

Hope starts with spreading awareness

by **Rachael Samm**

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I can remember the day that she was diagnosed with cancer.

I was too young to understand what the word "cancer" entailed. I can remember going to chemotherapy with her and changing my diet to fit her new, healthy diet and beginning to see her less as her naps became more frequent. I can remember the drastic change that occurred in my life the day my dad walked in with tears rushing down his face and told us that she was going to die. And the memory that sticks in my mind the most is the moment I walked into the hospital room with the heart machine sounding one long, unending beep and my family members standing around the edges of the room with tears weld up in their eyes, staring at me, my brother and my dad.

Cancer took my mom's life on Aug. 16, 2004 when I was 9 years old. She died from colon cancer, which has a survival rate of 74 percent in stage I and 6 percent in stage IV, according to the American Cancer Society. The higher the stage of cancer, the more it has spread throughout the body. When my mom was diagnosed, she was already in stage IV.

I had never even heard of colon cancer nor did I know anything about the disease or how horrible it can be. It wasn't until years later that I began doing cancer walks and supporting cancer awareness in honor of my mom.

It's ridiculous the amount of people who have had or will have cancer at one point in their life. Forty-one percent of people will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime, and 21 percent will die from it, according to a report for the President's Cancer Panel. So, if you're reading this in a class of 30 students, it's expected that 12 students will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime, and six students will die from it.

It's scary to think that it's possible that I may someday be in a doctor's office being told that I have some form of cancer. It's even scarier to think that someone could have it as a child or teenager. There are students walking around this school who have battled cancer. It's not just something adults can get.

Junior Mackenzie Eakle is that living example that students in high school can be diagnosed with cancer. She was first diagnosed at the end of

her freshman year when her appendix had ruptured, and Eakle was sent into surgery to have the organ removed. However, when it was removed, Eakle says the doctors saw something strange on her appendix and had it biopsied.

"The reason why my appendix ruptured is because there was a tumor growing on it. And, that's how they told me," Eakle said. "That day, they told me they wanted to send me to Riley Hospital to get multiple tests done to make sure the cancer wasn't anywhere else. I had seven tumors in my colon and my digestive tract."

Eakle had 20 feet of her large and small intestine together removed, 30 pounds of intestine removed, lymph nodes removed and received radiation treatment.

Because Eakle's lymph nodes were infected, cancer was able to spread through her whole body. The doctors

explained to Eakle that she was living with active cancer cells throughout her whole body.

"So, at any time, a tumor could just start growing. Like out of nowhere, anywhere. Because I had the cells that were positive," Eakle said.

Because of the radiation treatments Eakle was going through, she had to have her own bathroom, wear a mask and she couldn't be in contact with anyone the day she received treatment because it could make them sick. She says that people would look at her funny because she was this 93 pound girl wearing a mask, but it didn't bother her.

To this day, Eakle still goes in for radiation tests and treatment every three months to ensure that active cancer cells don't begin to form tumors. She still has one problem spot in her lung that she says isn't big enough to be a tumor, but

also isn't small enough not to worry about.

Cancer changed her life. She can't eat the same stuff she could once eat before, and she has to live knowing that there are still cancerous cells in her body.

Cancer changes the whole family's life as well. My world was flipped upside down when my mom was diagnosed with cancer, and now, my family has to survive without her.

Cancer is significant. Eakle knew about her symptoms for a year but dismissed them as anxiety. Though she knew she didn't have anything to be anxious about, she didn't bother to go to the doctor. And,

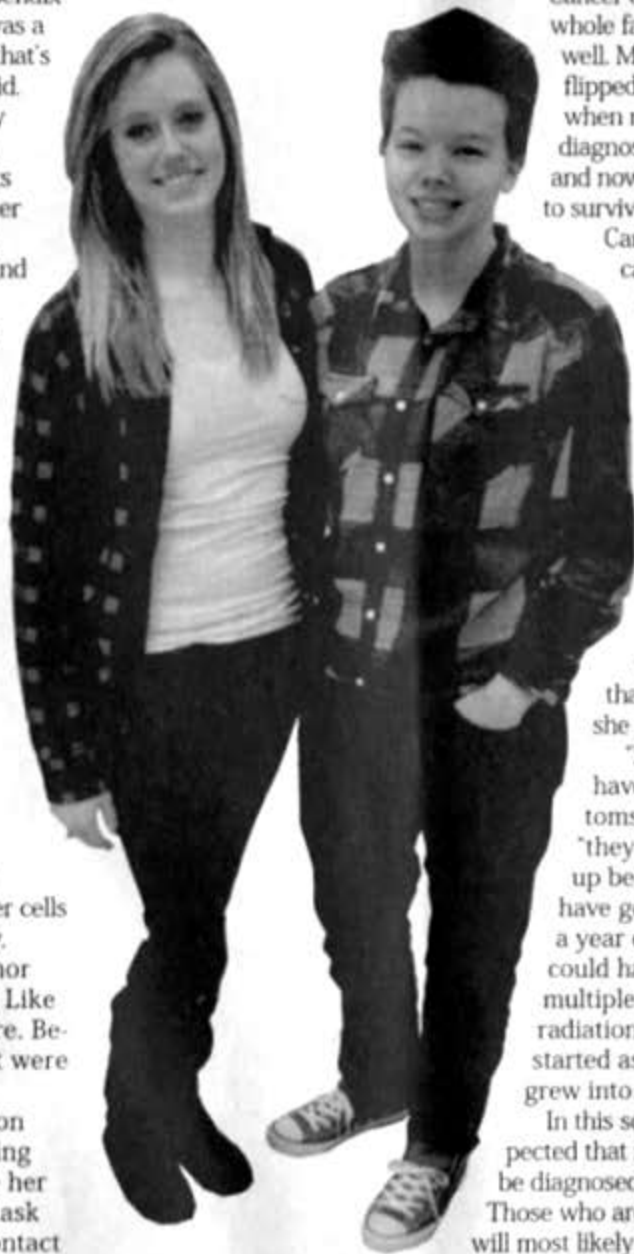
that's the one thing she regrets.

"If (students) have certain symptoms," Eakle said, "they should look it up because if I would have gotten tested a year earlier, then I could have prevented multiple surgeries and radiation. Because it started as one tumor and grew into seven."

In this school, it's expected that many of us will be diagnosed with cancer.

Those who aren't diagnosed will most likely have a loved one face cancer. Every person in this school will be affected by cancer at one point in their life.

Luckily, modern medicine has given doctors the knowledge they need to treat some cancers. But, sometimes, modern medicine isn't enough. That's why we need to spread awareness, donate money, get tested for cancer, become more knowledgeable of cancer, represent our family at cancer walks and fight for a cure to cancer.



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