

Non-Fiction

Section 3

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Growing up is a challenging task, but when you're eight and told you might not live long enough to see your age in double digits, everything changes.

Gaby is a 20-year-old woman born and raised in Cambridge, Ontario. When she was just eight years old, her family was told she probably didn't have more than two years to live.

"I remember feeling true anger and sadness for the first time. Up until that point, the only negative emotions I had were my mom not buying me the doll in Walmart or not being able to wear my Halloween costume to school everyday... I could barely grasp the concept of death, yet I was being told I will probably die soon," Gaby said.

She went through her first round of chemotherapy, then her second and third. There was no trace of leukemia in her blood or bone marrow. Things started to look up briefly. After a few more rounds of chemo, her doctors informed her family that she had four different genetic blood mutations, making it likely that she would relapse.

The doctors then advised her to have a bone marrow transplant to reduce the risk of relapse, but since the blood mutations were genetic, the leukemia could still return.

“It was like, I was told awful news, and then decent news, and then bad news again. First death and then recovery, and then a transplant, all in less than a year, and I had only just turned 9,” she recalled.

Gaby and her family started preparing for the transplant. She started chemo again in much stronger doses to wipe away her existing bone marrow, so that the transplanted bone marrow could be engrafted.

She spent the next five months recovering in the hospital, fighting for her life with every ounce of strength she had.

“It was so scary, being that young and suddenly aware of my own mortality. I remember thinking I might not wake up if I fall asleep. I won’t be able to say goodbye to all my school and dance friends, maybe not even to my mom,” she said.

One thing she and her family are grateful for is her smooth recovery from the transplant. Now that she is older, she knows that kidney and heart failures are common after a transplant, and sometimes people are put on high doses of steroids.

Gaby often thinks about the time she spent in the hospital and all the events that took place during her treatment. She recalls specific memories, like the time her mom brought her a portable movie player and watched movies in bed together. Gaby has also thought about how wonderful the support she had around her was.

“One thing that kept me strong and wanting to fight was the love and support I got from my friends and family. I remember everyone at my dance studio filming a video with all the cards, teddy bears, and balloons they were going to bring to the hospital, and cheering for my recovery... It was sad and made me cry, but at the same time it was beautiful knowing how many people cared for me.” She explained.

Gaby is grateful that her original prognosis, which was two years or less, was wrong. Even though it was tiring, she never stopped fighting and always kept going.

“I’m just happy now that I’m in my 20s to know that I didn’t have to say goodbye to everyone I loved before I was even 10,” Gaby said. “Going through cancer at such a young age taught me how valuable my life is. I spend every day doing things I love with the people I love.”

Word Count - 613

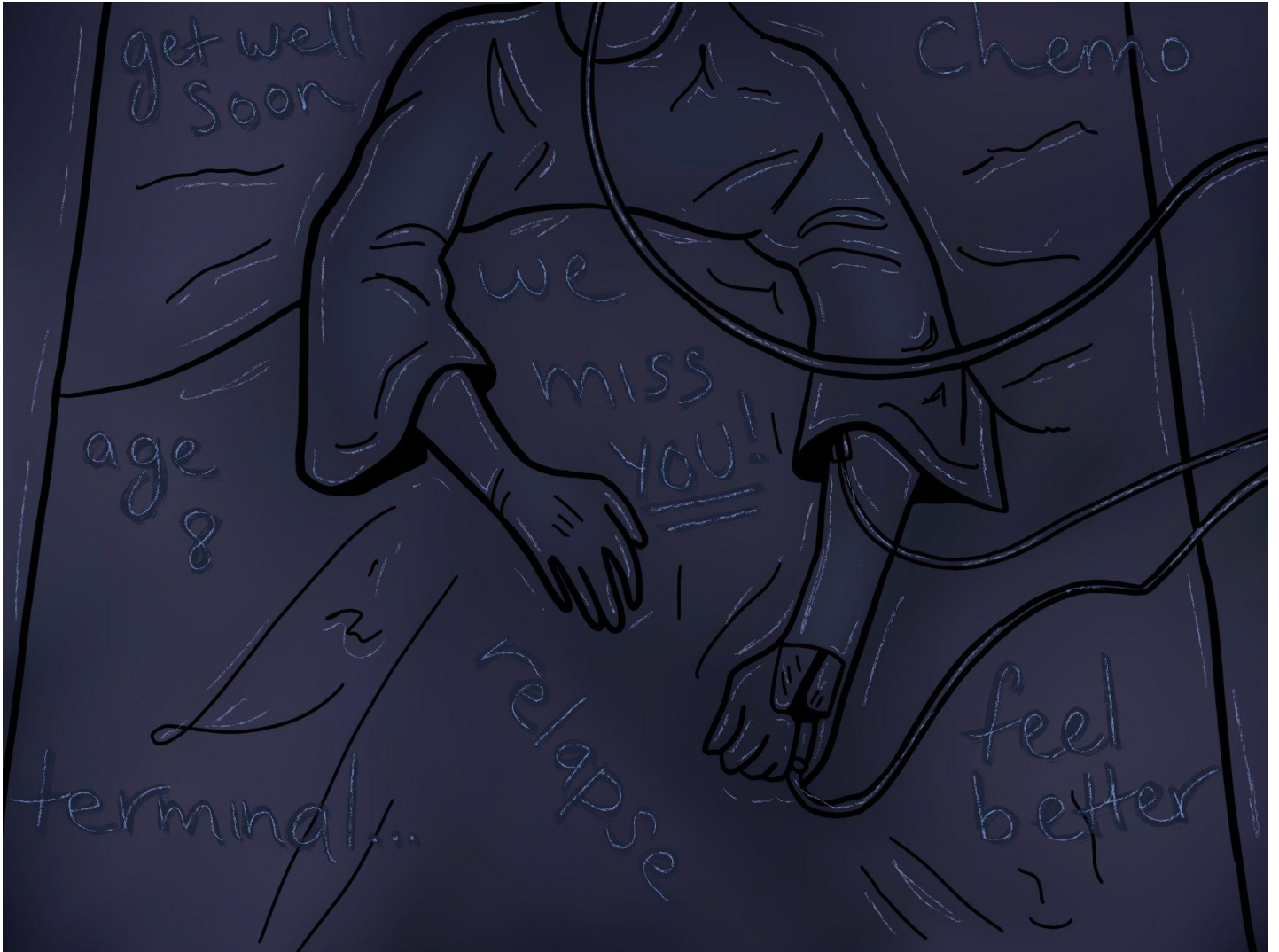


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