

He used to call me fishface.

My father's father used to have a small garden in his backyard.

He would spend hours tending tomatoes and picking plums, filling basket after basket with fresh fruit he'd then give to his family.

He would often hand me a fresh strawberry while he worked. The strawberries were tart and tiny. My tiny toddler nose wrinkled at the taste.

He used to laugh at my reaction.

He used to call me fishface.

He died of colon cancer when I was barely three.

And nearly two decades later, my mother's father faces the same struggle in the fight for his life.

But life is what we should celebrate-the lives of those we have lost, and the strength of the survivors who continue to fight.

That's why I Relay. I Relay For Life.

1.5 million people are diagnosed with cancer for the first time every single year in the United States.

That's how many people live in Philadelphia.

That's over four thousand people a day.

That's three people in the time since I've begun speaking.

And cancer isn't just something that affects those with a diagnosis.

Consider the caregivers who move parents back into homes, and drive them to chemotherapy after a long day at work.

Remember the researchers who pore over computers for hours, trying to find hope for a cure.

Think of the families with medical bills that pile up on the desk, untouched in the hopes that the hospital will stop calling and start helping instead.

And think of the grandchildren who cling to fuzzy memories of a loved one, picking strawberries in a garden so long ago.

The impact of this disease is daunting. Even the word "cancer" trudges up dread and fear.

But the American Cancer Society knows that cancer fears the walker. And Relay For Life wants to run cancer right out of town.

Relay for Life is a 12-hour event hosted by the ACS, in your hometowns and high schools, all across the country. Participants sign up on teams and raise money year-round through fundraisers and donations in order to reach their event's overall goal.

On the night of the event, the teams walk around a track together, with friends and family, and celebrate the lives of those touched by cancer.

There's a survivor lap. Those who have fought this disease and won are celebrated and applauded as they make their way around.

There is a caregiver lap. Those who dedicate their time and their energy to those in need join the survivors in the celebration.

There is a Luminaria ceremony, a solemn reminder that there are so many who have lost their fight and have memories that must live on.

And there is a ceremony to Fight Back, to urge everyone who has worked so hard to beat this disease to "keep calm and Relay on."

For twelve hours we walk. For twelve hours we celebrate. For twelve hours, we fight back.

And all of the money that gets raised that night, that's been donated to the teams and the walkers, goes towards that fight.

The money goes to those researchers looking for the treatment today and the cure for tomorrow.

The money pays for the flights of children with leukemia to cities with the best hospitals in the country.

The money covers the hotel rooms for caregivers who want to stay with their loved ones during treatment.

We don't live in a world without cancer yet. We live in a world where survivor laps are full of people, where teenagers walk side-by-side with adults facing the same diagnosis.

But we do live in a world where one night of walking can make a difference for someone struggling with this disease.

Last year American University raised nearly a hundred thousand dollars towards their goal. This year, we plan to step right over that goal.

If every undergraduate at American University signed up, and just donated the ten-dollar minimum, we would have more than half of our goal already.

If the grad students pitched in, too, we would break our goal before we broke out of the starting gate.

As I mentioned before, my mother's father now too suffers from the same colon cancer that killed my Grampie. I've been lucky enough to spend 21 years with him, whether it be knocking back milkshakes at the Newport Creamery or going to the beach every Thursday.

And I'm lucky enough to be able to spend many more years with him, too.

My grandfather is in complete recovery after a year and a half of treatment, and I know how much effort, time, and money went into making sure of that.

Cancer fears the walker. We shouldn't walk for a cure-we should run towards it as fast as we can.

A ten-dollar donation means skipping two mornings of Starbucks. It costs less than a TDR meal swipe. And you'll definitely feel better afterwards, too.

Cancer can be as bitter as the first hand-picked strawberry of the season.

But Relay For Life can keep our loved ones cared for, and ensure that their lives and memories are just as sweet.

