

2009 - 2010
CBC Writing Competition
Junior Entry
Category: Non Fiction
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Supermom

Last year, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. When she told me, a million thoughts raced through my head. So many questions, but no words. What was I supposed to say? I just stared at her. Nothing prepares you for life changing moments like this. I went and hugged her. She started crying; I cried too, but I didn't know why. All I knew was that the next few months would be tough.

In the next few weeks, I didn't tell anyone. I didn't want everyone knowing about personal details in my life. I knew my mom was scared, and I think that's why she did it: She told people. She told people about the cancer.

It shouldn't have bothered me so much, but it did. I mean, I didn't even tell my best friends, but suddenly, my counselor, my teachers, and even my soccer coach knew. They all knew. They all knew and all put on the same mask of expression whenever the subject came up. Tilted head, slightly furrowed brow, as if to say "This must be hard for you, I'm sorry." I know that all these people were trying to be nice, but frankly, it bugged the heck out of me. People would ask, "How's your mom doing?" And every time, I would have the same boring, habitual answer: "She's doing well." This response not only answered the question, but also sent across the message that *I don't want to talk about this subject with you, here, now.*

On the outside, my mom appeared calm and collected, but on the inside, I think she was freaking out.

In the summer, she started chemo treatments while I spent a month of my summer vacation on the east coast. I went to a choir camp in New Jersey, spent a week with my sister in Philadelphia, and went to New York City for the first time. I was having a blast while my family was stuck in the Tri-Cities. I was not home when my mom's hair started falling out. I heard about it over the phone, and part of me wished I had been there, because I knew that my dad and my brother wouldn't know what to do. She needed a hug, and I wished I could have given her one.

The day before I flew home, my brother texted me and told me not to stare at my mother when I got home. He said most of her hair was gone, and that she was worried what I would think of her 'new look'. *She* was worried what *I* would think.

By the fall, my mom was completely bald. And by the fall, even more people knew. It seemed that in the few short preceding months, the news of my mother's cancer had spread like wildfire. Even the checker at Safeway knew. To this day, I'm still not sure why this bugs me so much. Maybe it's because if people know, then we have to talk about it, and I don't know what to say except, "She's doing well." But in reality, I honestly don't know how she's doing. I know she appears to be fine, but I always wonder if there is something inside that isn't 'just fine.'

What are you supposed to say, when people ask you a seemingly simple question, such as "How's your mom?" There is no curriculum that prepares you. I never thought coming up with responses to this question would be as hard as it was.

Thinking back, I never really stopped to consider the hard fight against cancer. I never really reacted to the news of the illness because I was worried that it might change her into a different person. I won't let my mom be changed into a different person because she is the one

who holds our family together, and without her, nothing would be the same. She's the peanut butter to our jelly; the head of the family whether she realizes it or not. She's supermom, and will always be supermom, even with breast cancer.