



*Dreamers*  
**AND DOERS**

★ 2022 ★



LEUKEMIA &  
LYMPHOMA  
SOCIETY®





*Dreamers*  
**AND DOERS**

**THE LLS SCHOLARSHIP FOR BLOOD CANCER SURVIVORS  
CLASS OF 2022**

# IN ONE WORD, WHAT COMES TO MIND

graceful happy  
determined  
vulnerable choice life winners  
courageous love  
**resilient** bra  
incredible supported  
inspiring **fighter** Str  
fierce tough hero warr  
healthy awesome unsto  
determination awesome f  
conqu

# WHEN YOU THINK OF SURVIVORS?

rockstars  
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less perseverance  
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strong amazing  
rior resilience  
poppable family power  
future wise grit loved  
er wise grit loved  
courage  
alive  
strength  
relentless  
badasses

# CONGRATULATIONS

Dear Scholarship Awardees,

On behalf of everyone at The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, we offer our heartfelt congratulations to the awardees of our very first *LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors*. Each of you has displayed remarkable courage, grit, and determination—setting your sights high and reaching for your dreams despite setbacks. Our application reviewers were profoundly touched and impressed by your personal stories. We are so proud of you!

Over 70 years ago, our organization was started by a family who lost their son, Robbie, to leukemia. Since then, our organization has made tremendous progress by investing in scientific research, patient support, and advocacy to help families facing a blood cancer diagnosis. We understand how challenging it can be to plan for the future during or after cancer treatment—especially when diagnosed as a child or young adult. Hospital stays and interruptions in school can derail educational goals. And the steep cost of cancer care can make affording higher education difficult. The *LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors* is designed to ease those challenges.

These scholarships would not be possible without the generosity of our incredible major donors: the Okafor Family Foundation, Beth Ayres (in memory of Alan M. Ayres), Elbit Systems of America, ACE Family Foundation, Tour De Court, Alok Kapoor, and the Frederick A. DeLuca Foundation. Because of their commitment to our mission, we can provide much-needed funds to support tuition expenses for survivors like you.

Your future is now, and we can't wait to see what you do next! Congratulations again!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Louis J. DeGennaro".

**Louis J. DeGennaro, PhD**  
*President and Chief Executive Officer*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gwen Nichols".

**Dr. Gwen Nichols**  
*Chief Medical Officer*

# CLASS OF 2022

|             |              |               |               |
|-------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Adam O.     | Dazhane B.   | John K.       | Matthew W.    |
| Ainsley C.  | Denton T. R. | Jonathan R.   | Max M.        |
| Ainsley M.  | Dylan C.     | Joseph B.     | Maya K.       |
| Alana J.    | Elaine H. G. | Joseph K.     | Megan F.      |
| Alexis O.   | Ellie L.     | Julieta G.    | Mercy H.      |
| Alwin W.    | Emily A.     | Justin S.     | Misty H.      |
| Andrew V.   | Emily S.     | Katarina H.   | Munira N.     |
| Anna S.     | Ensley S.    | Katherine B.  | Nathan B.     |
| Ashley M.   | Ethan S.     | Kathleen R.   | Negeen V.     |
| Autumn R.   | Ethan Y.     | Katie S.      | Nikollette N. |
| Ava D.      | Eva H.       | Kendall S.    | Olivia C.     |
| Braulio H.  | Fatima O.    | Kendra K.     | Rhea J.       |
| Carlos C.   | Garrett H.   | Kyle F.       | Samantha S.   |
| Carlos L.   | Haley P.     | Kyle F.       | Sanaba D.     |
| Caroline D. | Hannah G.    | Lana T.       | Sara W.       |
| Carson B.   | Hannah H.    | Lauren R.     | Sophia T.     |
| Chloe F.    | Heather M.   | Lily A.       | Sydney B.     |
| Christa H.  | Henry P.     | Lily C.       | Sydney S.     |
| Claire B.   | Isilma J.    | Lorelai C.    | Tate M.       |
| Claire M.   | Jack T.      | Lucy Y.       | Timothy M.    |
| Colten H.   | Jacob S.     | Luke C.       | Timothy T.    |
| Connor P.   | Jameson S.   | Lydia Y. C.   | Victor H.     |
| Courtney C. | Jane F.      | Mackenzie M.  | Virginia D.   |
| Dane H.     | Jania W.     | Madison E.    | William S.    |
| Daria K.    | Jimmy Z.     | Maripaz C.-Q. | Zeena A.      |



# ANDREW V.

Columbus State Community College & The Ohio State University



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“Who you become as the result of the chase is the most important thing.” This phrase is ingrained in my mind by my football coach, Geron Stokes, every day at practice. I believe this statement is truly inspirational because it not only affects my life but also all of my brothers and sisters fighting this crazy thing called cancer. I think all cancer patients would agree with me when I say that life is hard and sometimes things don’t go your way or how you planned. Cancer has a way of tearing apart everything you know as “normal.” It has a way of going after your interests, hobbies and everything you love and making them seem less enjoyable. It will even go as far as attacking your friends and family — creeping its way into every part of their lives. Let’s face it, cancer affects not just the patient but all of their family and friends — and I don’t think enough credit is given there. The number of times I’ve had to lean on my Mom and Dad when I have not been strong is too many to count.

They have really kept me going and I am forever grateful for that. My brother has always been my right hand man through thick and thin. He's always been there for me and always will be. He continues to push me to be the best person I can be and to never settle. My sister, always ready to make me laugh or watch a movie with me, keeps my spirits up.

There have been times when cancer has brought me to tears — wishing and hoping I had my old life back. The life where I was able to play the sports I love with my buddies at a high level. The life where I didn't have to worry about my energy level or the effects of 6,000 medicines that come from who knows where. The life that I thought was mine and nothing could ever come in and change it. Then, on October 14, 2020, God presented me with a new challenge.

A challenge that would push me mentally and physically to my limits, putting everything I ever deemed as “challenging” to shame. I had no way of preparing mentally or physically for this challenge. I believe this was done for a certain reason though, to push me to be the greatest version of myself I can be.

My favorite part about my whole story is that cancer has affected me in too many ways to count, but there are things it can't touch. It can never take away my smile. It can never take away the greatest support system in the world: my family, friends, coaches, and community. It can never take away my drive to help other people. It can never take away my work ethic, because if I want something in this life I'm going to go freaking get it no matter what anyone says. Most importantly it cannot take away from my heart and pride in whatever I am doing. It can't take away my fight to get better each day and really embrace the grind.

One day this fall after a football practice, a teammate and close buddy of mine asked me a question that really made me think. He asked me, “What really motivates you?” After taking a second to think and really dissect the question I told him that I feel like God has really given me a second chance and sense of direction with being diagnosed with cancer. It really has opened my eyes into a whole new perspective on life. This whole process has made me realize that I need to go into a profession where I get to help people. There is no greater feeling to me than helping somebody out and them learning and improving on it. I really pride myself on waking up each day knowing if I can help just one person get to where they want to go, I've done my job for that day. I understand that life isn't going to be easy, but that's my favorite part. I understand I am going to wake up some days and not feel good but that's not going to stop me from being the best brother, son, friend, leader, teammate, and student I can be. Waking up each day with a new opportunity to get better and push myself is a gift. I just really love to embrace new challenges and new things.

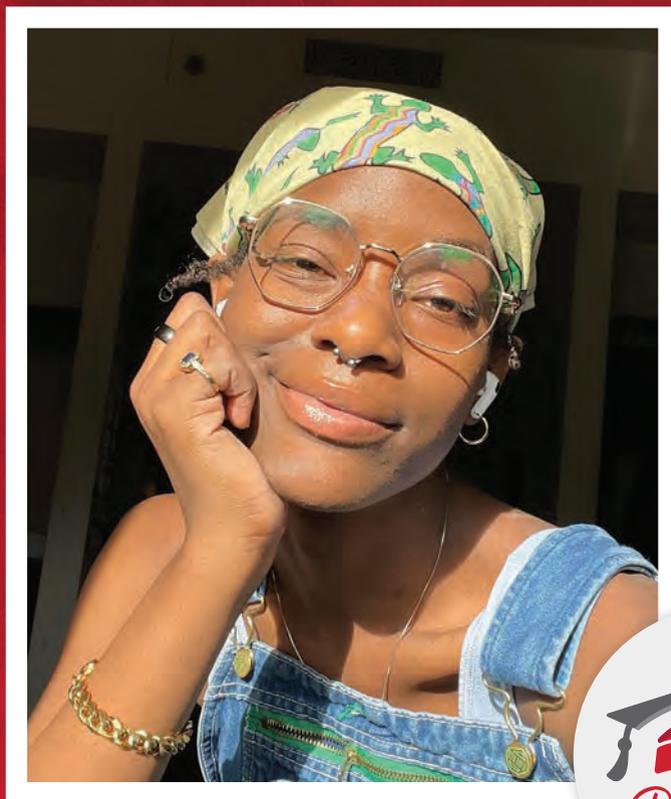
In college I would like to pursue motivational speaking or medicine, specifically cancer. This way I have a chance to help people with strength and motivation just as many others have given to me through my battle. When asked if I could do it all over again, with no cancer diagnosis on October 14, 2020 I would smile and tell them I wouldn't have it any other way. This battle has taught me valuable life lessons about friendships, toughness, and bravery. I've learned you are not going to feel 100% all the time and still need to work through it.

Our football team theme is Relentless. It's one word I really feel embodies all of cancer patients and their families. We are relentless — because we have no other choice.



# DAZHANE B.

Arizona State University



LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors,  
Okafor Family Foundation Award



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## Introduction

Being diagnosed with leukemia at 16 years old was as jarring as one might imagine.

Since then, navigating the disadvantages that have accompanied this diagnosis has been no less than challenging. These disadvantages include physical and mental obstacles that are seemingly determined to present themselves to me daily. However, childhood cancer has also provided me with benefits, or with qualities that have beneficial aspects, such as maturity at a young age.

Hidden gems also provided by my illness are integral life lessons that, without this experience, likely would have taken decades to discover. In this essay I will elaborate on the ways that cancer has affected my life as well as the skills and lessons I have gained from it.

## Physical Impacts

The first and most prominent impact was the fluctuation of both my weight and appetite. My weight has always been an important factor to me in relation to my appearance, so the inability to eat for weeks was devastating. As expected, I lost an unhealthy amount of weight and felt repulsed by myself. So much so that, while recovering, I stayed away from mirrors so as to not be scarred by my appearance. I cringed when my favorite outfits hung awkwardly large on my frame, and I despised myself for not finding the will to eat. I directed my anger at myself and concluded that my lack of eating was a result of a lack of effort. Reflecting on the matter has produced the realization that this anger was misplaced. It has also allowed the realization that the era when my appetite returned was one of the happiest moments of my entire cancer journey. I was more confident in myself, I was happier, and I was healthy. This fact paves the way for the first of many life lessons I have learned: There is always light at the end of the tunnel. I have heard this more times than I can count, and though it might be cliché, it is a lesson that I sincerely believe in as it is something I have lived.

Having mentioned this slightly in the paragraph above, a second physical impact that cancer has had is insecurity in myself, specifically my appearance. Alongside my weight, my bone marrow transplant resulted in the placement of a port-a-cath in between my upper chest and shoulder, an awfully prominent location. This means, whenever the weather warrants that I wear a sleeveless shirt, which Tempe, Arizona's hot and sunny days typically do, my port is on display for anyone to see, stare at, or question. Alongside this are my Broviac line, pic-line, art-line and other surgical or injection scars that are all exposed as well when I wear anything other than a long-sleeved shirt. When these are not insecurities, my hair length is. In a shortened state, I worry that people will make crude assumptions about me. These insecurities, though, have taught me to challenge whether these are flaws to be unhappy with, or vestiges of my most important endeavor. I am learning to look at myself in a new light and appreciate the changes and differences that transplant has given me. It is a continuous and difficult battle I struggle with daily but I often find myself successful.

## Mental Impacts

The mental impacts that have come with childhood cancer have not been lost on me. Perhaps the worst impact has been the anxiety that has been amplified with each differing course of action. It increased when my oral chemotherapy stopped working and needed to be switched; when my body started rejecting the new medicine; when I was told I would need a bone marrow transplant, and when the first transplant failed. Consistently, each trial has increased my fear of catastrophe so that every time I so much as get a cold, I am worried it will be fatal. Considering the circumstances of the pandemic only heighten this fear. Because of this, I have begun therapy in hopes to regulate some of this anxiety. I am also on medication to dampen the effects of the illness. Despite this intervention, every sniffle, every cough, and every headache are immediate triggers for me. I instantly dread it is a signal of my cancer's return.

Another mental impact of my cancer is a lack of confidence socially. My four-month hospitalization undergoing transplant was during the pandemic, so I was only allowed two visitors my entire stay. Thus, I missed out on seeing my friends and being involved in social events much longer than the average person due to Covid-19. As my friends moved out of state and made new friends in college, I was at home, studying online. Even those I knew who stayed in the state were out at football games while I was on zoom meetings with people twice my age. Now, back in person, I feel as if interactions with people my age produce an unnecessary amount of anxiety. I constantly worry I am saying the wrong thing, I am appearing weird, or I am simply not fitting in. While, this gives me the opportunity to challenge the anxiety and convince myself that I am doing a sufficient job, this is no easy task and, more often than not, I let my fear overwhelm me.

## Conclusion

One can imagine that childhood cancer is no easy feat. However, there are aspects to my cancer and recovery that rise above typical consideration. For example, the physical and mental impacts that I am forced to live with even though my cancer is gone. These impacts have overturned my self-confidence and have heightened my anxiety to the extent that I need psychiatric intervention. Albeit, from these negative experiences, I have also acquired the ability to confront my insecurity and reinforce the confidence I do have. I have also gained imperative life lessons and skills that I can now reapply to other strenuous situations I may encounter. My cancer journey was the most difficult experience I have ever faced, but I know as a result of it, I am a strong, intelligent, driven, and resilient young woman who is determined to fulfill her goals.

☆☆  
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**DYLAN G.**

St. Mary's College of California



**LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors,  
Elbit Systems of America Award**



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At twenty one years of age, I feel as if I have already been on a life changing journey. Being diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia took a lot from me; it flipped my life upside down. At the age of seventeen, I was suddenly stripped of my teenage privileges like going to school and spending valuable time with friends. Unfortunately, these are normal consequences for young adult survivors like myself. But that wasn't what made me stand out. I became the change I wanted to see and chose to turn my life right side up.

During my time in treatment, I learned the importance of staying positive. Powering through my days was only made possible by keeping a good attitude. While this wasn't the situation I wanted to be in, I decided to make the most of it. I felt that I had no other choice. Choosing happiness in my fight was the best decision I could have made because it didn't just benefit myself. It made the experience a little better for everyone; my family, my friends, and my doctors. Hope was something I wanted to spread; it was vital in maintaining a positive

mentality. By being a light for others, I not only inspired those around me but also gave myself the strength to keep fighting.

My absence during my junior and senior years of high school was difficult, but it challenged me to become more independent. I had to teach myself the majority of the curriculum and learned to work harder than I ever had before. Although this took a significant toll on me, I was determined. I didn't want cancer to hold me back from achieving my goals. During my time in the hospital, I started a t-shirt fundraiser to raise money for cancer charities like The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and St. Jude Children's Hospital. I wanted people at my school to look at my story and learn something new. I wanted them to continue the spread of awareness for blood cancers like leukemia. On top of this, I also started a club at school with some friends to create a shared knowledge of childhood cancer. My high school community was important to me and I wanted them to be able to learn something from my experience.

Although I was encouraged to take it easy, and told that I can make up for lost time after treatment, I did the complete opposite. I sat myself down and got to work. I applied to colleges, prepared material for scholarships, and maintained a 4.0 grade point average. Although I had more important matters to attend to, I chose to fight not only for my life but for my academics. I have always believed that a future isn't handed to you, you have to work for it. Earning good grades has always been an important goal that I set for myself. I didn't want cancer to get in the way of this. Nothing could stop me, and because of this, I know that I can handle anything that life throws at me.

I am beyond proud of what I've achieved, and what I continue to achieve. From my experience fighting leukemia, I learned the importance of giving back. Over the course of treatment, I had a tremendous amount of support from my community. I had friends and family by my side when I needed them, and even had non-profit organizations like Make-A-Wish to provide me with a little bit of hope. Seeing what others did to support me was incredible. The thought of complete strangers coming together to help someone they didn't know is the most amazing thing someone could ask for. I wanted to be a part of an important cause so that I could make others feel the same way. For the past year, I have volunteered with my local Make-A-Wish chapter and even became their summer marketing intern. While working there, I have talked to families over the phone and made real connections. Hearing their stories and finding comfort in one another has been the biggest blessing. Coming full circle is the most incredible thing because I believe it is an opportunity that cannot be ignored.

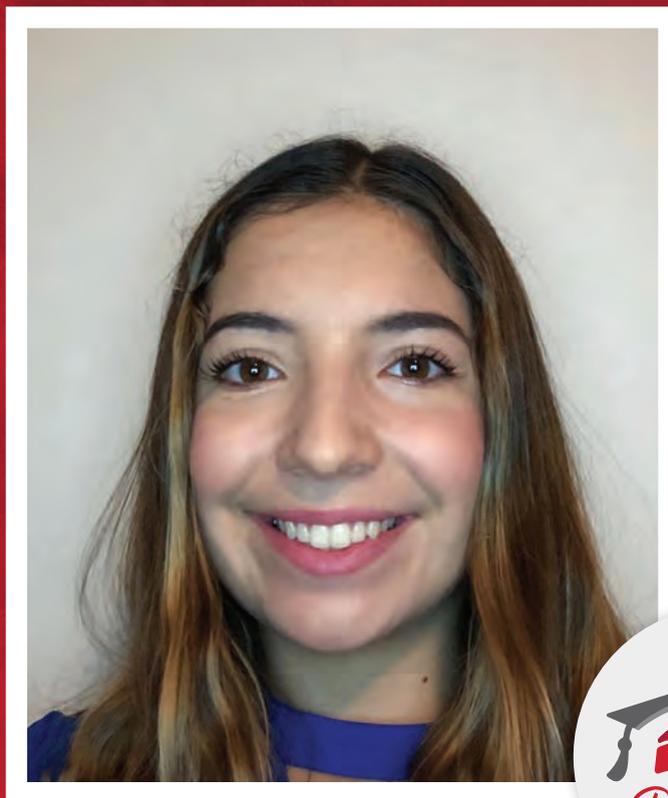
I am more than a survivor. I am fearless. Determined. Patient. Optimistic. I am no longer someone who is afraid of what is ahead. Cancer, if anything, shined a new light on me. It revealed the new and improved version of myself. I was taught through struggle to be grateful for every moment, and to appreciate the little things in life. I learned the importance of paying it forward, and how to be there for others. Through it all, I made the most of my life. I was given a second chance, and I am not going to waste it. The world can be a better place if we can continue to spread hope, joy, and kindness. I want to be a part of that effort.

Becoming a survivor was a wild journey, but it is one that I am still embarking on and will carry with pride for the rest of my life.



# ELAINE H. G.

Stanford University



LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors,  
Okafor Family Foundation Award



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“You have cancer.” This is a phrase that absolutely no one wants to hear, much less at 14 years of age. Unfortunately, these few words reverberated in my mind as well as in my parents’, my sister’s, and many other friends’ and strangers’ minds. I could tell my story since day one, the day of the diagnosis, yet I believe that it was not the illness nor the treatment that affected me the most, but the support that loved ones provided me and the skills I was able to develop during the short, yet eternal time that I was being treated.

Memories from every moment, significant or not, still run through my mind; they have taught me to interpret setbacks with an optimistic perspective. I can remember the good days: those when friends visited and brought joy to my room, those when my grandmother arrived with the best food she could think of cooking, those when relatives flew from their homes just to take care of me for a while, and even those when I stayed with my mom, dad, and sister, who instantly filled any room with hope. However, there were also dismal moments; for example, celebrating Christmas at the hospital, leaving my school and friends for a few months, arriving earlier than anticipated to the hospital, and even missing my dog so much I felt like crying.

I have not forgotten any of these moments because each has taught me a different lesson or skill that I have been able to use in different situations.

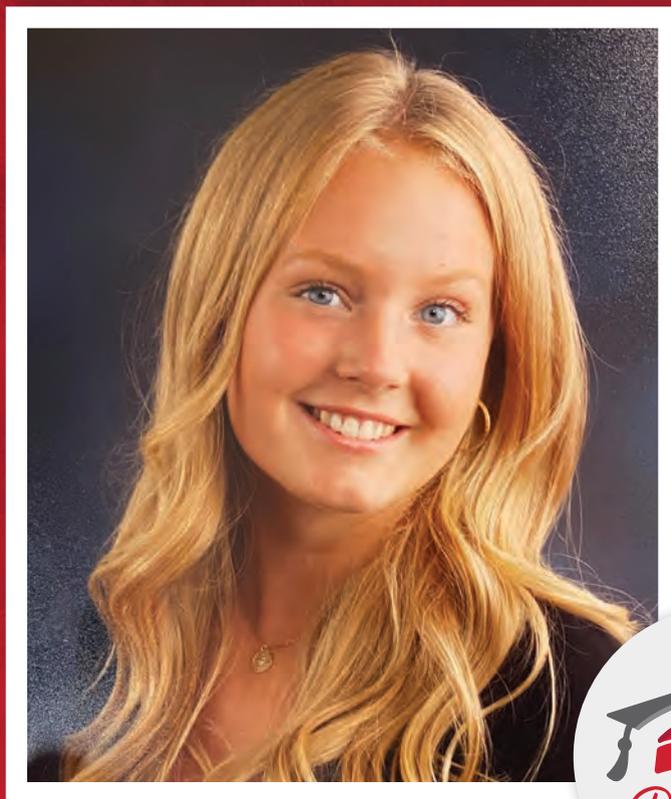
During my parenthesis from normal life I learned the value of perseverance and patience. I also learned that the strength needed to overcome obstacles is not physical, but merely emotional; the fortitude I gained is incomparable to what I had before, and it has helped me not only in my academics, but in the social and personal aspects of my life. I did not consider myself a tolerant person, but after several hardships it has been clear to me that this new trait is present in my new character. Altogether, the values and qualities I developed throughout this experience have helped me believe in myself and have given me the self-confidence to know that I am capable of doing so many things I didn't think I was capable of before.

Among all the “powers” that cancer gave me, the ones I consider the most important are the steadfastness and the determination to pursue my dreams and achieve my goals. With these values, I was able to prepare myself to get into the university of my dreams and make the best of all the opportunities that it has to offer. To do so, I found a way to relate my experience with blood cancer with my ultimate life goal: being encouraging, comforting, and helpful towards others. Every year since my remission began in early 2016, I have participated in the Light the Night (LTN) campaign organized by The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS.) Even so, I was chosen as the 2018 Honored Hero of Puerto Rico's LTN Chapter, in which I proudly represented my island. Afterwards, I dedicated a large part of my high school life to two things: research in basic sciences and community service. By participating in science fairs, I was able to foster my aspiration to learn and advance scientific technologies in the biological field while expanding my public speaking skills in these areas of study. Even though I felt much gratification from this, I knew that there was an emotional lack in this part of my life, which led me to joining several community service clubs throughout my high school years. In these clubs, I ascended the leadership hierarchy until I was president of one of them, which is when I began to link LLS to my school and my purpose by organizing LTN volunteer teams. All of these activities helped me learn which elements are the most important to me as a contributing member of my community. When combining this with thoughts about my future, I was finally convinced that medicine and healthcare were going to be an immense part of my future professionally.

When it was time to leave my first alma mater and start a new chapter of my life, I knew that I could not turn away from my interests or my passions, which is why I worked very hard to find and apply to an institution that focused on research and that could also provide students opportunities to help others through volunteering and community service. Fortunately, my efforts paid off and I got accepted into Stanford University! Here, I have been able to develop basic scientific research skills by working in the Porteus Lab, which focuses on developing gene therapies for genetic diseases of the blood, especially present in the pediatric population. During my time in the lab, I have deepened my understanding of blood diseases other than blood cancer and I have learned about what current researchers are working on to treat them. This has been very exciting for me because it has made me feel more involved with the scientific progression of potential cures that are more advanced than those administered to me, and the myriad of people that have been through situations comparable to mine; in fact, it makes me feel like I am also helping to accomplish the mission of LLS, even if it is indirectly. I have been involved with community service throughout my participation and leadership in organizations such as Healing Strokes, which focuses on coordinating art therapy sessions for stroke survivors and their caregivers. Through all this work, I have been attempting to globalize two of the most important things to me, science and serving others, just like LLS has been doing for thousands of people, in a way that is extremely rewarding to me.

I have always been eager to welcome new challenges, and especially those that drive me to ameliorate current situations that are affecting millions of people. With all I have learned, I want to share a message with everybody that is going through a similar situation: it is possible to face it and everybody has the strength needed to do so. Even though I was not attending school, each moment enlightened me and provided me with lessons, which I have tried to apply every day since my remission began. New values, emotions, and strengths define my thoughts, my actions, and my words. This illness may not have been a blessing, but without it, I would not have obtained the wisdom and courage to face challenges coming my way.

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**KENDALL S.**  
Denison University



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Some of my most vivid memories from around the time I was diagnosed with leukemia are surprisingly not horrible. I remember running around the Lincoln Park Zoo, sitting on my mom's lap, and stopping at the nearby candy store to pick out chocolate. Those were the good parts of my countless hospital visits and overnight stays. Maybe it's because I was only 2 ½ years old that other things didn't make a permanent imprint on my memory. Or maybe our brains work to miraculously save us from our worst moments. For example, I don't remember falling in pain at the beach or my parents rushing me to the ER to see what was wrong. I don't remember my dad collapsing next to me when the doctor said she's got cancer. I don't remember being whisked away to Lurie Children's Hospital in an ambulance and spending weeks there, getting spinal taps and countless pokes. I don't remember how it felt to gain twice my body weight from steroids and to be too sick from chemo to get out of bed. Many of these details of my diagnosis and treatment I've only come to know about from my parents.

The truth is, cancer doesn't stop affecting you even if you are lucky enough to be in remission. I am so grateful to be a healthy, 17-year-old survivor today. But there are aspects of my life that leukemia altered, which might never change. The heavy chemotherapy my frontal lobe took on as a 2, 3, and 4-year-old girl is most likely, according to my doctors, the cause of my anxiety and ADHD. I take way longer to focus and get things done than I should, and I have needed special help in school to keep up with my grade level. I also experienced severe anxiety and refused to go to school for months during 5th grade. This was when I first started "processing" that I had a disease which almost killed me, and I needed medication and therapy to get back on the right track. I also know that my family unit and our family relationships suffered because of leukemia. I am the third of four girls in my family, and the four years of time my parents spent dealing with my health issues caused a lot of hardship. My sisters were also very young then, and they lost a few important years of getting attention and time with my parents. It was not my fault, I know that, but there are still underlying tensions between us today because of what my cancer robbed them of. This is only part of the emotional toll that leukemia had on my family.

But despite these hardships, I have learned so much from my cancer diagnosis and treatment about things such as perseverance, advocacy, and sharing. These are values which have formed the true core of who I am, and who I want to be as I go off to college and leave home.

From a young age, I remembered hearing that I might never be able to play sports very well because of all the chemotherapy I received. The oncologists explained complications, but I just wanted to be a "normal" kid who didn't have this cancer stigma. So, I decided to try and prove them wrong. I poured myself into multiple sports, including soccer, basketball, and swimming. Eventually I focused only on soccer, playing year-round, loving it, and giving it my all. I developed into an aggressive forward, helping my U12 through U17-age club teams win numerous tournaments and multiple Illinois Women's State Cup Championships. I even made my very large high school's varsity soccer team as a freshman. Success in sports made me feel thankful that I stayed healthy and that I overcame odds that were stacked against me. I realized that my achievements in sports could be uplifting to other kids out there who were diagnosed with leukemia and told maybe you won't be much of an athlete. Now, I even have a few college coaches talking to me about roster spots for college teams, and I am so happy that I persevered and worked hard to get to this point.

As a leukemia survivor, I have also come to fully understand the importance of sharing my story to help others. There were times in my early teens when I didn't really want the spotlight that being the "kid who had cancer" can bring. But as I matured, I learned that my illness was bigger than me, and that talking to people about leukemia was not ever going to be as hard as getting spinal taps and being horribly sick.

Over time, the Illinois chapter of The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS) became like a second family to me. I participated in my first Light the Night walk when I was 5 years old. After that, I volunteered at dozens of events, year after year, like LLS-WGN fashion shows, boating regattas, and Chicago Cubs /LLS days. I was even the 2012 LLS Illinois Girl of the Year. I loved participating, but I was still flying under the radar. At that 2012 MWOY, I met Brian Sladek, the Man of the Year, who then went to work for LLS in Chicago. Brian's role at LLS was in advocacy, and he encouraged my mom and I to attend a Mission Day trip to D.C. in 2017. Somehow, because of Brian, I finally got up the nerve to talk about my cancer experience openly and share my story face-to-face with members of Congress. Our trip helped get the 2018 Childhood Cancer STAR Act passed! This experience really taught me how important it is for adults to hear from kids like me about cancer, because it encourages people to take action. Over this time, my family and I also started the Find a Cure high school service board to raise money for LLS. We now have more than 80 members from 4 different high schools, and have raised over \$35,000 in the last few years alone.

Although Brian Sladek passed away from his third blood cancer two years ago, every time I tell my story to help other people, I know his mission lives on. When I share how cancer affected me, I believe it can make a difference. I've learned to become comfortable sharing things that are difficult, to become a better speaker, and to become a better listener, which is what I think advocacy is all about. By gaining this knowledge through my experience, I feel like I've been able to essentially kick cancer in the face, and it feels amazing. Thank you very much for considering me for this scholarship opportunity!

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**ADAM O.**  
Delta College



**LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors,  
Okafor Family Foundation Award**

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I will never forget how everything happened. One day I was having severe stomach pains and decided to check myself into an emergency room. Once admitted, they did emergency surgery on me because of a ruptured appendix. After spending a week in the hospital, the doctor who performed the procedure informed me that she sent a sample of my tissue off to the lab and they confirmed that it was cancerous.

Throughout everything that I've been through, it made me realize that life is too short, and we need to enjoy it while we still can. Most importantly it taught me these things: how to take care of my well-being, how to be empathetic towards others, and how to support people that are in need. These are the three main lessons I've learned from my experience, and they helped shape me into the person that I am today. As an aspiring pharmacist, I want to take what I've learned and implement that into my career to give the best patient care that I could possibly give.



# AINSLEY C.

Bellarmine University



When you hear you have cancer you think you will never be normal again, at least that is what I thought. I figured volleyball, school, everything was out of the picture. I thought my life would never be the same, but I was reassured by many people that everything would work out. Now, I am in my senior year of high school, playing volleyball for the best high school in Kentucky and working out to keep up my stamina.

I kept going back and forth between careers. When I was diagnosed and started spending more time in the hospital, I realized pediatric oncology nursing is the career path for me, and I cannot wait to start college and begin my nursing journey.

You hear all the scary things about being an adult, but I think I've already been through the scariest thing in my life, and I am headed to the brighter side of it all. If I can help people because I have a special connection to what they are going through, then that is what I will do.



# AINSLEY M.

University of Northern Iowa



## LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors, Elbit Systems of America Award

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I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia with a positive Philadelphia chromosome on February 27th of 2021. This was a very scary time for me because I was enrolled in my second semester of college at the University of Northern Iowa.

I have learned so many things as I have gone through my harsh treatment regimen and dealt with my diagnosis. I used to sweat every small thing that would happen to me. My diagnosis made me realize that there are so many more important things in the world to worry about than if I get one bad grade on a test, or if I have one bad day it doesn't define my entire life.

I have been so overwhelmed with kindness and it has inspired me to be a better person in my life. This has been one of the hardest challenges I have ever faced and it is also a challenge that I never would have thought I would be battling. It has made me develop this new sense of appreciation for everything I have in my life.



# ALANA J.

Indiana University Kokomo



Having twin sisters that were as thin as a stick already made me insecure my whole life, as I had a little bit of meat on my bones. Endless comments were, and still are, made about my height; the chemo stunted my growth. Losing my hair was the cherry on top. Not only was this disease ugly, but I too felt ugly.

Even after my hair grew back, there was still a constant insecurity, my scar. A port was placed slightly off center of my chest and when it was removed it left a pinkish scar that measures around half an inch thick. Not only did I have crooked teeth and wore glasses, but I had no hair and a giant scar.

It wasn't until this year that I finally became comfortable in my own skin. I used to have no confidence in my appearance, now I have learned to embrace my short stature and my thick pink scar. I cannot change these things about me, so why not accept them and be proud of what I have overcome.



# ALEXIS O.

WVU Potomac State College



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That night I was admitted to J.W. Ruby Memorial Hospital in Morgantown, and by the morning I had been diagnosed with B-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia. My life, as I knew it, had changed completely.

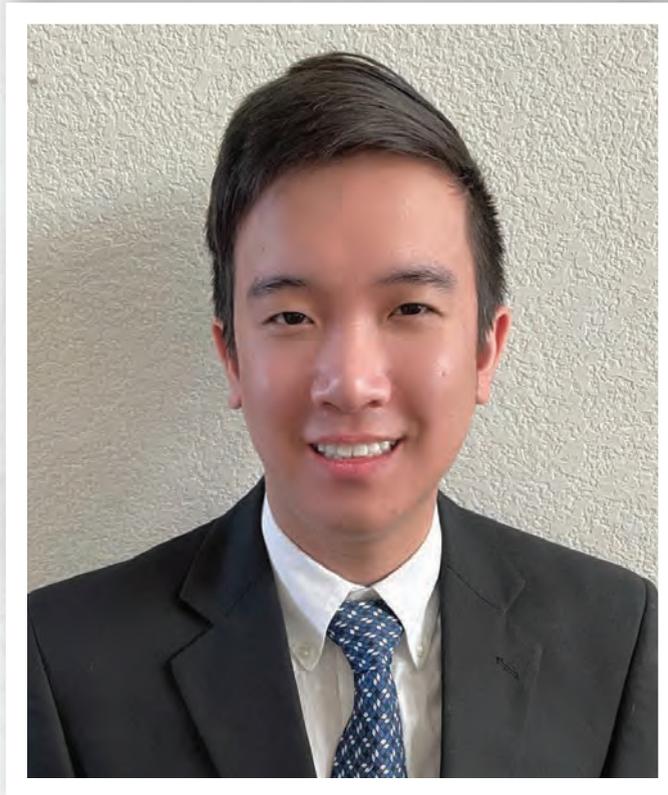
Over the next two and a half years, I received chemotherapy weekly and battled an awful side effect of the steroids given with treatment, avascular necrosis of both hip joints. This ultimately led to having multiple hip surgeries trying to repair the growing damage, but eventually I had bi-lateral, total hip replacements.

It is now July of 2021 and I am happy to say I am not only cancer-free, but it has also been over a month since I have had my stem cell transplant and I am doing very well. I am planning on attending WVU Potomac State College in the fall and am looking forward to starting my journey to becoming a registered nurse. I do have to thank my cancer for one thing and that is finding what I am most passionate about: nursing.



# ALWIN W.

Southern Methodist University



As a seventeen-year-old I was looking forward to a bright future. Everything changed on May 1st, 2018, when I was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia. I was forced to forgo my admission to Texas A&M.

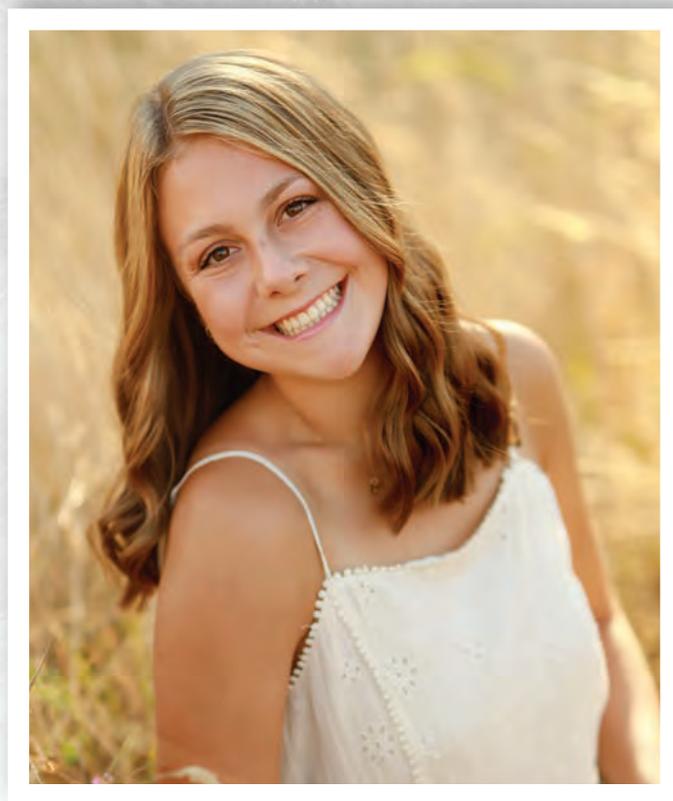
But with the support of my mother, my father who continued to work to support our family, my sister who supported me even while attending law school in New Jersey, and my friends who no matter how far they went for college always made sure to keep in touch, I fought my leukemia day by day, week by week.

Though the challenges of chemotherapy and radiation were daunting and challenging, I still went back to school, ready to fight for a bright future once again. I know that I want to major in finance and become a successful financial analyst at a Fortune 500 company. The adversity during this journey taught me how to prevail through tough times and the mindset it takes to be able to not only recover physically but mentally.



# ANNA S.

Gonzaga University



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I started my first dose of chemotherapy at 10:00 PM on Christmas Eve. I spent 133 days inpatient at the hospital and rarely got to see my friends and family. My whole world was turned upside down.

As I was reaching the end of my treatment, I had a realization that there was nothing I could do about my situation. There was no way to prevent my cancer, and all I could do was accept it. I learned to embrace my baldness and know that I overcame a very deadly disease.

My dream is to become a pediatric oncology nurse and help kids that are going through the same thing I experienced. I have a unique connection to these children and want to be more than a nurse to them. I want to inspire them to keep fighting. Children fighting cancer need to have someone they can rely on and connect with, and I aspire to be that person.



# AUTUMN R.

Northern Arizona University



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I was diagnosed with Burkitt's lymphoma at age 15, and prior to that, I would describe myself as an average teenage girl with average teenage girl priorities.

My priorities shifted during my difficult treatment because it was hands-down the hardest thing I've ever gone through. I was also witnessing families around me at the Jonathan Jaques Children's Cancer Center go through even worse hardships. Not all my new friends in the pediatric oncology ward survived their illness. Suddenly, I realized the minor problems I used to stress over weren't the end of the world and most importantly, that the tiny pleasures I used to take for granted are actually the most important things of all.

This perspective gave me a new appreciation for life, and it has allowed me to love everything much deeper and to overcome new setbacks which would've discouraged me before.

This made me want to give back to the wonderful community that supported me during my time of need. To that end, I've dedicated most of my life to volunteering and have begun studies to earn a Bachelor of Social Work.



# AVA D.

University of Alabama



## **LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors Award, Beth Ayres in Memory of Alan M. Ayres**

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Being fortunate enough to receive world class healthcare services at the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt was such an incredible blessing, not only because I beat my cancer, but because I got to see firsthand how incredible all nurses really are. This made me even more passionate about providing healthcare to everyone that I can impact throughout my lifetime.

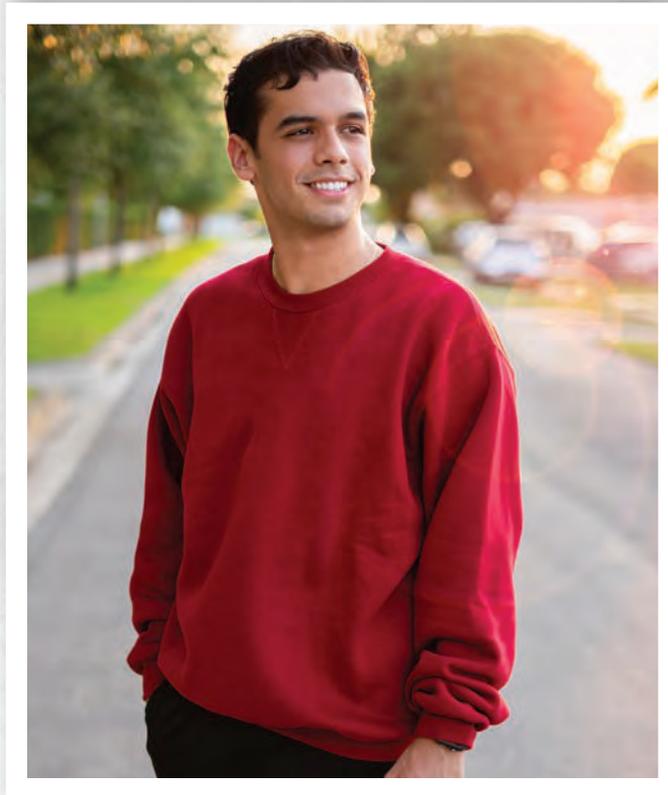
I unfortunately have another extremely personal connection to blood cancer due to my own father's 30-year battle against chronic myeloid leukemia. These experiences have inspired me to make an impact on the world of nursing because I understand first-hand the difficulties faced by the patient as well as the stresses placed on their families.

Throughout my battle against lymphocyte predominant Hodgkin lymphoma, one thing I cherished the most was the time I spent with the nurses who were dedicated to my treatment and comfort while helping me stay positive throughout the many months we had together. Not only am I extremely grateful for their dedication and compassion, but one day I hope to help others in the same way.



# BRAULIO H.

University of Southern California



Being bald is not exactly what I expected in junior year of high school, but the experience of battling stage III cancer during that time is one that shaped who I am today. I was no stranger to cancer — my mom and my aunt are both survivors — but it never crossed my mind I would have to go through the same thing.

It was then when I realized how much of my life I had taken for granted; I had been happy all along and simply wasn't aware. Things that I never thought about twice before — such as going for a run or being my usual energetic self — were now threatened due to the treatment I was undergoing.

From that point forward, I was determined to do my best in helping pave the path to change in childhood cancer. I partnered with childhood cancer foundations, spoke at events, helped fundraise for research, and even ran a 5k to raise awareness eight days after finishing treatment. I used my voice to represent those who didn't feel theirs was loud enough.



# CARLOS C.

University of Illinois Chicago



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Having cancer felt like I had to constantly live my life to certain requirements because of my diagnosis. As badly as I did not want to be different from the other kids, I was. The other kids could go to gym class, go on field trips, and join school sports.

As terrifying as having cancer may seem to me, it has humbled me, matured me, and taught me many valuable life lessons. I have learned that I cannot control some situations because they are out of my power and to enjoy the little things in life that many people take for granted.

I have grown and developed mental strength. I have built determination to do whatever it takes to face this challenge and overcome any obstacles that come my way. To me, being a survivor means that any barrier in my life, even cancer, should never keep me from achieving my dreams.



# CARLOS L.

Collin Community College



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Some kids that are so young and on treatment can only wish to get out of bed sometimes, or maybe have enough energy to smile for their parents. That's why I try to never think that no task is too hard for me, because I know that there is probably someone younger or older than me fighting tougher battles than I am.

No one ever knows when their time to go is going to come. Therefore, we must be grateful for everything we have no matter how small or big life's gifts are. I enjoy my life and live with a smile for all the kids in the hospital that can't.

If this cancer had never happened, I feel like I would have never opened my eyes to life's beauties and the lessons it has to offer.



# CAROLINE D.

Charleston Southern University



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I have learned through being a cancer survivor that nothing is impossible. Cancer survivors defy the impossible every day. Cancer has taught me to be fearless no matter the perceived outcome.

Cancer has challenged me to be brave, to never accept the average, and to always strive to do my very best. Cancer brings many challenges but for me, it is a story of strength rather than weakness.

Cancer has presented me with fear of the unknown. I like to plan down to the hour because the unknown is unbearable for me at times. Treatment every day for me was the unknown and being surrounded by people who are unknown to me was scary at the age of three.

Seeing what the healthcare professionals did for me after my diagnosis, has led me to pursue a career in nursing. My experience has taught me to be confident, God-fearing, and determined because someone's whole life can change in just a single moment.



# CARSON B.

Texas State University



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I woke up with an excruciating headache, so my mom took me to the emergency room where I was diagnosed with leukemia and rushed to the closest children's hospital to begin treatment that day.

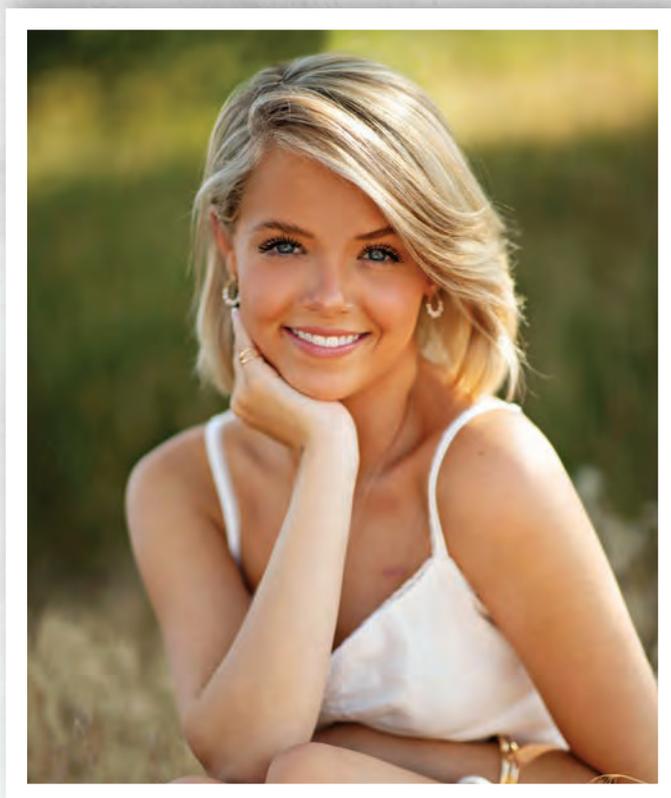
A cancer diagnosis turns your life around in an instant. I was a sophomore in high school having just made the junior varsity basketball team and was instantly sent to surgery to implant a port, complete a bone marrow biopsy, and a spinal tap to include intrathecal chemotherapy.

The experiences I endured during treatment prompted me to want to become a child life specialist. I developed a relationship with my child life specialist and knew this was the career I wanted to pursue. I can vividly remember the day I made this decision. I was not feeling very good just having a very tough day and my child life specialist came in my clinic room and completely turned my day around. I look forward to being able to stand or sit by a child's side and help them through a diagnosis like I have experienced first-hand.



# CHLOE F.

San Diego State University



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When you're 14, your biggest worries are things like getting good grades, spending time with friends, and figuring out who you have a crush on. You never think something like this could happen, until it does. My routine changed from school and Poms practice to chemo infusions and blood transfusions. I was too sick to continue with my regular schedule. I was in and out of the hospital more times than I could count.

All of this could have broken me, but I wouldn't let it.

Now, I am 17, a senior in high school, and focused on getting my life back. I have returned to school, returned to Poms, and I'm happy to say that I finished my treatment on January 2, 2021.

I've been given a second chance at life, and I will make the most of it. Yes, being a teenager is hard, and being a teenager with cancer is even harder. However, through fighting this battle I have seen the beauty of being happy and healthy and will continue to make a change in the world.



# CHRISTA H.

Western Kentucky University



Those two and a half years were stolen from me. While I could've been out making friends, I sat in a hospital room with a mask and IV on. However, everything happens for a reason, and that's a lesson I learned rather quickly.

In 2019, I received the privilege of being an Honored Hero for The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's (LLS) Students of the Year. Many other students now knew my name and all about my journey, and they all said I was inspiring and applauded me on my strength.

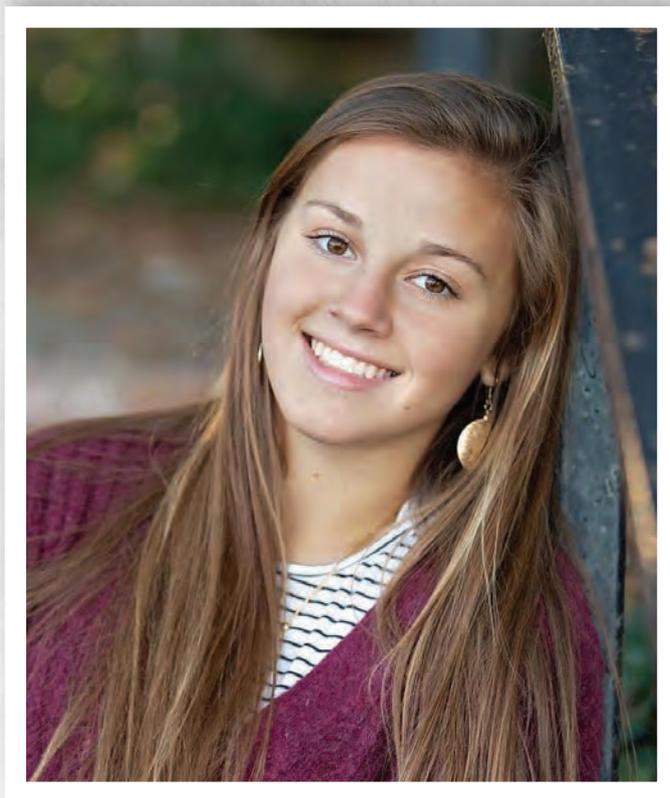
It's interesting how just fighting to stay alive, which seems to be your only choice, can inspire so many.

Whatever I do in life, every choice I make, comes back to my past and what cancer made me, as I am not the person I would have been without it. I live everyday as if it's my last, because I know how quickly that can happen. I live everyday as if it's a miracle, because to me, it is.



# CLAIRE B.

Stevenson University



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Cancer has had a huge impact on my life, but it is not what defines me. Overcoming all the adversity and challenges it has caused me is what defines me.

My family lived in crisis mode for several years. We were always prepared to drop what we were doing and get to the nearest hospital as quickly as possible. I was determined to live as normal as possible. I learned that having a mind over matter mentality would get me through every challenge I would face.

We rallied our neighborhood to build a dream bedroom for a young girl down the road from us who was diagnosed with late-stage terminal brain cancer. I don't think I would have ever had the need to help others like I do if I had not gone through my treatment.

I most recently was the ambassador for the Fly4aCure Campaign, a student-led fundraiser for The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS.) We raised over \$400k for LLS and won national recognition for a cause that I would have never had an appreciation for if not for my connection to it.



# CLAIRE M.

Baylor University



I didn't feel sick, so it made it difficult for me, at 2 years old, to understand why my life had changed so drastically in one day. One day I was playing with my cousins in my Grandma's backyard and the next day I was in the hospital.

We had a kitchen cabinet dedicated to my chemo supplies. My mother wasn't supposed to touch any of the pills with her bare hands or let them touch the kitchen counter, but I had to ingest the "poison" that she couldn't touch.

My mother saw my cancer diagnosis as an opportunity to teach me to have courage in the face of adversity. We started volunteering for organizations that helped us because it was the only way we felt we could give back and make a difference.

Instead of looking at leukemia as something bad that happened to me, I turned that into what I am now able to do because I am a cancer survivor. I am no longer a victim, but a champion for organizations whose mission helped save my life.

★ ★  
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**COLTEN H.**  
Collin College



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Early on in my treatment, I had the opportunity to fly with a Young Eagles pilot who learned about my cancer and dedicated his time and a flight just for me. His generosity showed me that I could pass it forward to children with a similar situation, and give them an opportunity to fly with me in the future. I could potentially work for specific charities like Make-A-Wish and Challenge Air to give those kids the adrenaline and awesome experience of what it feels like to fly.

I have learned how adaptable I can be. When the doctor told me I had cancer, I instantly changed as a person, and thought, “I want to live”.

This experience has changed my life with physical and mental challenges that prove that I can fight back, and that I am resilient. I have grown as a person throughout this whole experience.



# CONNOR P.

Penn State University



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As a Level 1 certified sailing instructor, I am trained to be prepared for any circumstance and be ready to respond in every situation to protect the lives of the students in my care. However, nothing I had experienced on the water even remotely prepared me for the biggest, most daunting challenge I have faced.

The staff assured me that I would be back on the beach in a matter of hours. I did not return to the beach for two years. My summer tan faded, I lost my hair, and my days spent on the water were a distant memory but offered a glimmer of hope on the horizon.

Life can be filled with unexpected challenges and setbacks. You cannot plan for them or prevent them, and so I learned to appreciate each day.

The lessons I have learned on the water and in the hospital have taught me to remain calm, exude confidence, take charge, and face challenges head on. I choose to learn from my experiences and the unexpected storm I survived, and sail on.



# COURTNEY C.

Bethel University



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Each day around 170 people are diagnosed with leukemia. On February 27, 2007, I was one of them. Throughout treatment, I was intentional about choosing to find strength and fight courageously. My cancer treatment affected my life in numerous ways, from the physical effects to the numerous mental health effects. These are things that most people don't have to worry about until much later in life.

Despite the struggles that came with my diagnosis and treatment, I learned many valuable lessons. I look at life with an empathetic perspective, I have inner strength and determination, and a passion to serve others, especially those who are suffering.

Because of my leukemia, I found my passion early on. When I was given only five days to live, I was put into a medically induced coma. When I miraculously awoke 14 days later, I knew I needed to be a part of the larger fight against cancer. I started volunteering with The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS). By the time I was in high school, I wanted to invest the majority of my time helping LLS find a cure for cancer.



**DANE H.**

**Drexel University**



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I had to stop playing soccer, miss trying out for the varsity team, and start treatment. I could no longer go outside of the air conditioning out of fear that my port would get infected. I had to shelter in place at home for the rest of my summer and that fall while immune-compromised during the COVID pandemic.

I was let loose from cancer and treatment by the end of October. Instead of letting the experience keep me down, I propelled myself into reclaiming what I once had.

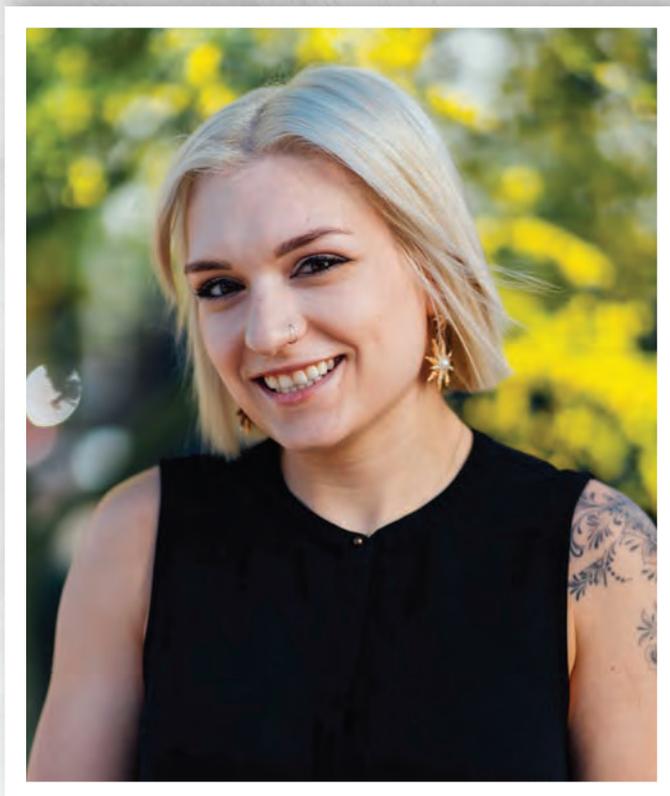
Cancer has opened me up to be more empathetic. After being in the hospital, I learned to empathize with those that are going through that same experience. It has solidified my plan to offer my own scholarship to those that have been affected by cancer and are planning on pursuing an engineering degree.

I learned to maintain that positive outlook I had during treatment throughout the rest of my life. I know how fortunate I am to be able to go forward with my life's plans after such a life-altering illness.



# DARIA K.

Arizona State University



**LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors Award,  
Beth Ayres in Memory of Alan M. Ayres**

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After explaining the basics, the doctor left me and my boyfriend alone for a couple of minutes. Neither of us said anything. We both silently cried.

My favorite activities no longer brought me joy and reoccurring thoughts of lymphoma coming back filled my mind. In order to get back on track, I had to work with therapists and social workers as well as find the right medication. I started CrossFit, made new friends, developed new hobbies, but I have learned that cancer will always be part of me.

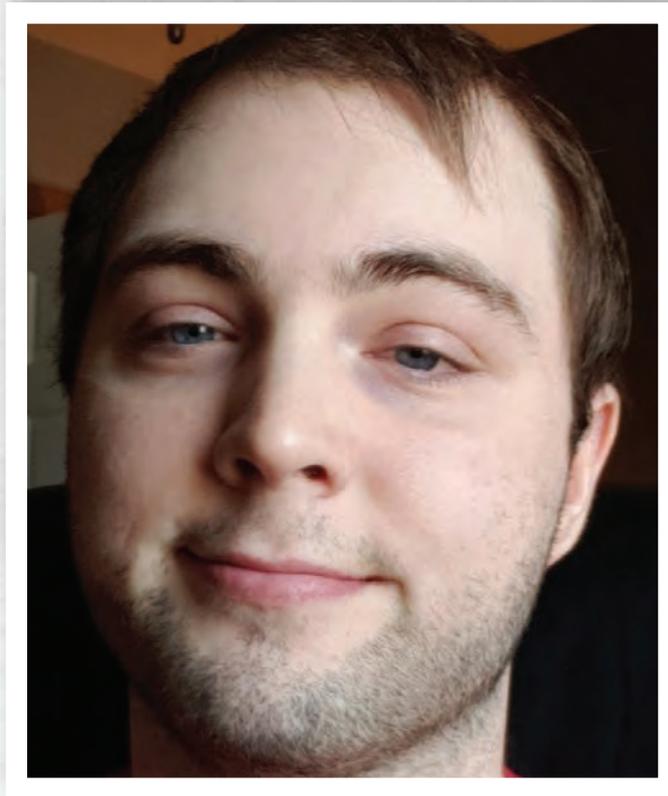
I learned that you shouldn't waste time doing things you don't enjoy. This was one of the reasons I switched careers and earned a degree in forensic psychology, a field that always intrigued me. I realized I wouldn't have a second chance, a second life, so I had to make my dreams come true now.

I had never thought of living long, I believed life was a burden, but now that I've had cancer, something that could have potentially killed me, I want to fight, and I want to live.



# DENTON T. R.

Southern New Hampshire University



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Acute myeloid leukemia has been with me every day for about five years. There is not a day that goes by without me thinking about it. Even after the doctors say everything is fine and you've gone into remission, there is the haunting feeling that it will all crumble down and start all over again.

The experience of leukemia is filled with a lot of emotions: despair, loss of control, isolation. I feel like it can be hard for people like me to talk about their experience to almost anyone; it's a hard experience to relate to.

I want to become a mental health professional so I can try to help younger adults and kids deal with this isolating, awful thing that has happened to them. I was given an experience that could help so many people, and to become the person that I needed when I was struggling over the past five years is the greatest thing I can do for myself, and all the people I know who are struggling just like I once was.



# ELLIE L.

Missouri Southern State University



## LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors, Okafor Family Foundation Award

I don't have any memories of being a victim of childhood leukemia. My only connection is living through the pictures in our family scrapbook. At seven months old I was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia. All of my "firsts" took place at the hospital: my first crawl, my first time eating solid food, my first Easter, and my first birthday.

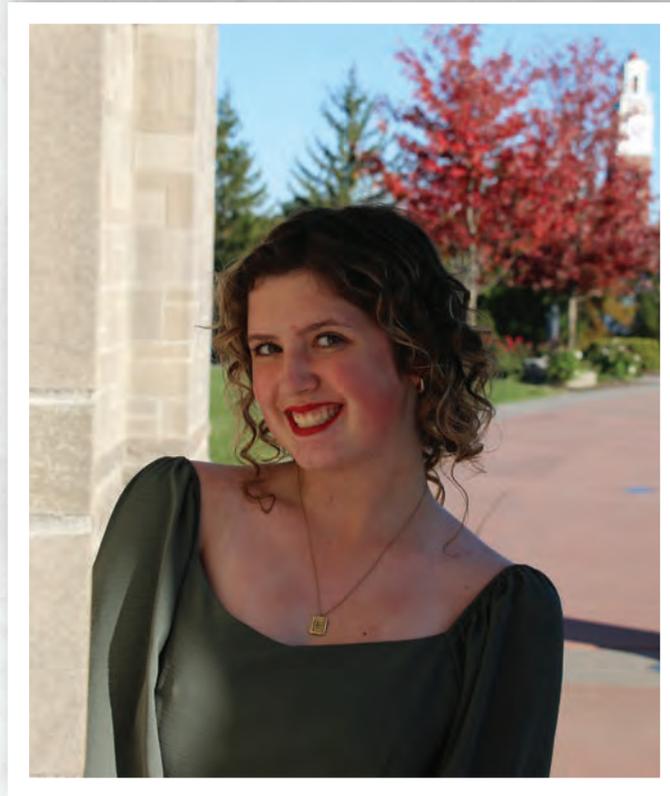
Cancer does not just end at remission; the treatments can have long-term effects on the body. Much of my childhood has been learning about the type of treatment I had received and the potential long-term side effects.

Even though I may not have memories of my battle during infancy, being a cancer survivor has taught me many things. I've learned that cancer can change everything. The very word itself can take your breath away, but it does not have to shatter your hope, silence your courage, or conquer your spirit. I hope to be a life-long encourager to individuals and families navigating cancer. Cancer doesn't define me; instead, I've let it shape me into who I am today.



# EMILY A.

University of Michigan



I was 14 years old. And, I had stage IIA Hodgkin lymphoma, a rare and aggressive type of cancer. I did the best I could to “fit in” at my new high school. As my friends played sports, went to dances, and did countless other wonderfully mundane things, I endured four months of chemotherapy and its physical and emotional side effects, including hair loss, nausea, cognitive deficits, and neuropathies.

But thanks to a terrific support network, a strong faith, and a well of courage and resiliency I honestly did not know I had, I have been in remission since December 2018. Honestly, though, it isn’t so much about my past as it is a future investment in someone who will treat it every day as a constant, inspiring reminder that, although some good has been done by things I have thus far accomplished, there is more to do. More to give.



# EMILY S.

Minnesota State University



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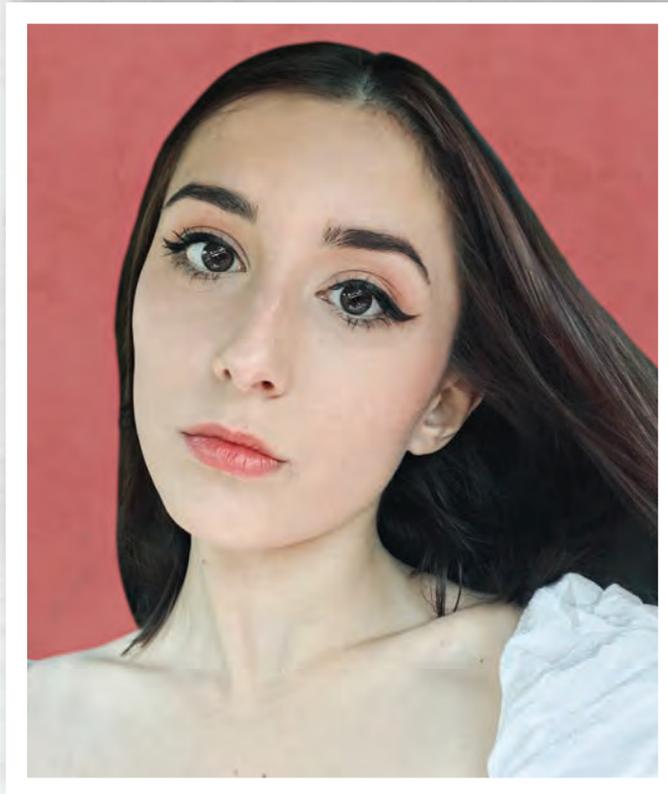
At the age of 13 my life was filled with average teenage activities. Eighth grade schoolwork, volleyball, church activities, friends, and family filled my days. Normalcy, however, was exchanged for a battle my family could never have been prepared for. Our world was flipped upside down when the emergency room doctor told my family that the health issues I was experiencing were leukemia and I needed to be transferred immediately to the children's hospital in downtown Chicago for treatment.

Because of my experience with childhood cancer, I developed passions that would not have been realized without cancer. My passion for the mental health of the patient and my passion for nonprofits are a direct result of the experiences I had through my three-year battle with leukemia. Through faith and perseverance, I can look back on the suffering of cancer and see that God used it in my life in tremendous ways.



# ENSLEY S.

Arizona State University



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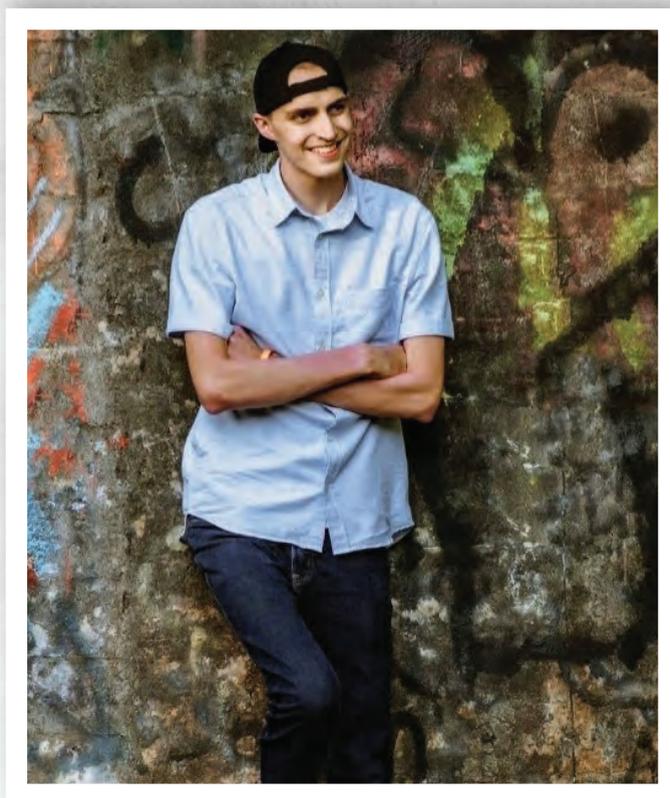
My diagnosis didn't just affect my immediate future, it changed me on a physical and psychological level. In the beginning of June, 2020, just weeks after completing high school, I was officially diagnosed with stage 3 nodular sclerosis classical Hodgkin lymphoma. While my classmates were participating in a COVID-friendly graduation ceremony, I was undergoing my first round of chemotherapy.

A little over a year after my diagnosis, I am spending my first days as a college student on a campus I'd not considered before cancer. As I navigate my new surroundings at a new school, with new hair, and with a post-chemo body that I'm still getting to know, I have a lot of anxiety and some insecurity. I feel flashes of sadness and anger for what should have been, and moments of gratitude for what is. Under all of those emotions, however, is a new and deep understanding that I can do this. I am a person who has endured incredible physical and mental pain and not just survived but moved forward. So, whatever happens, I can do this.



# ETHAN S.

Brigham Young University - Idaho



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After being diagnosed with pre-B cell ALL, I always felt sad but refused to tell anyone. I felt like it was my burden to bear. This misconception was thoroughly shattered on February 9th, 2020, when I announced on social media my diagnosis. Instantly a wave of compassion poured through my phone as hundreds of my peers and friends messaged me with their support detailing how much they loved me.

I realized how foolish I'd been to think myself alone. Not only was I not invisible, I was loved and cherished by my peers! I was ready for the challenges coming my way with the support of my friends. Cancer is an unforgiving teacher. The past year has been the hardest, most painful, and most emotionally grueling of my life. But as I stand near the end of this trial, I can't help but look back fondly on my experience. I no longer take life for granted, and I will take care of my body better than ever before. It may seem like an odd thing to say, but I truly owe cancer my life.



# ETHAN Y.

University of West Florida



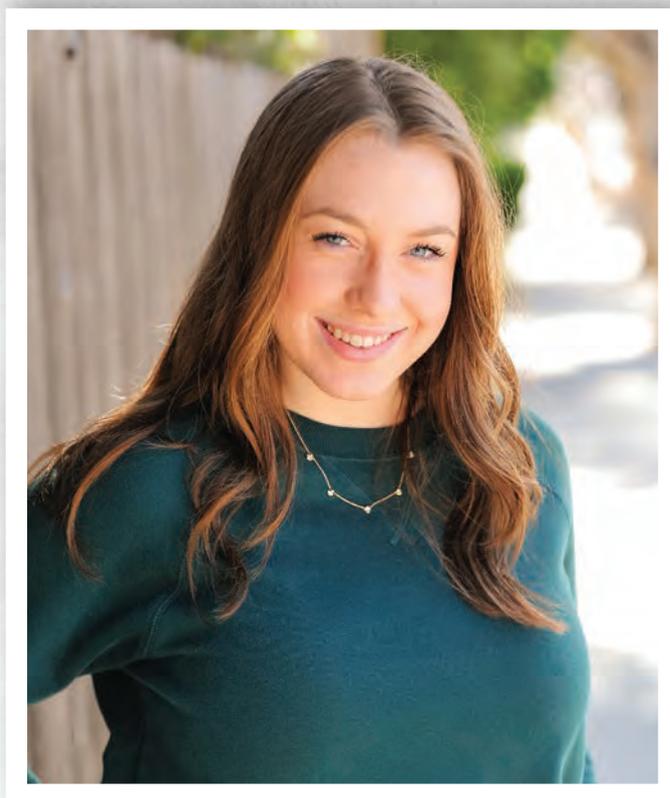
My fight with blood cancer began during my senior year in high school when I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (B-cell). For eight months I endured blood and platelet transfusions, CT scans, fevers and chemotherapy.

I have learned to be grateful for the future. People might consider me unlucky, but after being in and out of the cancer care unit, I consider myself extremely lucky and I am grateful for my doctors and my family and friends who never let me forget that I am beating this. I will get well and stay well and restart on my path to living.

I am a fighter, and I have always had to work hard for the goals I set for myself.... I will get back to rebuilding my life. I will get better. I plan to become a physical therapy assistant, to help push others through their hardships. I have seen strength and fortitude and hope and I have learned to lean into that and I know that I will share that strength with others throughout my lifetime.

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**EVA H.**

**University of California, Santa Cruz**



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At age 4, I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). My dad had just been diagnosed with chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML) in February of that year. My dad continues to manage his CML with a daily pill, and I'm now eleven years cancer-free.

We've shared our story at The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS) events to bring awareness to vulnerable communities and raise funds to support advocacy and research. I've been an LLS honored hero locally, nationally, and in Canada. I celebrated my 10th year being cancer free by raising \$165,000 and winning the title of Student of the Year! Last year, I became the SOY Mentorship Director, and serve as the Co-Chair/co-creator of the SOY Ambassador Program, helping the 2020 candidates continue their leadership.

I've used my passion for service nationally in Washington, D.C. at the March for Our Lives rally, meeting with congressional leaders for gun reform alongside Parkland shooting survivors, and locally by representing my peers on the CCUSD School Board and serving on the Culver City Police Department Chief's Advisory Panel. I am a survivor determined to make a constructive, positive, lasting impact on the world as my story unfolds.



# FATIMA O.

Rutgers University - New Brunswick



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I was diagnosed with Philadelphia positive ALL, a rare chromosomal type of leukemia that carries a dire prognosis. There was a high probability that the first stage of chemotherapy would not work for me.

During my new hospital life, I met other patients and we enjoyed spending time together. I liked making my hospital roommates happy. I loved seeing them get better and celebrated every time someone was in remission.

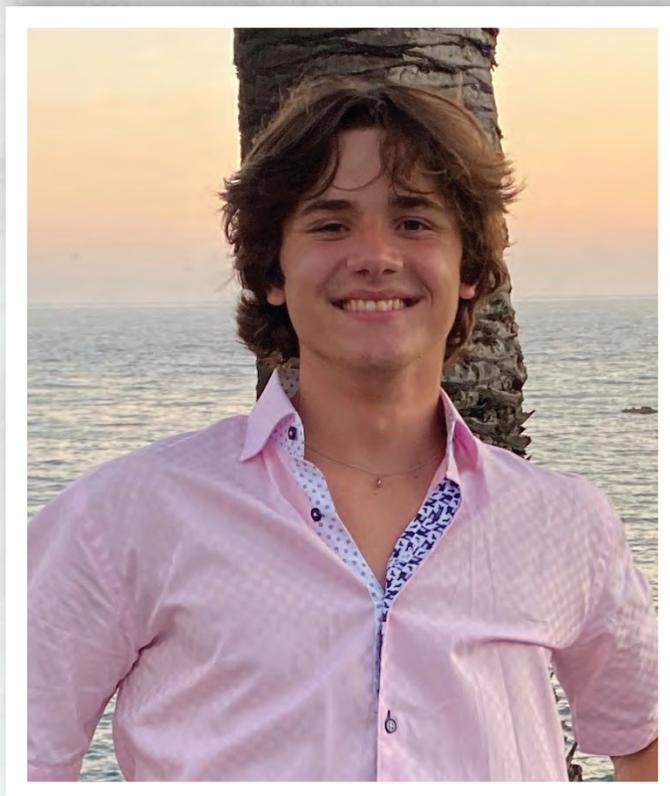
For Christmas, my parents and I rallied a community to contribute gifts for the children's floor. I learned I was going to receive chemotherapy on Christmas Eve, and couldn't deliver the presents, but still helped any way I could. I bought the presents with my parents and wrapped them. My mom sent me photos of the kids with their gifts, and after seeing their cheerful faces realized I wanted to be a doctor.

I have faced a lot of obstacles in my life, but I know that with a positive attitude and hard work, I will achieve my goals. I want to be an extraordinary doctor who leaves a legacy of kindness and caring for my patients.



# GARRETT H.

University of Southern California



**LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors,  
Tour De Court Award**

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At age 10 I was diagnosed with high-risk B-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia. I became a child living an adult life, taking adult medicine, fighting adult battles and adult anxiety. I would rarely go a night without being nauseous or being in physical pain.

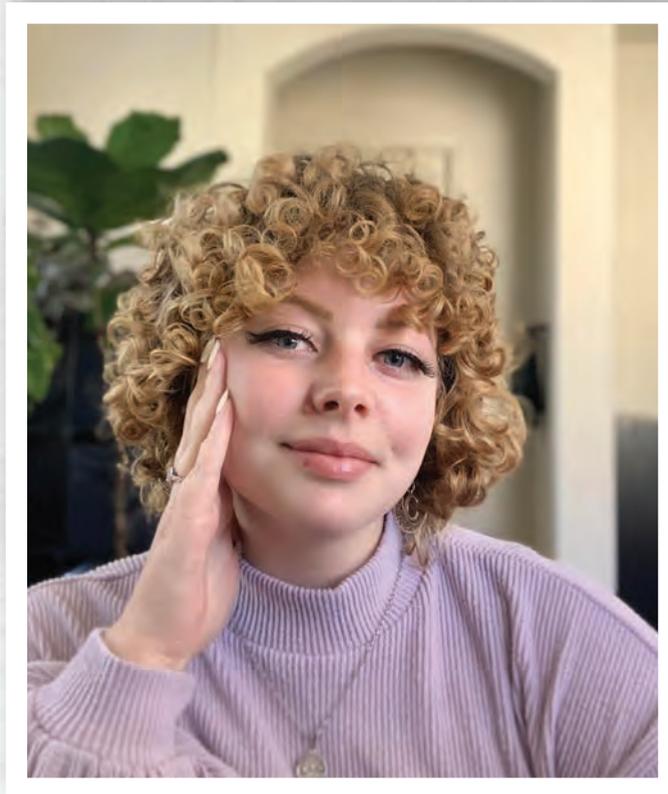
In 2012 I was nominated as “Boy of the Year,” which made me the face of the 2012 Man and Woman of the Year campaign. When I turned 12, I spoke at schools as Pennies for Patients Campaign ambassador. At 15, I became the vice-chair of The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society’s (LLS) junior board, a group of high schoolers raising funds and organizing events, to help children with blood cancer. At 17, my team won LLS’ Students of the Year Campaign by raising \$47,000 toward blood cancer research.

My cancer experience was a gift and opportunity unlike any other. I plan to become a pediatric oncologist and I know my path will be hard, but it pales in comparison to beating cancer. I want to have a positive effect on other children battling cancer and fighting for their childhoods.



# HALEY P.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas



From a very young age, I have loved helping others. I raised funds for Hurricane Katrina and donated to the Red Cross. In middle school, I was a peer tutor, and helped special needs students through the Best Buddies Club.

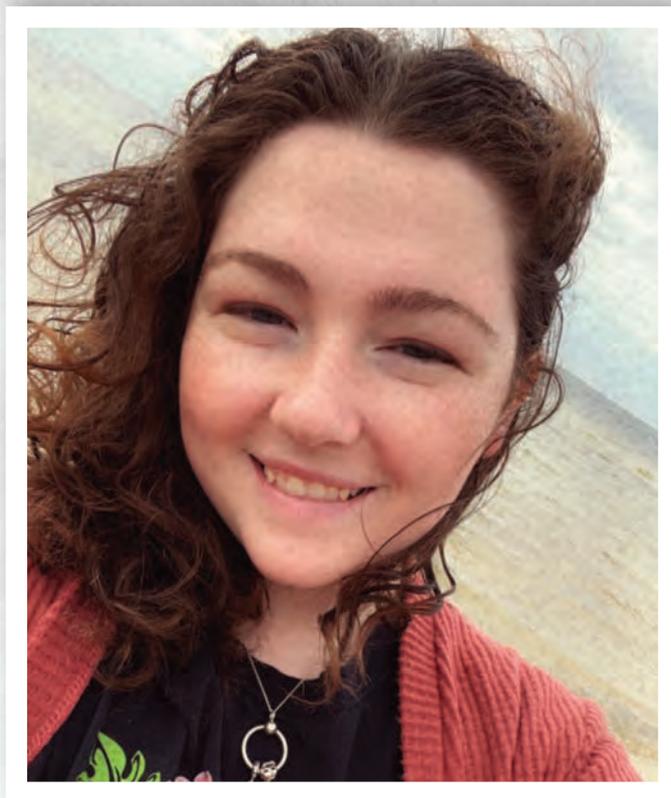
After earning my associate's degree I decided I wanted to become a nurse. While finishing my prerequisites, I knew something wasn't right. I was having a hard time sleeping and felt exhausted. An urgent care doctor thought I was lying about my symptoms. After finding multiple lumps in my neck, I found a new doctor, and was diagnosed with nodular sclerosing Hodgkin lymphoma, stage 3B.

I made the Dean's List every semester throughout my treatment and became cancer free on October 9th, 2020. I had been working so hard toward my goal, but realized my heart wasn't in it. I ended up switching my major to social work. I started volunteering with The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS) to help others throughout diagnosis and treatment, so that they have access to the things I wish I had known about during my overwhelming time as a cancer patient.



# HANNAH G.

University of South Florida



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When I was diagnosed with blood cancer, my mom and sister sobbed on the hospital couch. I didn't cry, I wanted to be strong for them. The moment my hair came out, I sobbed. I was losing a part of the person I was. I was depressed I looked so ill and that my family had to see me that way.

Two months after remission I felt something was wrong. My legs gave out, and I learned I had severe necrosis in both hips as a chemo side effect and needed both replaced. At age 20, I had to relearn how to walk, how to balance, how to stand without help. Then, I learned I had bilateral necrosis in my knees. I've had arthroscopies, debridement and stem cell injections in both knees.

One of the biggest takeaways from my experience is that we should be grateful for every single day. Regardless of the hardships that blood cancer has given me I know that if I can somehow touch the life of someone else and bring something to this world, my life is worth it.



# HANNAH H.

Pennsylvania State University, University Park



At 16, I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma. That day, and the journey that followed, allowed me to form a new perspective on life, and cherish my time here on earth.

I became exposed to a world I never thought I would have to experience, but I moved forward with grace and pride. Cancer taught me to “accept what I have lost and understand what I have gained.” This statement encouraged me to keep going in a world I thought was stacked against me.

In 2020, I was named February Hero of the Month by The Headstrong Foundation, raising \$5,000 for families affected by cancer. The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society named me Hero of the Year for 2021. I helped form Beads for a Cure, raising \$2,000 for The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) - Child Life Services in oncology, and organized a “Kids for a Cure Run” raising \$7,000 for pediatric cancer research.

I will continue to share my story and spread awareness to make a difference. I want to speak for the souls that cancer has silenced. “Nothing is Impossible to a Willing Heart” - John Heywood



# HEATHER M.

University of New Hampshire



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In 6th grade, I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. My days became filled with long hospitalizations, IV's, blood draws, porta Cath, lumbar punctures, chemotherapy, meds and so many doctors. Once you get into a treatment routine, you start to believe you'll get through this, and you focus on what you can do for others who find themselves in your situation.

In 2020, I learned my leukemia had relapsed. I enrolled into a clinical trial for Car-T therapy at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and just received labs that indicate the T cells are doing their job and remaining in my body.

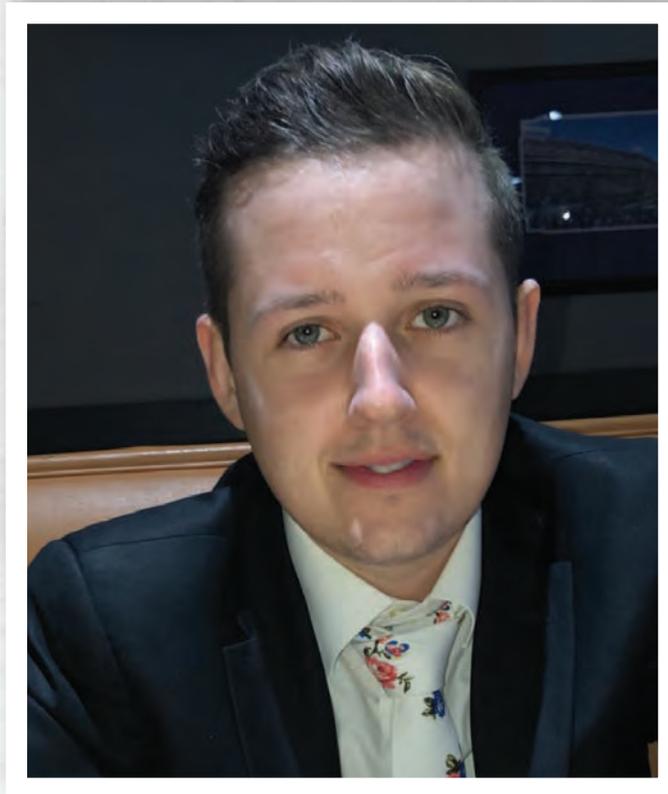
I'm motivated to go to my dream school, the University of New Hampshire for veterinary science. My doctors and nurses have arranged my monthly labs and IVIG treatment at Dana Farber, and I'll go to The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia every three months for bone marrow biopsies and lumbar punctures as part of the trial.

I'm older now and know I can get through this rocky time. I am the recipient of gifts and kindness from people, and I look forward to reciprocating what has been done for me.



# HENRY P.

Brigham Young University - Idaho



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Challenges are like rocks in a rock tumbler. Once in the tumbler, rocks are worn down. As I overcame my challenge of leukemia and a relapse of leukemia, I — like the rocks — have become refined and polished.

I was diagnosed in fourth grade. I simply just wanted to be a normal eleven-year-old, and that was hard when I couldn't run, had a bald head, a face that was swollen due to prednisone. While undergoing intense chemotherapy, I struggled to keep up with the work.

As a freshman, one year post chemotherapy treatment, I found out I had relapsed. With dedication, and pushes from my support system, I was able to stay caught up with my peers and graduate high school on schedule.

It is because of those around me who loved and cared for me physically, mentally, and emotionally, that I have the opportunity to continue in higher education. My struggles and challenges have made me who I am today, and I am grateful for it. I have been polished and refined, but there is more polishing and more refining to be done.



# JACK T.

University of St. Thomas



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At the age of eight, I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. I've had two relapses, gone through a bone marrow transplant, a total hip replacement, and CAR T-cell therapy, all before graduating high school.

One of the most important things my diagnosis taught me is resilience. One of my favorite quotes is from Bob Marley: "you never know how strong you are until being strong is your only choice." This proved true for me in many ways, and that newfound strength and resiliency has helped me through many challenges.

Nine years later, I am still fighting. It is okay to not always be positive, but to take things one step at a time. And, I've learned to advocate for myself. During my treatment, I realized I needed to vocalize my preferences and let the medical team know when I needed something done differently.

While I have not decided on my degree, I feel drawn towards the medical field to contribute to medical advances and help patients. My journey has made me the person I am today, and my experience has taught me many life lessons and skills.



# JAMESON S.

California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo



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When I asked for a “two gang four-way large bore stopcock manifold,” the hospital staff was amazed. I was 6 when we found out I had stage 4 non-Hodgkin lymphoma. My immune system was so weak that going back to school would’ve been dangerous, so I was homeschooled.

Instead of focusing on the negative, I chose to stay positive. One of the things that kept me positive was watching physics programs and analyzing mechanical devices. I had plenty of machinery all around me during my hospital stays — with one object being the aforementioned manifold. It connected to a port attached to my central vein, which allowed blood to be drawn and medicine administered through a single connection.

Whether it was analyzing things in the world, watching science TV shows, or building mechanical structures, I managed to distract myself from everything I had to endure, keeping myself occupied through science. Everything in the hospital was made through engineering. This has helped guide me to the path I’ve chosen today, as I hope to pursue engineering in order to keep helping to improve lives everywhere.



# JANE F.

Miami University of Ohio



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In October 2015, I was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma. After growing up healthy and never getting sick, I had cancer. I went through four rounds of intense chemotherapy feeling sick and constant hospital visits. My cancer journey seemed to be over in January of 2016 and I went back to school with a feeling of hope, but the lymphoma came back in July 2016 and was much stronger than the first. I went through another four rounds of chemotherapy that were worse than the first four, a stem cell transplant that landed me in the hospital, 18 rounds of proton radiation, and 16 rounds of immunosuppressive chemotherapy.

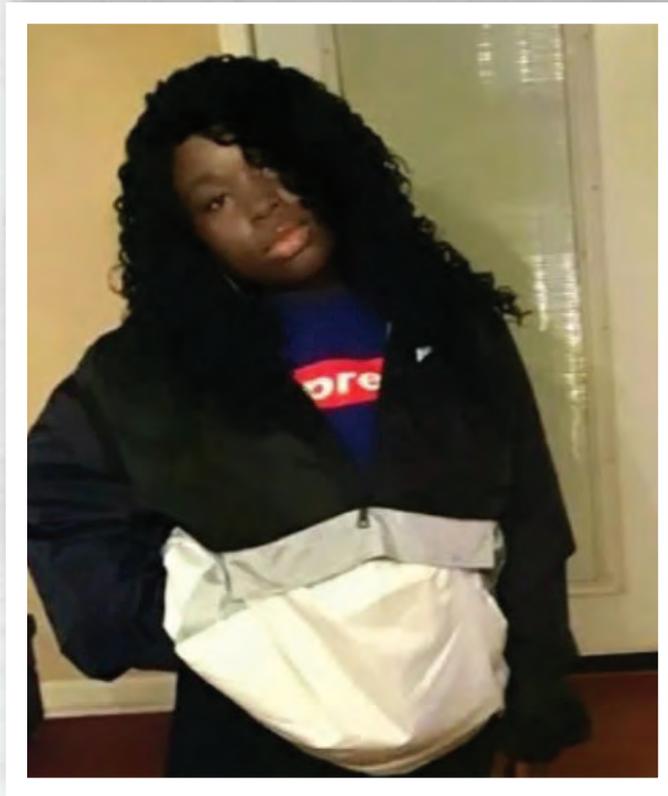
Cancer was breaking me, but I couldn't let it defeat me. Cancer completely changed my life but didn't ruin it. If anything, it made life better.

I started to advocate for childhood cancer and raise money for organizations that supported me. I wanted to keep going for those who couldn't. Sharing my story is one of the greatest gifts I have been given and I hope to continue to share it with others no matter what I decide to do in life.



# JANIA W.

Young Harris College



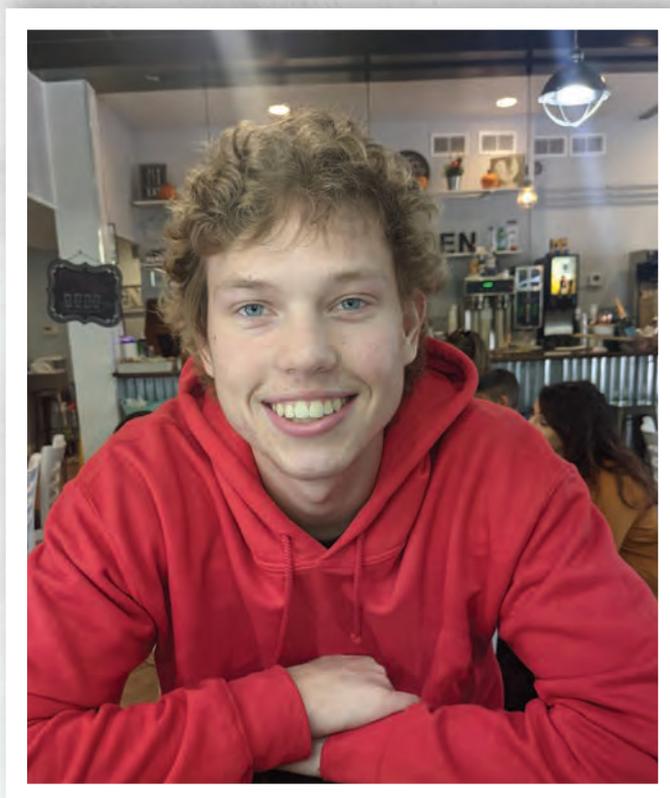
Since I've been diagnosed with cancer I've had good and bad days, but I've realized that any day God wakes me up is a blessing. Unfortunately, many kids don't make it. But, with every tear, blood transfusion, and chemotherapy treatment I made it. If you would've told 16-year-old me that I would be beating cancer, graduating from high school, working two jobs, and getting ready for college, I wouldn't have believed you. For me, cancer was a blessing in disguise. I've learned to love myself and I've learned to appreciate life and praise God for everything.

I don't know what college will bring, but if I can beat cancer, homelessness, graduate high school, overcome depression and restore my faith, I know I can become a lawyer. My dream is to not only beat the odds once, but twice - I will be the first person in my family to go to college. I'm a survivor, a warrior and can do anything I put my mind to. I'm very thankful for this opportunity, and what this scholarship will help me achieve.



# JIMMY Z.

University of Wisconsin - Madison



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On June 12, just about two weeks past my birthday, I was diagnosed with stage 3A classical Hodgkin lymphoma. I kept thinking, “Why me?”

Luckily, I was met with tremendous support from my family and community. My mom connected me with multiple cancer survivors and patients and only then, after hearing their stories and advice, I began to think, “why not me?” After weeks of denial and confusion, I learned there is only one way to get through this: I have to take this challenge and fight for my life. I began chemotherapy and felt extremely unprepared for this battle, the only thing I had was this mindset, “why not me.” It was coach Dzingel, one of my baseball coaches and a cancer survivor, who explained this to me, and every day I couldn’t help but think of its importance.

This journey provided me endless learning experiences and a new outlook on life. I’ve become appreciative of small things like the ability to play sports, work out, or even drink caffeine. Most importantly, I know I am going to overcome one of life’s greatest challenges and become stronger because of it.



# JOHN K.

Belmont University



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At ten, I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, and developed a rare infection that placed me in a medically induced coma and onto a ventilator for eleven days. When I woke, I learned the nerves in my right leg died and I was unable to walk. The next three months I had to relearn how to walk. I was introduced to music therapy and learned my first song on the guitar. Things improved, and I kept learning the guitar on my own at home.

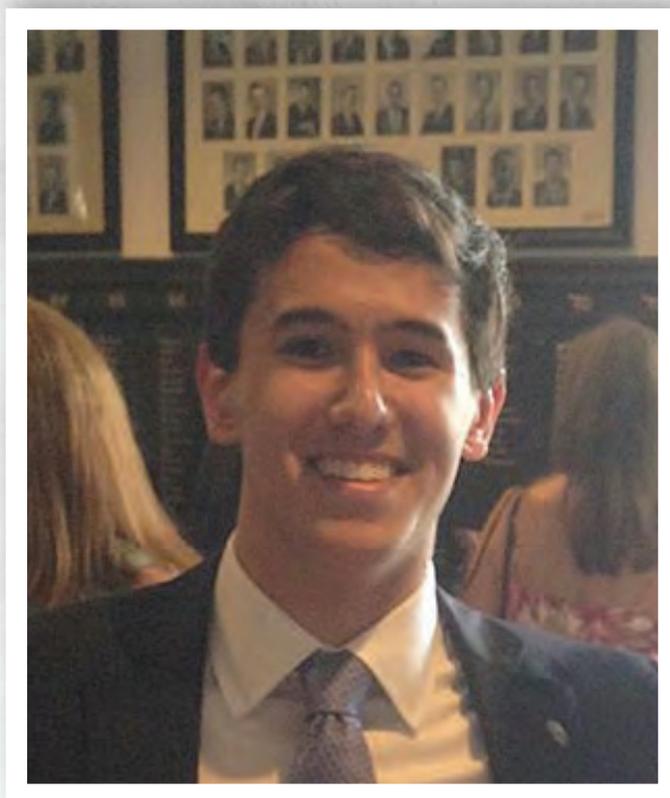
In eighth grade, my cancer returned, and I received two more years of chemotherapy. This time, there was a new music therapist who introduced me to advanced music theory and audio recording. I began working with Songs for Kids, providing music mentorship to children with medical illnesses/disabilities, and my cancer returned again. This last diagnosis made me decide to pursue a future in music.

My treatment was successful and I'm in remission. Each trial provided me an opportunity to find my God-given passion in life. I believe music is what I'm meant to do, and I cannot wait to explore that path.



# JONATHAN R.

University of Chicago



**LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors,  
Tour De Court Award**

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The hardest part of cancer was that I had to grow up. Cancer plucked me from that blessedly stupid boyhood haze and threw me face-first into a world where everything was painfully serious. No 19-year-old should have to know what “intrathecal” means, no 19-year-old should need to understand the potential side effects of doxorubicin.

This growing up, this devastating feeling of watching your friends twirl in the air while you, broken and battered, look on from the ground, has been the hardest challenge of all.

That collegiate haze is gone: The magic of new experience, new freedom, is emotionally impotent when compared with what I’ve experienced in the past two years. You can’t un-grow up. What I do know is that it’s not all bad. There are parts of that magic that I know, I hope, I can return to. I don’t need to be enthralled by new freedoms to find out who I am, to learn how to make a difference, to start relationships that may last me a lifetime. These things I can do by simply going back to college.



# JOSEPH B.

University of Texas at Dallas



At age 15, I was diagnosed with cancer. There were days I was too ill from chemotherapy to do anything but sleep, but I managed a nine-month chemotherapy regimen and returned to school during my junior year.

Thankfully, I graduated with my peers and was able to attend the University of Missouri. Before I left to begin my freshman year, I scouted out some jobs, but it was difficult to find jobs that fit. I couldn't do a job that involved standing or heavy lifting, as my ankle and hip had been affected by chemotherapy. I had two experimental (and extremely painful) surgeries to restore blood flow to these bones, but wasn't able to work at a fast-food restaurant or similar type of college job. I began a job at OrderUp, as a delivery driver.

I made the decision to return home to Texas. At first, I didn't know what to do, only that I wanted to return home. After some thought, I decided to pursue the same career as my mom: accounting. I've worked hard to stay in school and pursue the career of my choosing.



# JOSEPH K.

Rowan University



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Looking back now at all of the bloodwork taken, needles inserted, hair loss, upset stomachs, and sleepless nights during my chemotherapy as an inpatient, none of these regimens are what a 10-year-old boy should have to be worrying about. To add on, given that fact that I was going months without being in school, not being able to see any of my friends and do normal kid things was the worst part of it all.

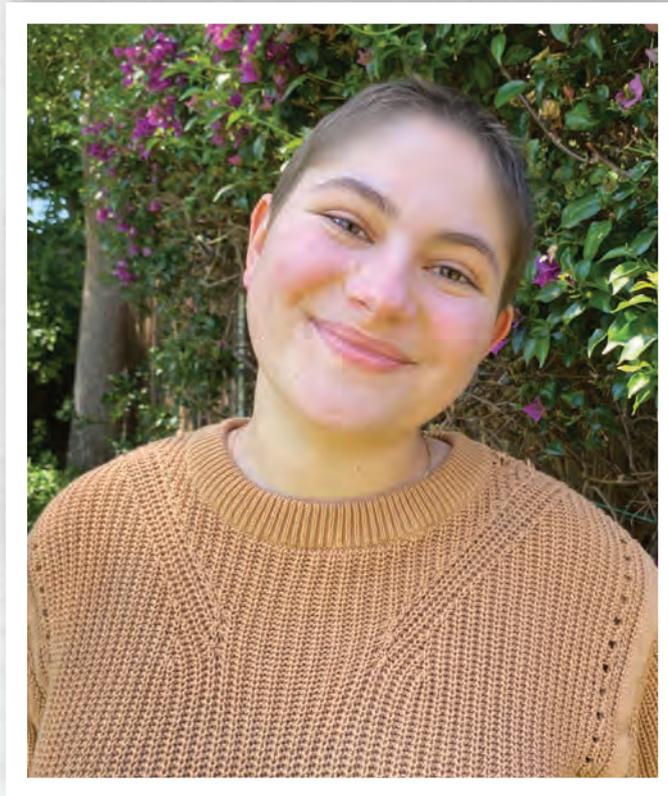
As a result of my diagnosis and treatments during my childhood, my life did indeed take a different route than I had planned, but I always knew deep down that I still had control of my plans in life, even if I still needed to go to yearly doctor appointments and watch my health more closely than a normal person my age does.

Regardless of what life throws my way, I will continue to work hard at what I love to do because I intend to make the most of this second chance that I have been given.



# JULIETA G.

Tufts University



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Although sometimes it feels suffocating to rely on others to make me lunch, drive me to treatment, or even take a shower, I am learning how to accept help from others without taking it as a sign of my weakness. Being cared for by the people around me has taught me the different, and beautiful, ways my community expresses affection and takes action. Rather than interpreting their assistance as a challenge to my autonomy, I have learned that their services are expressions of their love, and I am learning to cherish that.

I am learning to appreciate my body for helping me complete simple tasks I once took for granted: walking across the street, eliminating waste products, completing a crossword puzzle. Even though there are still days where I look in the mirror, cannot recognize myself, and cry profusely, I am learning to value the practical over the superficial. I am thankful that my body, despite struggling to grow hair and let me walk, is working so hard to tackle my blood cancer.



# JUSTIN S.

Houston Community College / University of Houston



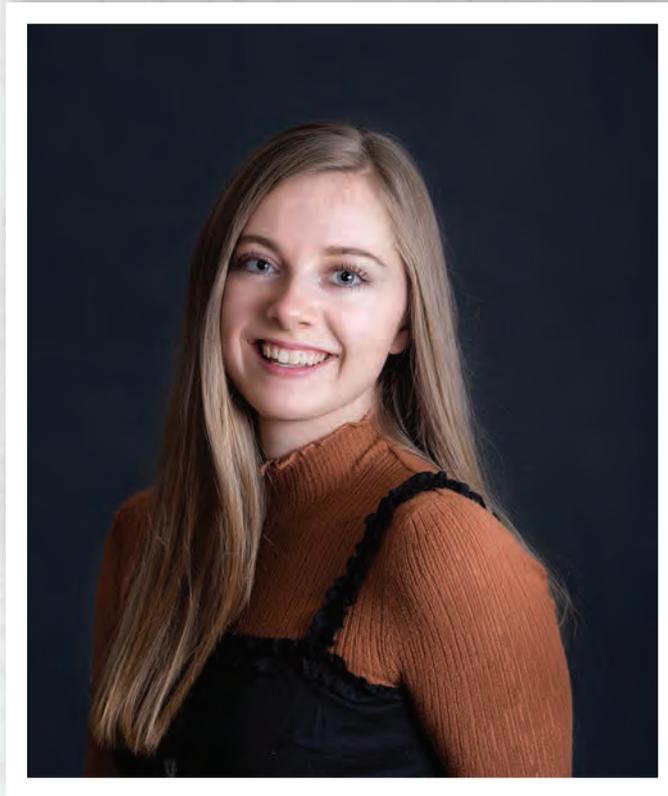
**LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors,  
Okafor Family Foundation Award**

My advice to someone who has been recently diagnosed would be to not let your disease define you. At the beginning of my treatment, I lost all ability to walk and was confined to a wheelchair on multiple occasions. I was also immunosuppressed... meaning I was unable to attend school and was for the most part confined to my home. This often led me to feel like I was never going to get better and made me feel very lonely during my treatment. This helped me develop my independence, as well as my mindfulness, as I am more aware that others may not be having an easy time. I gained the ability to see into the experiences of others and understand their struggles. As I progressed through treatment, I started to feel better and then a sense of normalcy returned. A newly diagnosed cancer patient should hold out for that light at the end of the tunnel.



# KATARINA H.

American University



I play my cards deftly. It takes skill to manage my hand, debating what to share and what to hide, for every card weighs differently. I am touched by cancer, but it does not define me, nor does it limit me. Instead, my array of cards, ranging from my cancer card to my passion for environmental policy, allow me to describe myself as more than just a cancer survivor. Cancer has left me with challenges and choices: Is it worth sharing? Is it just another sympathy card? Am I allowed to play it when I do not remember my diagnosis or much of my treatment? And after years of contemplating its place in my deck of cards, it's grown comforting, reminding me to ground myself and be grateful for my friends, those who know my cancer story and those who do not, for family, and for the ability to say I am a survivor.



# KATHERINE B.

University of Connecticut



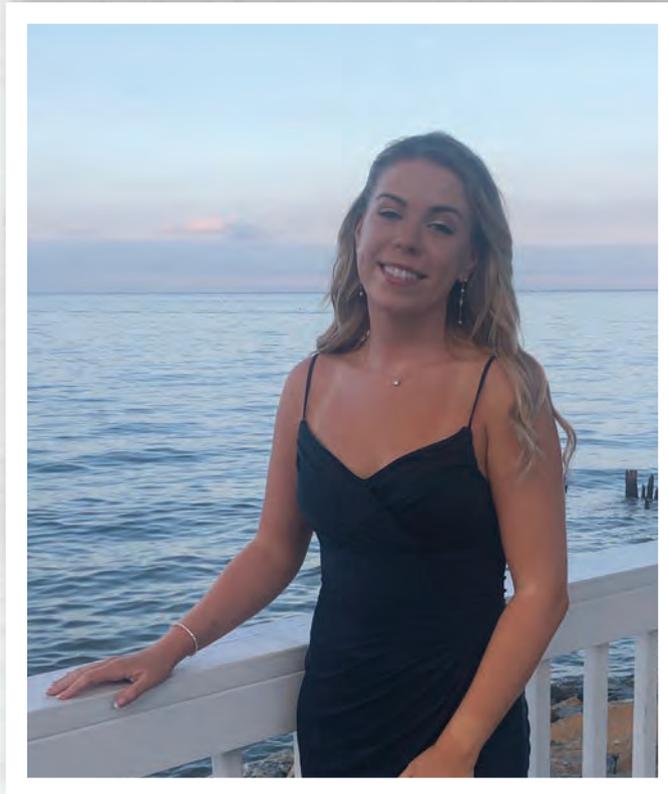
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For many years of my childhood, especially during chemotherapy, I was considered the odd one out. I was not as athletic as the other children my age and I did not understand why. I turned to my talents of being a leader and became the captain of two varsity sports by the time I was a senior in high school. Furthermore, I was voted class president junior and senior year of high school in addition to being National Honor Society president. In these roles, I developed my love for being a leader and helping others. In college, I took my skills to the next level and became a manager at a local restaurant and a Resident Assistant. These accomplishments took a lot of hard work, discipline, and motivation; but I feel that I owe it to my younger self, and to show her that just because I may not be physically strong, does not mean I am worthless.



# KATHLEEN R.

University of Maryland



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Before I became sick, I would spend too much time picking myself apart. My insecurities often had me questioning whether or not I was pretty enough or thin enough. It wasn't until my battle with cancer that I realized how trivial this mindset was. One day I stood in front of a mirror examining the reflection of a person I did not recognize. It seemed as if having cancer relieved the pressure I had felt to be "beautiful," because at this point nobody expected me to look good. This allowed me to find confidence through means other than my physical appearance. I faced trauma that most people will be fortunate to never know, but I was resilient enough to face the challenge. That lesson is invaluable to me because now I know that no matter how hard or how often fate plans to knock me down, I have the inner strength to keep getting back up.



# KATIE S.

James Madison University



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At the age I was diagnosed, you're in kindergarten, learning simple things like your ABCs or how to color inside the lines. Cancer made me feel different from other kids and like I was missing out. Although the experience was something quite terrible, I think it taught me lessons that even some adults haven't learned yet. I met people and experienced things that I never would've if I wasn't diagnosed, those people became like my family. I also learned that life is not always guaranteed. I thought about why I was one of the ones to survive and how I could make sure that I never take this life for granted. Cancer may have forced me to mature young, but with maturity came my desire to work hard. I figured out that if I could fight through cancer, then I could work through anything. Cancer gave me, a quiet little girl, the aspirations to work hard and turn into the strong woman I want to be.



# KENDRA K.

Alverno College



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The people who cared for me while I lived in the hospital opened my eyes. They were my shoulders to cry on, my best friends, my advocates, my superheroes. While in treatment I was fascinated by everything they were doing. One nurse practitioner asked if I had ever thought about nursing: she was in awe of how in tune I was with my body and the things I had already started to pick up on. That moment changed the trajectory of my life. In this moment with my NP, I realized I wanted to be her, I wanted to be like all of them. I knew my calling was to be that nurse for someone one day. That day, I decided that as soon as I got out of the hospital and was cleared, I was going to nursing school—and I will work on that unit someday.



# KYLE F.

Savannah State University



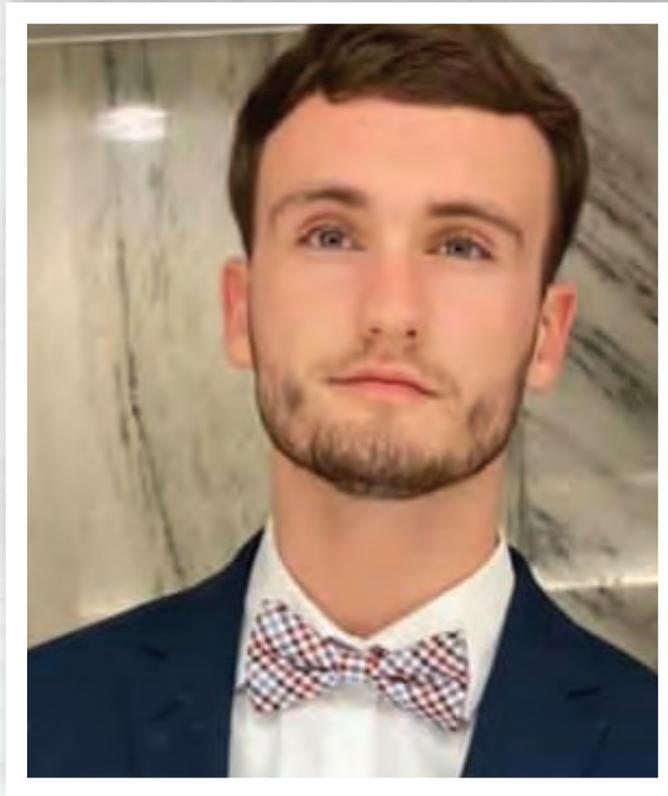
## LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors, Okafor Family Foundation Award

I remember thinking, “Cancer. How can I have cancer? I have never been sick. I work out every day.” My mom immediately called my college football coach and told him. He told my mother that my place on the team would be there when I was finished beating cancer. In retrospect, it is my belief that I was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma to be able to help others. I give back as much as I can by volunteering with The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS.) My medical oncologist hooks me up with newly diagnosed young people as a support system. Take it one day, one test, one procedure, and one treatment at a time is my first piece of advice to those just starting their cancer journey. My second piece of advice is always enjoy the good days and get through the bad ones. The road may be long and/or rough but doable. Listen to your physicians and caregivers, follow their advice, and most of all, fight.



**KYLE F.**

**University of Maryland College Park**



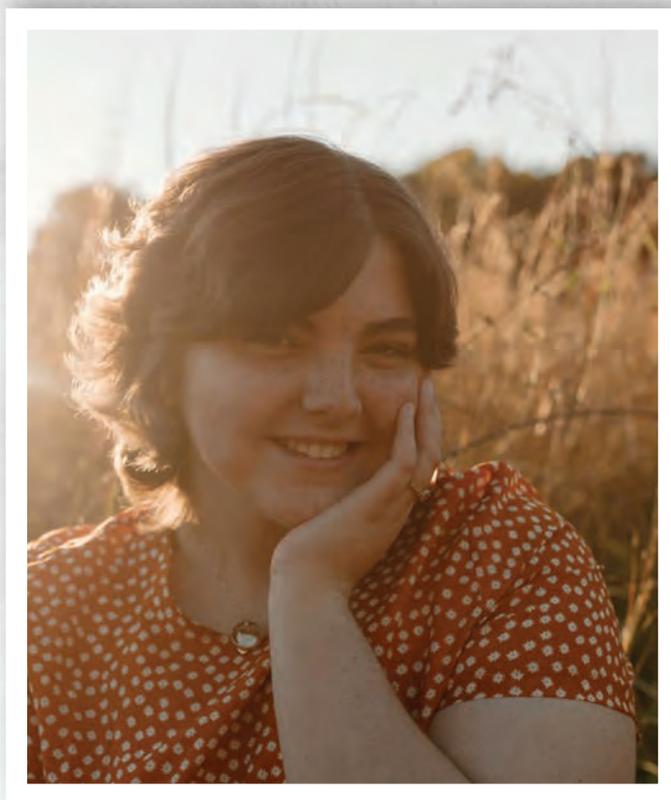
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Cancer had broken me down to my truest self, but I took all of those experiences and built myself back up stronger and more determined than ever. I know how dark life can be, but more importantly, I also know how beautiful it can be too. My journey with cancer taught me appreciation and perspective. It's not a bad thing, especially because most 21-year-olds don't know any better, but we tend to take a lot for granted right up until it is taken away from us. It sounds weird to say, but I'm thankful for having a near death life experience. It showed me how valuable my relationships, my education, my career and my hobbies are to me. Living with cancer is definitely a twisted way to live but if I didn't experience it, I probably wouldn't have "woken up" and realized how blessed I am and how much living I have left to do.



# LANA T.

University of Alabama at Birmingham



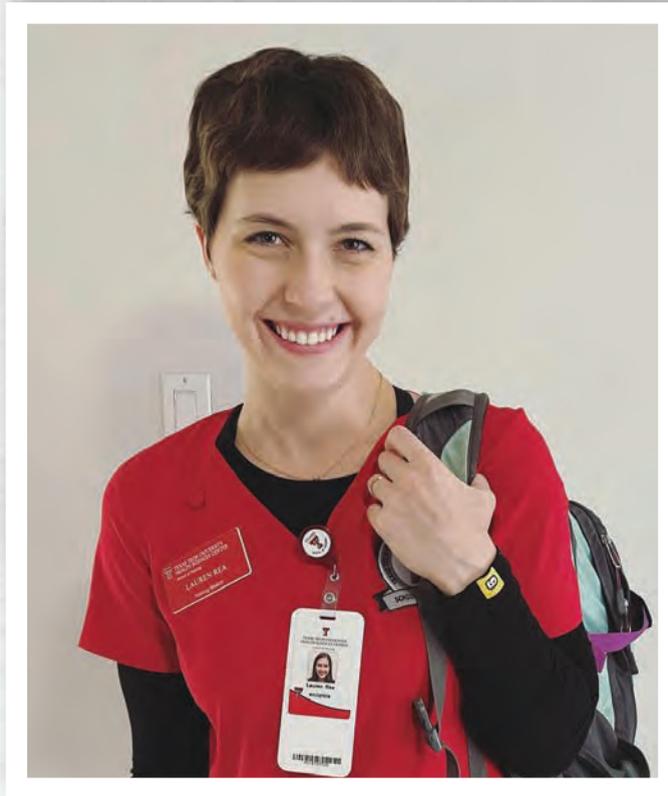
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Cancer is such an emotional concept to grasp and to have to live through. Over the course of my eight-month hospital stay, six kids passed. To this day, I am still grieving over these kids even though I only knew them for a short period of time. I experienced a rollercoaster of emotions during treatment. One day I could be extremely happy with no side effects from chemotherapy. And the next day, I would spend the entire day crying. During these hard and trying times, I turned to my faith to keep me going and to keep myself pushing through the horrible monster known as cancer. I think the three most important lessons I learned from being diagnosed with a blood cancer are: blood is so essential to blood cancer patients, cancer does not discriminate, and to never take life for granted. I have made irreplaceable bonds with my nurses, doctors, fellow cancer patients and families, and childhood cancer and blood cancer organizations. Even though blood cancer took over my life, it will never define me.



# LAUREN R.

Texas Tech Health Science Center



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Before my diagnosis, I spent a year and a half pouring into my prerequisites, applying to nursing schools, and starting an accelerated bachelor's in nursing program. Taking a leave from the program was one of the most difficult things I've ever done. However, I quickly learned that it is impossible to fully understand the fear, turmoil, and pain of a life-threatening illness and treatment until you are walking through it yourself. My diagnosis and treatment taught me how to be a better future nurse. More than ever, I cannot wait to be on the other side of the hospital curtain. If I get through this, as hoped, and get back to school, I will take every moment captive and seek ways to love those around me intentionally. Although having cancer devastated my life, I will use my understanding of this pain to appreciate every moment I am alive and care for my future patients with deep empathy.

★ ★  
★ **LILY A.**

**Western Michigan University**



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There were a lot of hard things about being a kid with cancer, but looking back, I do not often think about any of those things. I choose to look back on that time in a positive light and remember all the ways it changed me for the better. For example, I was constantly tired and worn out from my chemotherapy, but I continued to push through and do my homework in the hospital, even if it meant taking a nap in between assignments. Also, instead of being upset by the fact that I was stuck in the hospital, I would often visit the activity room to do crafts, or play floor hockey in the hallway with my dad. Along my journey, I continued to face my struggles by finding the bright side, and embracing what I could do over what I could not. My experience with leukemia was a tough one, but not one entirely void of positive impacts from which I have been able to learn and grow.



**LILY C.**

**The Ohio State University**



Cancer is isolating. Not the COVID quarantine or mandatory shutdown where you can walk your dog and gather in small groups, but being alone and having nothing or anyone to distract you from the reality of a disease impacting your everyday life. However, the cancer community revealed to me that strength and beauty truly come from within. It was that same community that lifted me and inspired me to use my gifts and talents to do the same for others. I designed a shirt to sell to raise money to give to the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. In the end, I raised over five thousand dollars. In the future, I would love to share my experience with others, be in a support group, or even volunteer at different events. I want to continue to raise money to help with research, support, awareness, and education for all cancer patients who got lumped into a family they never asked to be in.



# LORELAI C.

University of Missouri - Columbia



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I wouldn't wish leukemia on my worst enemy. However... I am a better person today. I am more appreciative and more open to the world around me. I am no longer a scared, shy little girl afraid of the future; I am a strong, proud young woman excited for what is next. When I first entered the hospital, I had no idea what I wanted to do as a career. Now I know that I want to help people who are just like me. My doctors were fantastic, but I never had someone who actually experienced what I had. I'm pursuing careers in pediatric psychology and public relations for children's hospitals now, and I'm more excited than ever to plunge headfirst into the fray and get to know all kinds of little superheroes and help them cope with their scary situation. Once the hospital was a place I abhorred and wanted to never see again. Now it's the place I want to spend the rest of my life working.



# LYDIA Y. C.

Oakton Community College



It could be frustrating sometimes to wait for the next treatment, but that's when I began to appreciate the little things around me. Everyday tasks began to be enjoyable, such as sweeping the floor while music blasts, watering the plants on a sunny day and reading a book on the porch while listening to children play in the playground across from my house. I even began to start new hobbies such as cooking, photography and writing. Moments like these make me realize that it's okay to take it slow and easy. I just need to overcome what's around me, to take down the wall brick by brick in order to overcome what I have now. Cancer is an illness that pains so many people and tests every possible trait we have. The beginning of a challenge comes at the beginning of a future that will outshine these dark days. I can't wait for the day I get discharged.



# MACKENZIE M.

McDaniel College



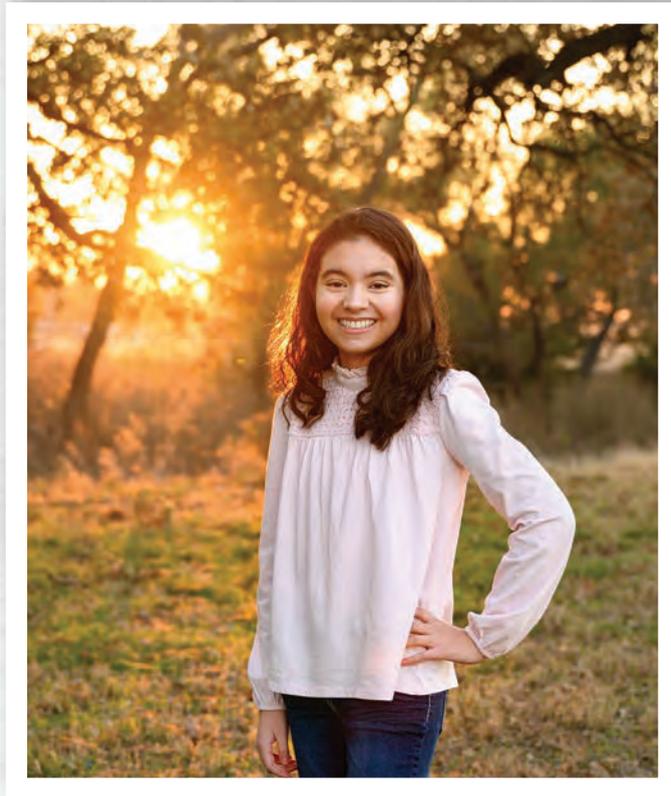
## LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors Award, Beth Ayres in Memory of Alan M. Ayres

A college student must have grit. When faced with challenges, they must demonstrate mental toughness in order to overcome them and move forward. [They] must be equipped with the skills to make decisions and face adversity. As I sit here today, I am approaching eight years cancer free. Over the last several years, I have spent time reflecting on my diagnoses. I have asked “why” time and time again, and just recently have come to the realization that my battles with cancer have made me everything that I am today. I am strong, and I am resilient, able to adapt to my circumstances and move forward. As I eagerly await the move to campus and begin working towards a degree in biology, I am faced with the realization that it will not be easy... but I am comforted by the fact that I will stay true to myself and my dreams, never giving a challenge too much sway over my life.



# MARIPAZ C.-Q.

University of North Texas



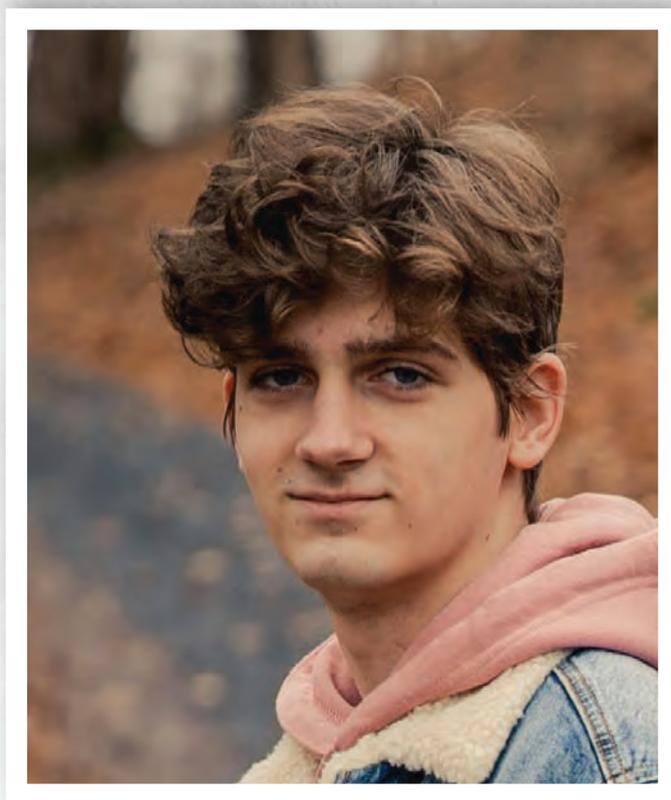
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It was a week before my sixth birthday when I found out [I had leukemia]. My family was devastated... I felt the same way and I wanted to wake up from this painful and confusing nightmare, but I couldn't. It was reality. I needed to fight this cancer no matter how hard it was. My parents and brother were always there for me, giving their love and support. The love they [offered] gave me hope and strength. I know it wasn't easy for them and I sometimes feel bad that they had to go through it, but what matters is that we were all together. [Faced with] any challenge, we went through it together. Now that I think back on it, love and hope is like a warm and welcoming flame in a dark and cold cave, the light in the darkest of moments. Going through cancer at a young age was hard. Today, I am strong and healthy and 9 years in remission. I am thankful to be here, alive.



# MATTHEW W.

Fordham University



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“Pay attention while you are here. You will learn a lot,” is something you might hear from a teacher or your boss at your first job. They certainly are not words I expected from my oncologist. From the moment of my diagnosis, my oncologist expected me to be an active participant in my own care and a “student” of sorts. Why not learn a thing or two about the world of health care while fighting cancer, right? After much contemplation I realized that my story is a story of survival. I found out my great uncle had a type of lymphoma in the 1940s. The chemotherapy that saved me was not yet available. In the 1990s, my cousin was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma. I am a survivor who has benefitted from the many advances in cancer treatment. After changing my perspective, I saw how my story was part of a bigger picture that supports the cause of cancer education and research, and I’ve embraced it in honor of those who fought before me.



# MAX M.

New Mexico Junior College



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I was sitting in class when my dad came into my classroom and dragged me out. He told me, “You have cancer.” Hearing that left me speechless and in shock. At 15, I had no idea what was next for me.

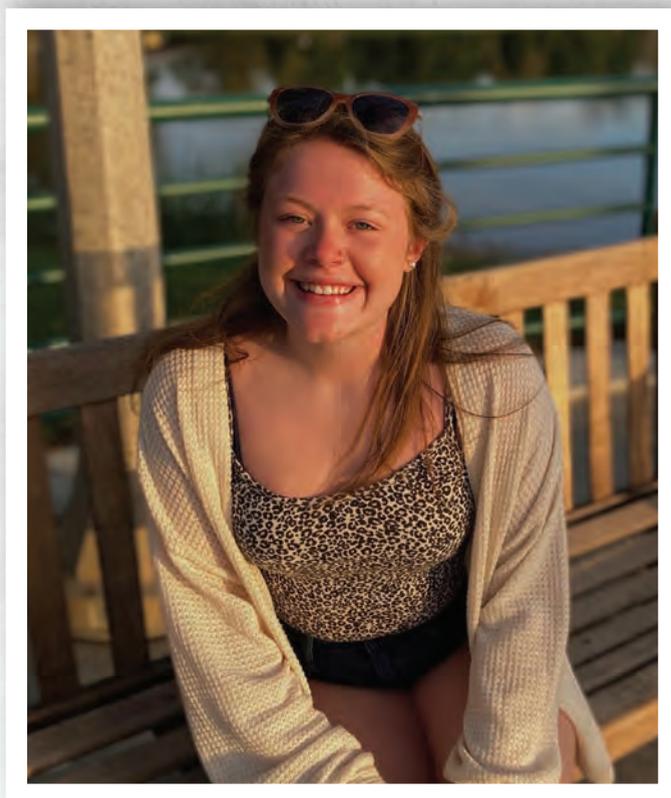
No matter how sick I was ever feeling, I knew I had to keep a positive attitude because that was the only thing that would bring a little bit of peace to my parents, and that brought me peace. Through the whole process which lasted about a year, I got to be home for about a total of 20 days.

My family and I made it through, and it brought me a new perspective of life. I know there will be adversities, but I don’t take anything for granted like I used to. I like to live in the present and just enjoy what’s going on I’m making the best out of my second chance, and I’m prepared for anything that comes my way.



**MAYA K.**

**Marquette University**



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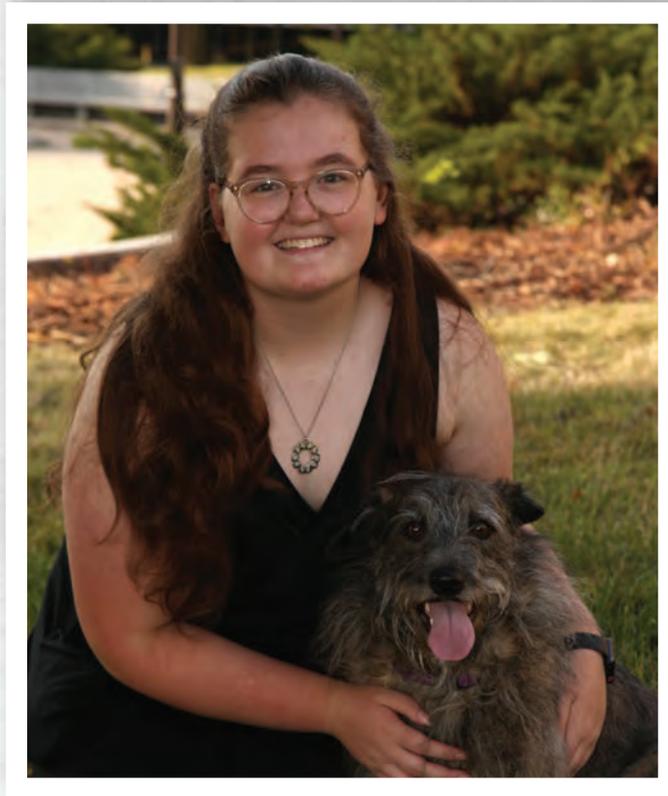
At the most basic level, I want to be a nurse because I want to serve others and give back to the medical and cancer community. I feel the perspective I bring as someone who has lived through a critical, lengthy healthcare crisis allows me to understand the patient experience and to integrate compassion into medical care at a different level. I have worked hard to find opportunities to give back to the childhood cancer community and my pursuit of a career in nursing is the next step for me.

Being a member of the cancer community is something that no one chooses to be a part of, but I have grown to love and have gratitude for my place within it. I was thrust into this community by horrible circumstances and have come out with a new understanding and appreciation for life. As a survivor, one of my greatest wishes and goals is to give back to other children and families faced with the challenge of a cancer diagnosis.



# MEGAN F.

Truman State University



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I quickly learned how to advocate for myself in a clinical setting and assert when I felt uncomfortable with something that would be happening.

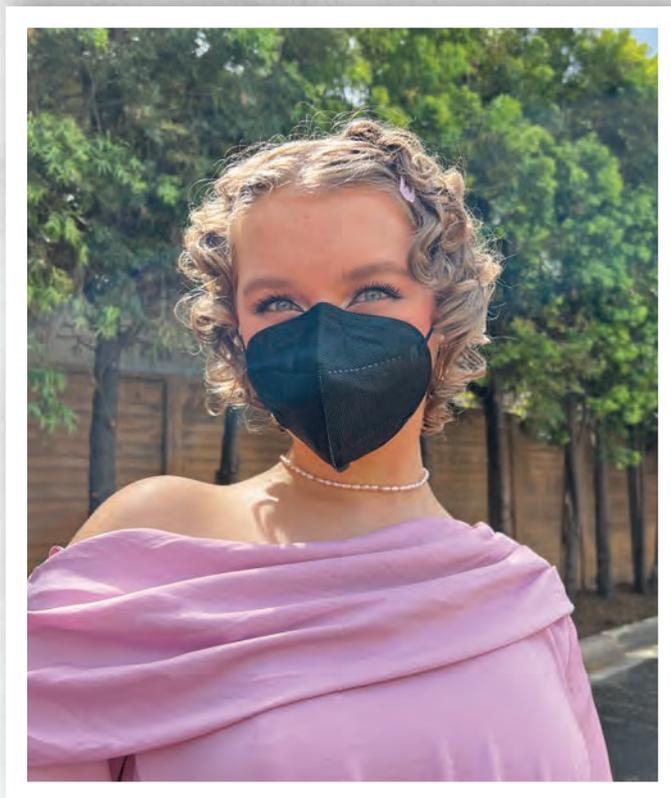
In addition, my cancer experience taught me how essential a positive attitude is. At many points throughout my treatment, my plan had to be adjusted or changed altogether. During a time of so much uncertainty, my family and I realized that when something went awry, you could either laugh or cry and that it was so much better to laugh.

My life has been immeasurably impacted by my cancer diagnosis. However, despite the hardships I faced throughout my treatment and the lasting side effects that I still struggle with, I wouldn't change my experience at all. Without it, I would not be who I am today, and I would not be on the path that I am on. I learned so much from this experience and in the future, I hope to be able to continue sharing my story and using my voice to make a meaningful impact in the lives of others.



# MERCY H.

Stanford University



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I know what it means to fight like my life depends on it  
Because  
It does.  
I know what it means to look at a new patient and see  
Their eyes shimmering with faltering hope,  
Trapped shock,  
And dread of the unknown.  
I know  
Better than most  
What it means to be brave.



# MISTY H.

University of Houston - Downtown



A few months before my 9th birthday, I got sick. I was admitted to Texas Children's Hospital in Houston and diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. At the time I thought, why me?

Little did I know this diagnosis would make me the person I am today. The short, yet very long three years of my life though one of the hardest things I've had to face, I wouldn't take back because it led me down a road of pursuing a passion for health.

My experience led me to the people that raise money for blood cancer research, the reason I call myself a survivor. I went to work for The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS) Texas Gulf Coast Chapter in 2008 to 2015, raising money and awareness to find a blood cancer cures.

I applied to the University of Houston - Downtown and was accepted into the social work program. My focus is pediatric oncology and can't wait to help patients and their families. I feel my past experiences have put me in the place to discover who I am, and what I want to be. I can't imagine my life going any other way.



# MUNIRA N.

University of Missouri - Kansas City



## LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors, Okafor Family Foundation Award

Growing up in a Muslim household, *Allamdulillah* was a word of solace. Every bump in the road or snag in my plan was tolerable when I could remind myself that it is ultimately not my plan, and there is purpose and reasons for my successes and failures. At age 17, I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia... *Alhamdulillah?* I spent eight days in the hospital following my diagnosis. For the first time in my life, I stopped searching for the silver lining and just watched as the storm swept me away.

After the initial losses, another realization comes: There is no way around this; there are no shortcuts. By simply weathering the storm, I allowed myself to focus on what I was gaining — knowledge. Week after week, I began to look healthier and feel healthier.

Four months after my diagnosis, I entered complete remission, followed by an 18-month “consolidation” stage. My hardships, as much as my successes, make me who I am. How blessed I am to have experienced such a realization. As a cancer survivor, *Alhamdulillah*.



# NATHAN B.

University of Florida



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My blood cancer diagnosis changed my life. It's made me relentless, but also decisive of my battles.

I'll never forget waking up after a biopsy of my largest tumor. My father leaned over the bed and told me I had stage III Burkitt's lymphoma. My response to the news was a great form of sadness. Being diagnosed with something that kills an outrageous number of people annually, terrifies you. Your world is rocked in a way you can't fathom.

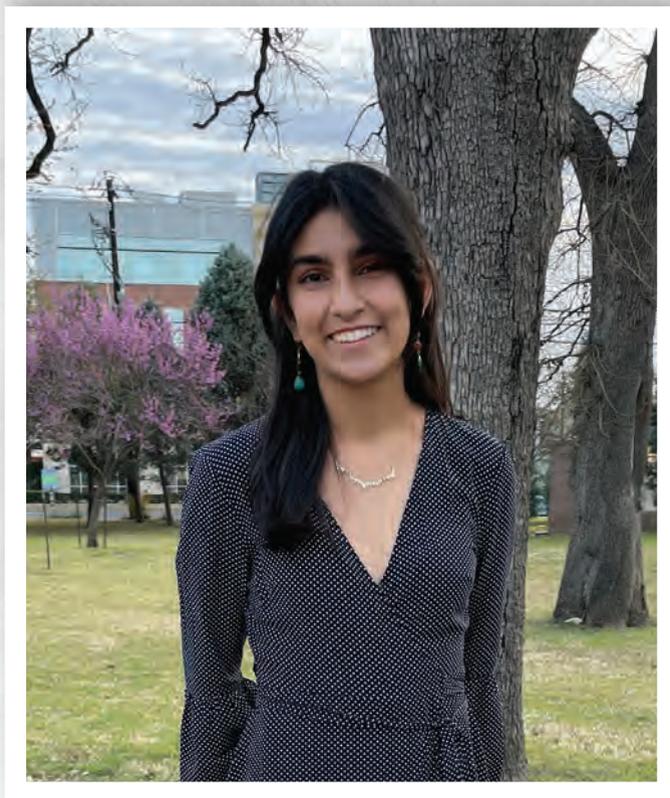
At one point during treatment, I spoke to my family about withdrawing care, and accepted death because I couldn't keep going. Now, years later, I think back to that headspace, and I don't recognize it anymore. But it's because of doctors like mine that I kept going.

Cancer changed me and I learned to be more appreciative of the now, yet always work for more. When you're diagnosed, you have one job and it's to fight. You have the rest of your life to live, and cancer shouldn't be the end of that.



# NEGEEN V.

University of Texas at Dallas



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It was March 2020, I could barely taste the bittersweet end of my senior year of high school when the year took a turn to the worst. I felt a lump in my neck, and after testing I was diagnosed with classical Hodgkin lymphoma stage 2A. Luckily, I got one of the ‘easier’ cancers and was fortunate enough to catch it early.

With a standard of care and a confident oncologist team, I had no doubt I’d get through this. By the time school started I was halfway done with my treatment, but it was at this point where each session became more difficult. I never thought undergoing treatment would affect my motivation and mental well-being for so long.

All the challenges I overcame during my cancer treatment were worth it, and I’m happy to be where I am today. Through my treatment I learned to persevere through difficult times and try to stay positive as much as possible. I had a lot of lows, but I knew the only way to get better was to keep pushing to get back up.



# NIKOLETTE N.

Penn State University - University Park

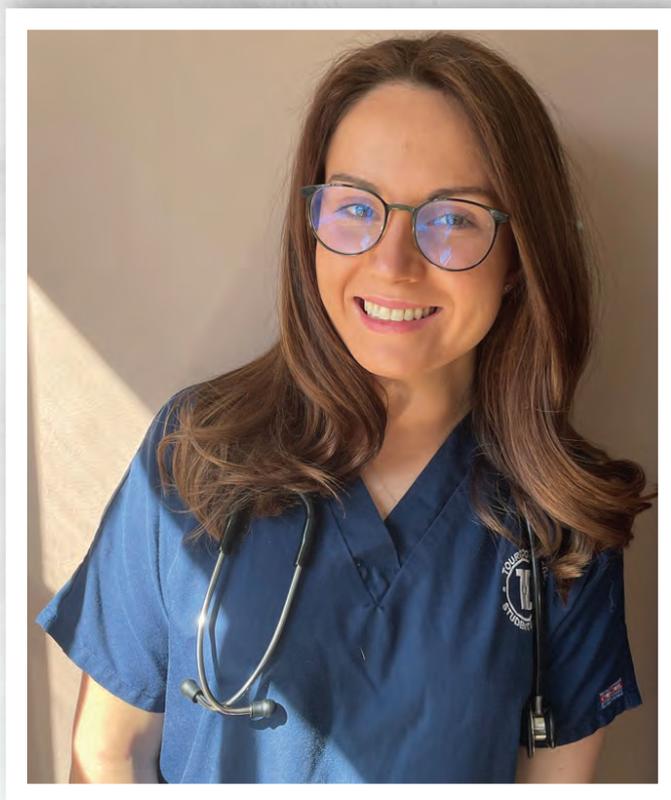


Everyone experiences challenges within their daily lives, but only few experience what it's like fighting a cancer diagnosis. During my freshman year of college, I had to medically withdraw after being diagnosed with cancer for the second time. My first cancer diagnosis, primary mediastinal large B-cell non-Hodgkin lymphoma, occurred when I was a junior in high school. Treatment lasted for four months, and I was declared cancer free and in remission just in time for my senior year of high school to begin.

Unfortunately, life threw another challenge at me only five weeks into my first semester, where I heard the words, "You have cancer," again. I was diagnosed with treatment-related acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). Thankfully, the medicines and physical therapy worked, and I am fully recovered.

Today, I maintain a 3.94 GPA heading into my junior year of college and am excited to represent the Blue and White for another year at Penn State. Even though fighting cancer is incredibly hard, it has made me a stronger person in the end, and for that I am forever grateful.

★ ★  
★  
**OLIVIA C.**  
Touro College



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The pungent smell of Purell is filling my nose as my parents and I walk slowly towards the outpatient oncology clinic. It's the fourth time this month we are here. I think to myself, "this is not a place where I belong." My dad says to me, "You are sick, but these doctors are going to make you better. You have cancer."

After a month of living in the hospital, I am finally being discharged. We pull up to the elementary school and there is a crowd of people on the blacktop and playground with signs that say "Blood Drive." It is overwhelming the amount of people in my community who rallied for me.

This experience has given me a passion to strive toward a cure and fundraise for the research that allows more patients to get the best possible treatment and end up in remission. My diagnosis has led me to pursue a career as a pediatric oncology nurse. Blood cancer does not define me, but it has made a large impact on who I am today.



**RHEA J.**

**Gonzaga University**



I was sixteen when my doctor dropped the life-changing news that my simple thyroidectomy in February was not just that. Due to my immune system being down for the grueling treatment I had to go completely offline in school, with friends bringing me assignments and then dropping them back off to be graded. I missed the teachers and learning, and the socialization.

Then lying in the pediatric hospital bed being pumped full of chemicals I couldn't pronounce, I realized my life was far from perfect, but I also gained perspective. It is hard to feel sorry for yourself when two doors down nurses are running into a four-year old's room because he is coding and hanging on for life.

I knew from that moment that while the work of pediatric oncologists is needed, I felt I would only be treating the symptoms of childhood cancer, rather than the cause. I now want to pursue environmental research and policy eventually hoping to provide scientific data on how these two are linked and implement policy to prevent this from happening to anyone ever again.



# SAMANTHA S.

University of North Carolina at Greensboro



## **LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors, Okafor Family Foundation Award**

I was excited to start my first day of 10th grade on August 26, 2019. When I woke up in the morning, I felt like I was going to faint. Sensing that something was wrong, my parents rushed me to the Levine Children's Hospital. It was leukemia.

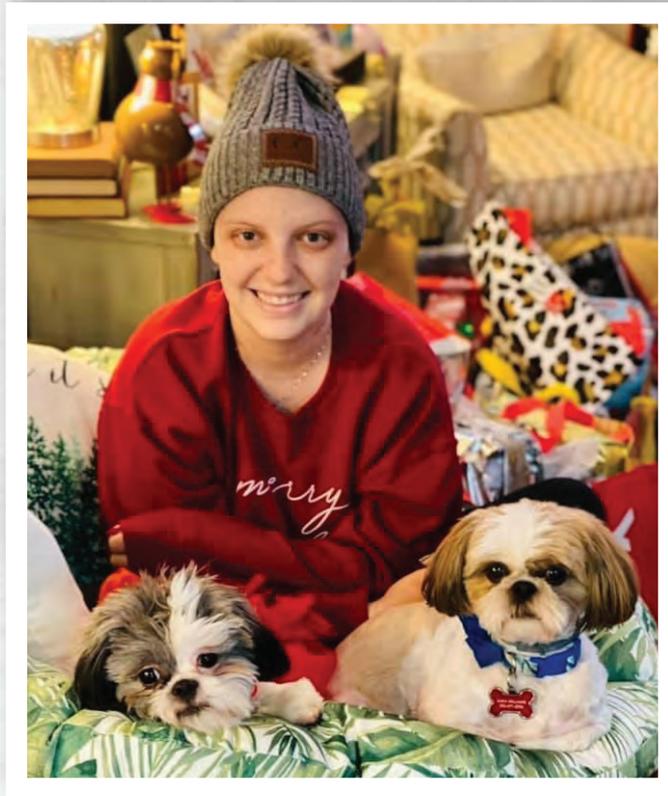
Being hospitalized with cancer was a difficult experience. I couldn't understand why this was happening to me. Soon after, I started undergoing aggressive chemotherapy. My body suffered greatly, both physically and mentally. In days, I went from being a healthy girl to being very sick. While I was sick, I had numerous other challenges, but was able to overcome them in a variety of ways.

My family was a huge motivator for me to fight, as was my medical team. After tackling these challenges, it made me want to go to college even more because this illness taught me I could do so much more with my life. I've always wanted to work in medicine as an OB/GYN, and after everything I've been through, I'm even more motivated to achieve that goal.



# SARA W.

Emory University



In July of 2020, I was diagnosed with stage four Hodgkin lymphoma. My world stopped and everything changed. I struggled for about six months to reach a diagnosis and visited many different doctors who discounted my pain and symptoms. After many tests I stayed for about four weeks in different hospitals until I was able to receive my first round of chemotherapy.

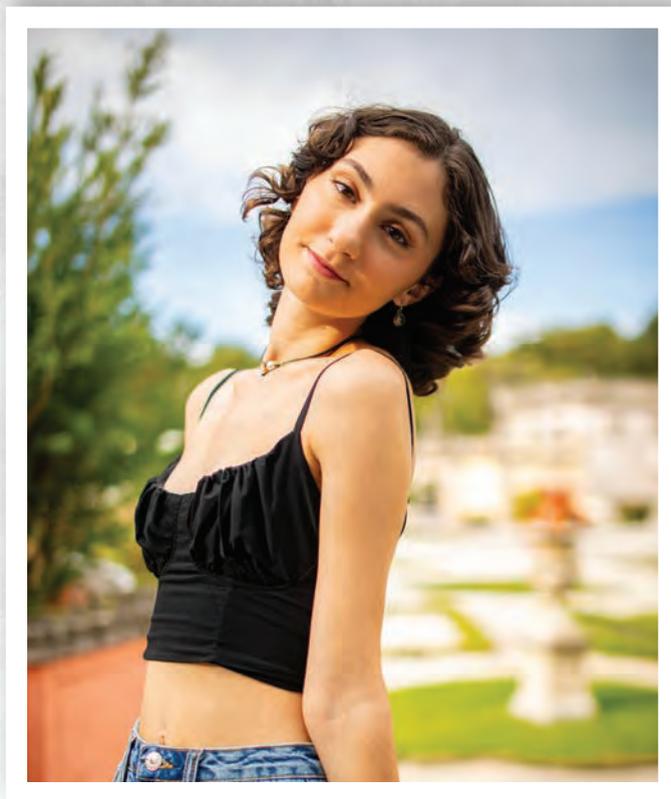
As someone who struggled to reach a cancer diagnosis, I am 100% committed to patient advocacy and the importance of backing up the patient and how they feel. I believe that no one knows your body and how you feel better than yourself because it can often be hard to put into words what you are feeling. I think this quality will make me a better nurse.

Through my nurses, doctors, family, and friends, I finished treatment on January 13th, 2021, and I am cancer-free. Cancer may have changed my life and damaged me, but I fought back hard, and I am stronger now more than ever. I am ready to be the change.



# SOPHIA T.

University of Miami



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When I was diagnosed with a blood cancer 37 days after my 15th birthday, college was the last thing I was thinking about. I was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia and spent the next eight months quarantined in the hospital and at home. I was so weak at one point that I thought I was going to die, and there was nothing anyone could do to save me. I almost gave up fighting for my life.

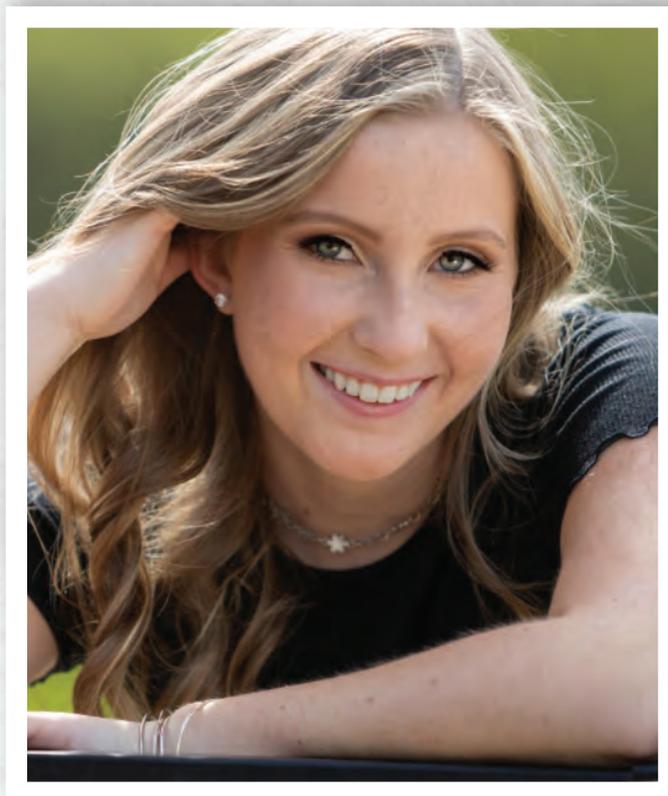
What helped me not give up was the thought of the future. Before my diagnosis, I dreamed of creating music for people around the world. Even before my sickness, I knew that music would stick with me for as long as I live. And I want to learn more about music and pursue all aspects of it in college.

It's been two years since my final chemotherapy session, and a lot has changed. One thing that hasn't changed is my desire to continue playing and creating music. Having blood cancer strengthened my desire for higher education to use my talent, abilities and knowledge to make others' lives better.



# SYDNEY B.

Hope College



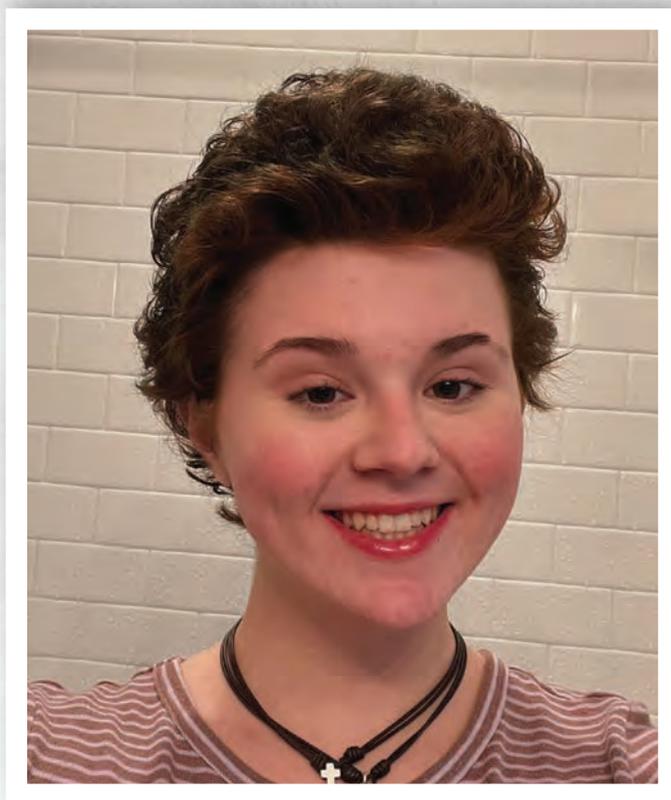
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In September of 2010, I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. I went through 2.5 years of treatment, relapsed 6 months later, started treatments again, and had a bone marrow transplant and cranial radiation. Nothing prepares you for such a fight... but, it did prepare me for life beyond cancer!

Having cancer brought some challenges that I will live with forever. The first challenge is it's harder for me to do cognitive learning. The second challenge I have overcome is being different. I've also learned to overcome the challenge of the "unpredictable."

I've been cancer-free since 2014. I know college will have unpredictable moments – some good and some bad. If I can overcome cancer and its nasty "side-effects," I can conquer the unknowns of college. Blood cancer has taught me exactly what I want to do in my life. I had so many amazing nurses through my experience, I want to be like them – a pediatric oncology nurse. Being able to work with children and tell them: "I know how you feel, I used to be you," would be so rewarding.

★ ★  
★  
**SYDNEY S.**  
Elon University



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I just knew that something wasn't right with my body. I was not myself, and nothing seemed to be able to fix it. It was after rounds of testing when I found out I had been diagnosed with lymphoma and would need to complete six rounds of chemotherapy treatment. My life paused as I stopped going to school, stopped going to work, and stopped seeing everyone except my family and extremely close friends.

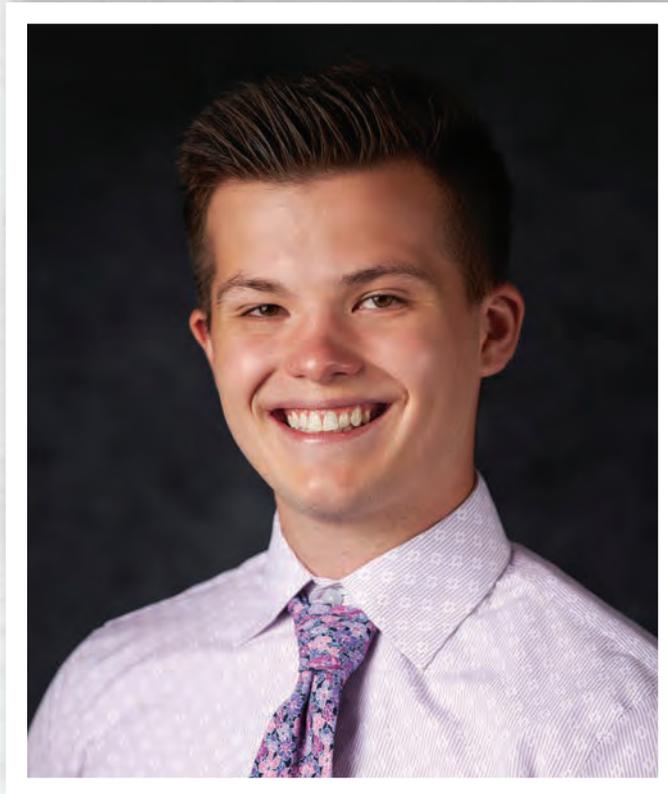
One of the hardest moments on my journey was losing my voice from treatment. I had turned to singing as a way to escape life, and I especially turned to it during my worst moments before my diagnosis, so when I was unable to sing while going through treatment, I took it very hard.

Thankfully, my voice returned after my treatments, and I am able to sing every day again. The gift of singing is something that I am now able to treasure much more than I ever thought possible and am now working even harder to pursue my career goals and to better my voice for the future.



**TATE M.**

**Loyola University of Chicago**



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Can a cancer diagnosis be a gift? Instead of a birthday party with my friends for my 12th birthday in 2012, I had a CT scan and found out that I had stage III Burkitt's lymphoma.

Pre-cancer, I was known as a bit of a showman, never shy on the community theater stage. That confidence transformed into a motivational speaking/fundraising career as I shared my cancer story as an honored hero through the Pennies for Patients campaign.

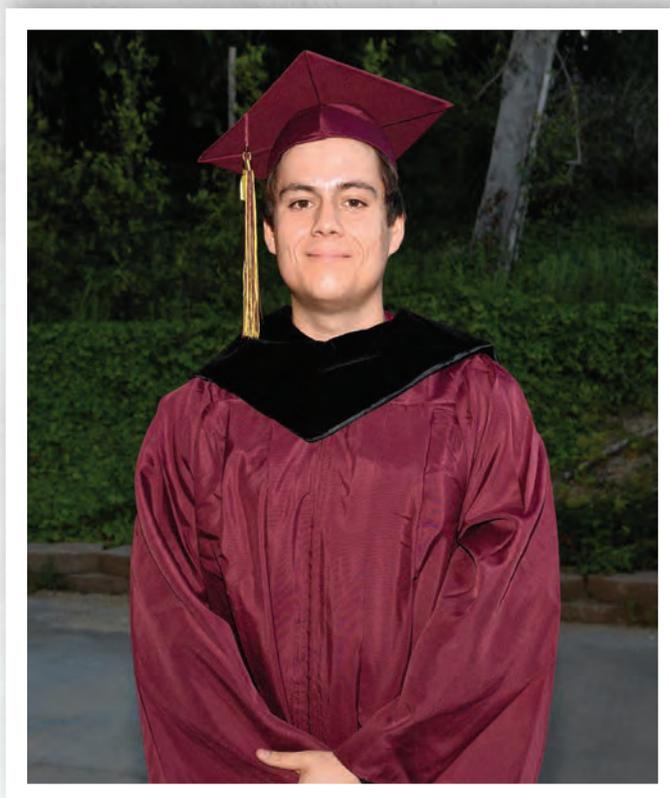
As important as fundraising is, I also share the many life lessons I experienced from having cancer. I championed the phrase "laughter is the best medicine" as an Honored Hero, and I truly believe that approaching life with a joyful attitude can make all the difference.

In spring 2022, I learned I have cardiomyopathy caused by one of the chemotherapies I received. My cancer doesn't define me. But I know that my story is going to help other cancer survivors. Cancer has shaped me into a man of character, a man who shares kindness and compassion and a man who inspires generosity and hope in others.



# TIMOTHY M.

California State University, San Bernadino



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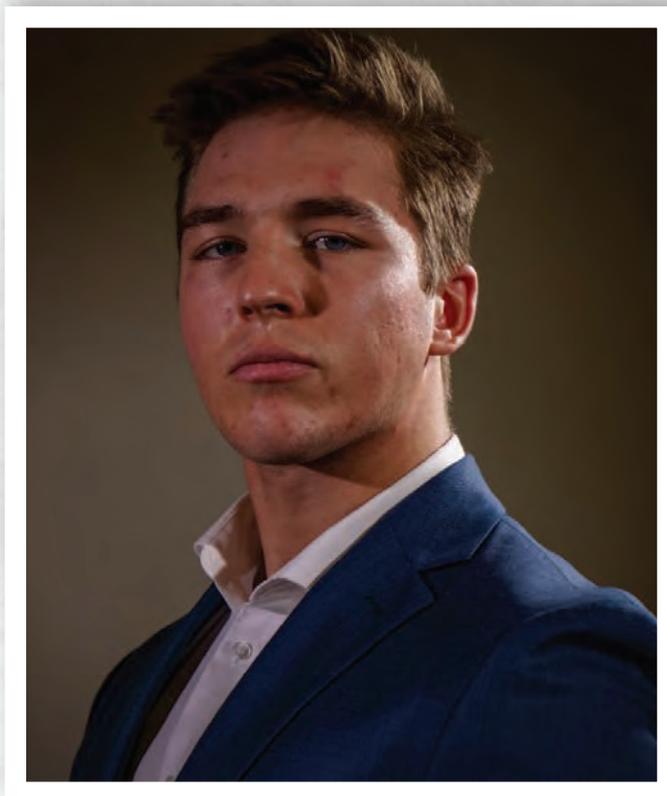
I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia when I was 6 years old. Cancer brings many negative outcomes into your life, but it also brings positives. The biggest positive outcome is how cancer brought my dad and I closer together. After losing my hair to treatment, my dad shaved his head. We would pass time in the hospital trying to guess passcodes to locked doors. And when I was scared, I would hold my Dad's thumb for comfort. It took many years to get over the fear of being alone during a procedure.

My past experiences have made me want to pursue a career in medicine and help those that have been so kind to help me. I have witnessed the unfortunate passing of friends that had this disease and it breaks my heart, I need to help those in need. I learned how to cherish the good times and forget about the negatives. This journey has ultimately guided me towards my desired future in helping children beat any undesired diagnoses and continue with their bright futures.



# TIMOTHY T.

Kent State University



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My battle with cancer is one that is still inspiring people today. It began my freshman year of college. I was a happy, healthy 19-year-old excited and nervous to begin this chapter of my life, when I was diagnosed with blood cancer.

I spent the next four weeks in the hospital getting chemotherapy. I received blood transfusions and anything else needed to keep me alive. I learned what my life would be like for the next 3 years.

Despite the way my body felt, I always had a smile on my face. I began doing 100 push-ups every morning and ran 5Ks to raise money for cancer research. I began selling “invictus” wristbands, meaning “unconquerable soul.” I wanted others to see this message and be motivated by my attitude.

I finally rang the bell in July 2021. What was supposed to be the darkest chapter of my life, turned into my most proud. Now, I know I will always believe in myself and push myself to do whatever it takes.



# VIRGINIA D.

Clemson University



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I was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma when I was 14. When you are facing cancer people assume you cannot focus or do anything besides battle cancer, but I wanted to prove that not only could I pass my classes, but that I could excel in them. I was not going to let cancer take anything else from me.

Even homebound, I worked hard to keep my grades up, and ended up finishing the year with a B average. The following year, even after a hip replacement surgery, I was inducted into the Beta Club. I walked across the school stage in crutches to accept the honor. In the fall of my senior year, I applied to 6 colleges and wrote my application essays based on overcoming my cancer challenges and thriving academically.

My parents, friends, teachers, and medical team pushed me to achieve my best. They are the reason I am happy and healthy at Clemson. They helped me believe I could do it no matter what life put in my path, and that is a lesson I will hold with me the rest of my life.



# WILLIAM S.

Hinds Community College



## **LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors, Okafor Family Foundation Award**

I was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukemia at age 11. I played soccer, participated in Boy Scouts, and did things many kids do, but had to stop because of my cancer. I had to quit contact sports and was so sick from treatment I couldn't stay at Boy Scout summer camp. I grew up with my parent's hovering, because my treatment would make me so sick.

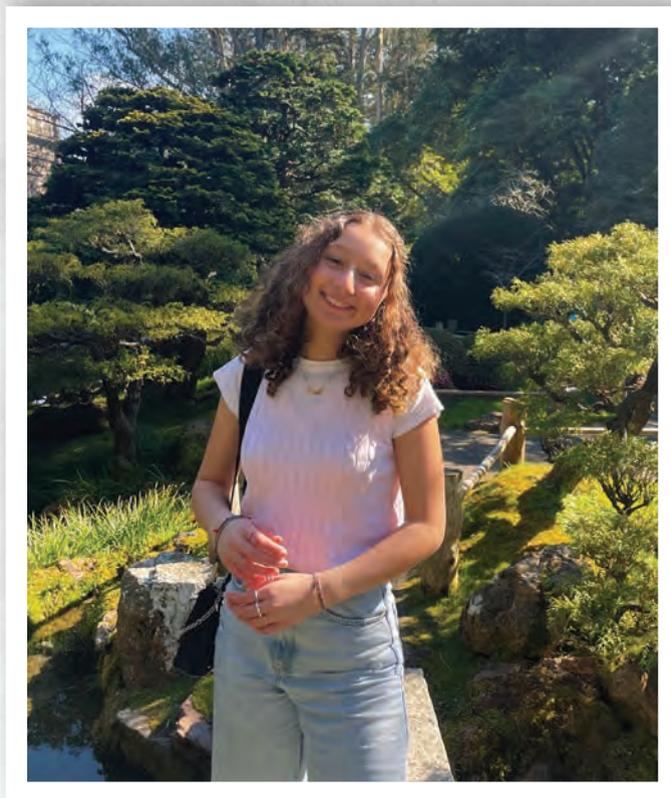
I am four years undetectable and for the past year have been participating in the first CML pediatric stop trial that my oncologist wrote for me. We were told to prepare for the same side effects as when I first started taking Gleevec™. I wasn't sure how I'd be able to leave for college. I was going to live at home and commute back and forth, but I haven't been sick once. I now live on campus.

Because of CML, I've learned to appreciate all aspects of my life and to fight. CML will not defeat me. It's just a part of my story. There are much bigger things ahead of me and I can't wait!



# ZEENA A.

University of California, Davis



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As a child, I was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma. My curly golden hair fell in chunks on the floor and tears fell as my reflection became unrecognizable. I watched from my hospital bed as my friends adjusted to high school, engrossed in Friday night football games and the latest gossip. Despite these losses, I realized I needed to define a better version of myself.

I began a YouTube channel and created videos experimenting with various wigs and colorful hats. I found joy in the little moments, using humor and optimism to reinvigorate my confidence. I learned to play the ukulele and uploaded my original song, “warrior” which showcased my transition from hopelessness to strength.

Although cancer was the hardest thing I’ve gone through, I consider it one of my greatest blessings. I found my passion for cancer advocacy and became co-lead of the American Cancer Society West Regional Leadership.

Had it not been for Hodgkin lymphoma, I wouldn’t have found my voice or its purpose, and although my battle with cancer ended, my goal to help others defeat their battle has just begun.



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Our founding supporters are dedicated to helping patients, survivors, and families get the support they need. Thanks to these essential partners, LLS is proud to offer the **LLS Scholarship for Blood Cancer Survivors:**



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