

Each morning before I step into a steamy shower, a 3-inch long scar on my upper chest reminds me of my past. However, once I get dressed, this scar goes unnoticed to anyone I meet that does not know me or what I went through. My port-a-cath that was used for my chemotherapy I underwent to fight Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia from the age of 2 to the age of 5 gave me that scar. This scar does not define me. It gives me an inner strength that often goes unnoticed, much like the difficulties that Leukemia survivors face. In reality, my childhood was far from normal due to my treatment but it was all I knew. Looking back, I can see that I was a joyful child and made the most of everything. When I check in every 2 years with my oncologist, he tells me the same thing each visit, “You’re the most boring patient I have all day, and I love that about you”.

To many outside people, that simple sentence repeated by my oncologist could support the idea that my Leukemia only affected me during treatment. Admittedly, I never let cancer get in the way of what I want to accomplish and my experiences even drive me to pursue a career in medicine. Recently, however, seemingly insignificant parts of my life have been affected by cancer.

First, ever since getting cut from soccer freshman year I have run with the cross-country and track teams. Although I was never the superstar or varsity runner, I put in all the effort that I could muster but hamstring injuries kept nagging and cutting my seasons short. After a brief visit with my oncologist and a physical therapist, they realized that one of my chemotherapy drugs had a possible side effect of restricting muscle growth. The possible side effects from chemotherapy and radiation are the first thing that the public does not know about Leukemia. Even still, I deal with the long-term side effects of the steroids I took during chemo. Now, some people would have viewed this as a way out because running is admittedly not always fun. Quitting just was not an option, so this season I assumed a role as a manager for the team and still had just as enjoyable of a season as my other friends. I even managed to run the last race in the season, pushed through the pain, but most importantly finished the race.

The second way that cancer has affected me in a minor way this year is with our student-run blood drive at school. As I have an interest in medicine and also wish to give back, I signed up to donate. After going through the process of filling out an electronic test, the Red Cross technician informed me that I will never be able to donate blood due to my Leukemia. This restriction makes perfect sense, as the blood from a donor who has survived Leukemia could possibly still have the cancerous cells hidden inside. Seeing that I was slightly disappointed, she informed me of various other opportunities in which I could help the Red Cross. Now, I am planning on volunteering with the Red Cross at one of their local blood drives once I turn 18.

Finally, the hidden nature of my experience has complemented other aspects of my unique high school education. I chose to attend an All-male, College-preparatory, Catholic, Military high school. Focusing on the military aspect of our education, retired military personnel teach each cadet the importance of leadership and putting the brigade before yourself through our “brotherhood”. My scar hides under my crisp, ironed blue dress shirt. Both the leadership instructors and my battle with Leukemia have taught me to dedicate myself for the greater good and not to let a single characteristic define me.

Since a young age, I knew that I wanted to give back by pursuing a career in medicine. Although surviving cancer does not affect me on a daily basis, it is part of my identity of who I am today and who I want to become. I realized that the world owes me nothing; rather, I feel indebted to the health care workers that helped me recover and become the young man who I am today.

Now, the most important obstacle that Leukemia patients face that the public lacks knowledge of is their weakened immune system. Physical obstacles like my hamstring issues are more visible to society whereas the unseen obstacles like compromised immune systems are less obvious. While undergoing my 2 ½ years of chemotherapy, taking a trip to the zoo, beach, or anywhere in public was dangerous. My immune system was so weak that a common cold could cause me to be bedridden or even take a trip to

the hospital while influenza or Chickenpox easily could have killed me. For this reason, vaccinations are so vital to our society. Each day while going through treatment, which is now 3 years long for young males, the biggest danger to your immediate health could be a simple handshake, mosquito bite, or a cough from a nearby stranger. (857 words)

Throughout all of high school, I have pushed myself to my limit in order to achieve success. By choosing an All-male, Catholic, College-preparatory, Military high school, I set myself to be challenged along my journey called high school. Numerous AP and honors courses, service trips to Guatemala and volunteering in my community have all taught me important lessons in becoming a leader. With this scholarship, I would be able to further my education along the path towards becoming a pediatric oncologist. Eventually, all my hard work and diligence will pay off when I can begin to give back to society. When I was merely a toddler, doctors saved my life. Now, I want to take on that challenge of being in those doctors' shoes.