

Grief is deep sorrow. Grief is what you feel when something is taken from you, like someone you love. Grief is crying, weeping and not being able to get out of bed and go on with your day. Grief is emptiness, loneliness, and heartbreak. It's not knowing what to do with yourself, feeling lost and hopeless, and unsure if you'll ever feel the same as *before*. Cancer has affected my life by giving me the adversity of grief.

Some people are lucky they have never lost someone close to them. Me, I've experienced it multiple times. The most grief I've felt was when my sister died. It was 2007, she was ten years old and I was seven. I wasn't sure how it happened. I knew she had cancer, Leukemia specifically, and I knew it was a bad disease. I was only a child and didn't understand the severity of it all and what my sister went through on a day to day basis. I didn't see her as just a girl with cancer. She was still my big sister, I still ran through the sprinklers with her in the summertime, we still played with Barbies together, and we still fought as sisters do. But then I would also visit her in the hospital, help her pick out a bandana or hat that matched her outfit every day to cover her bald head, and hold her hand as my mom gave her chemo shots on the couch at home as she screamed and cried. I will never forget the sound of her screaming in pain. But yet I still didn't understand the pain she endured, physically and emotionally. No one can unless they've been through it. But what I did notice was Tara confined to a hospital bed as all of her friends went to birthday parties and sleepovers. I noticed her begging to be able to go to school, to go to six flags, or to go swimming at our grandmother's house. All she wanted to do was be a normal kid.

With grief can also come guilt. It has been ten years since her death and I've had time to mature and understand more of everything that happened to my sister. I can't help but feel guilty that I didn't understand anything when she was actually going through it. This may sound

unreasonable since I was so young when she was being treated, and of course I wouldn't know what exactly was happening, but now that I have matured there is an ache in my heart realizing the severity of pain, restriction, and sadness that my sister went through at such a young age. No child should have to go through something so grueling and life-threatening. Childhood cancer and other childhood diseases are topics close to my heart, and something I passionately want to change.

After Tara's death, my family teamed up with family friends, whose mother had passed from cancer as well, and began a non-profit organization, the AnnMarie Chandlee Tara Stout Foundation. This is something I have gotten very involved in as I've grown older and hope to one day take over myself. By having an annual golf-outing, we raise money to aid families dealing with cancer: by paying a hospital bill, sending a donation for whatever they may need, or even making a dream come true through the Make-A-Wish Foundation. My involvement in my family's organization is what made me certain that I had a passion for helping people. I have decided to attend either Syracuse University or the University of South Carolina, majoring in Public Health on a pre-Physician Assistant track. With this career I will be able to pursue two passions of mine on a day to day basis -- science and helping others. I really hope to work in a hospital with children in the future. Even though I may not find the cure for cancer or make a huge difference in the medical field, I think that just helping people every day can make a difference.

Achieving my goals will take a lot of hard work and dedication, but I am ready for it. I have learned from Tara to never give up. For such a young girl, she was wise beyond her years and stronger than she seemed. Even with all she went through, Tara never asked "why me." She accepted what life had thrown at her and refused to let it ruin her spirit and positive attitude

towards life. She was not just a girl with cancer. She was a daughter, a sister, a best friend. A free-spirited, funny, intelligent, and wise young girl that brightened the lives of everyone she met. I strive to be more like her: to have a positive outlook on life, fight for what I want, and never give up. I have realized through this adversity that often times in life there are bumps in the road. Some bumps may be bigger than others, but your attitude as you try to get over them will reveal your character. I want to be strong, just like my sister, no matter what happens, so that I can remain focused on achieving what I want in life.

Money does play a huge role in my education. When my sister was diagnosed with Leukemia in 2005, my mom had to quit her job in order to be there for her: from taking her to doctors' appointments, staying home and giving her treatments, and especially driving to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and staying there with her for sometimes weeks at a time. This obviously played a huge role in our financial struggles, being that now we were a single income family, with thousands of dollars' worth of hospital bills, a child fighting for her life in the hospital, and two other children at home (my twin sister and I). At one point my family had become reliant on credit cards to pay the bills and unfortunately, we haven't fully bounced back yet from that debt. After my sister passed, my mom decided to go back to work. Unfortunately, she does not make as much as she used to so it's still hard to keep up with bills, expenses, and two teenage girls getting ready to go to college. I value my education and going to college is not optional for me. Although I know college won't be easy to pay for, I am determined to get as much help as I can in order to not put my parents, or my future self, in tons of debt.