

Dear Patti,

I truly appreciated your visit to our class last week. In our short conversation, I learned some really important points relating to my topic. My topic started out as ableism relating to cancer, and how people that don't deal with cancer usually don't understand the challenges associated with it. My topic has evolved to be "Supporting a Person with Cancer". Your words inspired me to write these two paragraphs in my essay:

I have no direct experience with cancer, but I am aware that interaction is one of the simplest ways to support a person with cancer, and one of the most significant. My premise for writing this paper is that I know there are many people out there who want to support a cancer patient, but steer clear of communicating with them because they don't know what to say and they don't want to tell them some platitude like "I'm here for you" or "Let me know if you need anything". I had a conversation with Patti in class the other day, an adviser in the HBHS department at Cornell University and a pancreatic cancer survivor. She said that dealing with cancer is a full-time job, and no cancer patient wants to be a volunteer manager as well. It can be more of a burden for cancer patients to reach out to people who promise to be there than it is for them to just do certain tasks themselves. Even if a cancer patient can do things like errands, a friend reaching out and offering to do a specific errand would give them one less thing to do, and one less thing to think about.

I think a lot of people overlook having a casual conversation with someone with cancer because they think they have to contribute some kind of advice, or have a deeply emotional conversation about cancer and the chance of dying, or sign up to be their assistant on a regular basis, etc. Patti mentioned another very interesting point: she doesn't want her life to be about cancer in other peoples' eyes. She wants to be seen as Patti, the person she was before cancer, and the person she still is. From my experiences so far, I have learned that simple communication and human interaction is supportive on its own. Even if the person with cancer doesn't need support, who doesn't enjoy a nice conversation with a nice person?

I'm sorry that cancer has been part of your life. I want to share one life lesson I've learned that I apply to situations no matter how bad or good they are; the phrase "Everything is". I use this phrase to describe things in the most meaningless way possible. The premise is that the *existence* of whatever you might be trying to describe is more beautiful than any way you could possibly describe it. I believe that thinking about how bad something is only makes it seem worse. Thinking about how amazing being alive is in general allows me to see everything else as insignificant, and helps me to avoid ruminating about any particularly bad experience.

If you have any life lessons that you have learned that you would want to share I would love to hear them! I would also be more than happy to hear about your life and keep you updated with my life. I just got accepted to Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach for Aerospace Engineering and I'm going to start taking classes in Summer B session. I intend to participate in the Air Force ROTC program there with the goal of becoming a pilot when I graduate, and my ultimate career goal is to be an astronaut. Not to be existential or anything, but hundreds of years from now, the little things that make us smile every day won't be etched in stone or documented in a museum. But making someone else happy is more significant to me than anything else. I love being able to share these moments in life and I'm looking forward to hearing back from you!

Sincerely,

Sean Johnston

