

## Grade 11 Public Speaking

I have been told many times that I am an extremely fortunate and lucky girl. Of course, I do not disagree with this statement considering that I adore my family, friends, peers, and almost every aspect of my life. Most importantly, unlike many people, I was granted the gift of a second chance at life after dominating in my battle with cancer, even though the doctors only gave me one week to live. It would just be plain senseless of me to not appreciate every waking moment I am able to spend, whether it is through sleep, academics, sports, or social activities. Some of you may still be dwelling over the shocking fact that I even had cancer. However, pretty soon your memory will dismiss it as a simple story with a tragic plot but a happy ending. But, have you ever wondered what takes place after the "...and they all lived happily ever after" part of a story? Well, I can explain now that it is what I am currently living through.

After passing my five-years-cancer-free mark, it was finally time to officially attempt letting go of the past and begin pondering about what the future may hold. I had just begun attending school here, starting fresh, and loving life. This first year of sixth grade held but one medical dilemma, which was a topic of concern for a while at my doctor's appointments, and was then eventually dismissed as nothing but a one-time rare incident. Jumping ahead to my summer after Freshman year, this "rare incident" occurred once again during our first family trip to Italy. Unfortunately, one of my close friends was present, and since then, three other friends as well have watched it happen. Even though they have stayed brave, I feel guilty because they witnessed such a scene. Merriam-Webster medical dictionary defines a seizure as "a sudden attack [including] the physical manifestations ([such] as convulsions, sensory disturbances, or loss of consciousness) resulting from abnormal electrical discharges in the brain." But I define seizures as the scariest moments of my life, even though I consider myself to be a pretty fearless person.

Once we returned from our trip, we began testing to determine the cause of this random and sudden turn of events in my health. A month later in July, I had two more seizures within two days: one at home in my living room, and the other at an annual charity event. Almost immediately, I was introduced to anti-seizure medication in order to decrease the likelihood of

my having one again. Although this new medicine eliminated major seizures, more minor disturbances arose once I began my Sophomore year. The side effects from this medication made me extremely drowsy, made simple concepts more difficult to comprehend, and caused me to have some serious mood swings; I drastically switched from being elated to being on the verge of tears within seconds. Considering that I am passionate about completing all my work and trying my hardest in everything, I felt very frustrated and had difficulty adjusting to the new school year. Although I was relieved of the “grand mal seizures,” I continued to have worrisome miniature seizures, which consist of a temporary zone-out and moment of confusion, a condition which still baffles the doctors today. Nevertheless, I ultimately adapted later that year and even got my driving permit, so this past summer I began to decrease my medication. However, we are not at the “happily ever after” part just yet.

Over a year had passed since my last major seizure, and I was beginning to feel as though I could see some light at the end of this tunnel, even though I was having those mini-seizures almost every day since school started this year. On Sunday, October 16<sup>th</sup>, I attended the Patriots vs. Bengals game, which was also Tom Brady’s first game back, with some family and friends. Aside from having a mysterious ominous feeling about me, this was a very exciting day. Then in the car ride home with the windows open, my heart sunk as I suddenly began to recognize the usual prodromal symptoms that precede a grand mal seizure. Imagine, your head slowly turning uncontrollably to the left as your vision begins to blur and spin rapidly to the left as well. You barely manage to say the words, “I don’t feel well” or “I’m shaking,” as your vision completely disappears. Sensing that the room is spinning around you, as though you are trapped within a tornado, the only sounds you hear are the panicking voices of the people around you as they struggle to calm you and rally help, and your own voice, repeatedly apologizing for the drama you are about to cause. You feel an immense pressure increasingly rise in your chest and head because you cannot breathe. You can sense yourself shaking, and besides this vast pressure you can only feel the secure grasp of a loved one’s embrace around you, when suddenly there is utter blackness and silence before you lose consciousness, as though you have just woken from a bad nightmare. I will leave the rest of what occurs up to your imagination, as it is left up to mine.

Doctors repeat to me the main factors that lead to seizures include lack of sleep, dehydration, and stress. Although it remains unclear as to what specifically causes mine, I continue to pay close attention to my health by getting as much sleep as possible, drinking lots of water, and practicing methods to relieve stress. It has been a very nerve-wracking and frustrating beginning to the year once again. The daunting possibility that I may have another seizure hovers like a gray funnel cloud above me. I wonder how people may change their views about me if they see me having one, I am embarrassed by fact that I am not able to go for my license for six months now, and I dread the trying deed of increasing my medication again. However, no matter how seemingly bleak these events seem to be, with help from my family and friends, I continue to keep my chin up, wear a smile, and power through it all because I know that everything I go through is simply another block that contributes to the formation of the person that stands before you today. So, if you have been dealing with difficult times, continue waiting for your happily ever after, because you can overcome whatever is troubling you. As Robert Tew wrote, “The struggle you’re in today is developing the strength you need for tomorrow.”