironically, you also brought strength with you. You made me stronger. You gave my family strength too. I thank you for that. The cancer treatment I had because of you, took away so many things, but humbled me and overall made me a better person. You think you took my hearing away, but I became a more effective listener. You think you took my speech away, but I just learned to say the things that matter. You think you took my confidence away, but I am learning to be a symbol for others. A representation of hope, faith, love, and everything else you cannot defeat or break.

You hurt my parents terribly. You tried to crush their hopes and dreams when you had the doctor mention their baby and cancer in the same sentence. You failed! Their love for me and for each other only grew and together we fought you. You took away my infant and toddler years. You robbed me of the childhood I could have had, and still you tried to take more. You tried to take my life. Little did you know that you were strong, but I was always stronger. I am glad I fought you. I am glad I beat you. I like to tell myself that if you sleep, I am your nightmare. That you see me and remember that you lost! I won! That is why today I am here. You kept me away from what the world has to offer, but that is in the past. I have won. Now I plan on experiencing all of the positive things in life. All of the things that you tried so very hard to keep me from. So cancer, although I resent you for what you did to me and my family, I thank you for making me a stronger and better person.

So long,

Jasmin Castro (The survivor)