Everyday someone’s life is impacted or changed. They had a baby, they lost a close friend or relative, they hit the jackpot at the casino, or they simply tried a new food. Every single day things happen to people, both good and bad, amazing and terrible. in fact you never do truly know what’s going to happen to you when you wake up and start your day. There are an infinite number of life changing events that can happen to you in the twelve or so hours that you spend awake each day. Unfortunately I woke up one day and was thrown for a loop that I never in a million years would’ve even considered happening to me. On February 22, 2014 I was diagnosed with Burkitt's leukemia.

No one ever expects them selves to be diagnosed with an incurable disease. I can guarantee you that not a single person on this earth has woken up one day and said “I’m going to be told I have cancer today”, it just doesn’t happen. Therefore when you are told what's happening to you it comes as a huge shock. being told you have cancer just isn’t something you can ever be ready to hear. It’s one of those things that your mind just can’t process it in a day, a week, or even a month. It takes time for you to truly begin to understand what’s going on to you.

I hadn't felt very good for about two weeks before my family and friends started to truly worry that something was wrong. I had the strangest symptoms, numb bottom lip, teeth were sore, gums continuously bled. I also had some more common types of aches and pains, like headaches and fatigue, but no one could seem to figure out what was wrong. My mom and I went all over the place to try and figure out what was wrong. We went to the dentist for my teeth because maybe I had a cavity. We went to the doctors and they suggested maybe a concussion, but no one could figure out what was wrong though and I was starting to panic. Eventually my pediatric doctor finally said they should maybe take blood, just to see, so I went in and they drew blood from my arm and said if we see anything we’ll let you know. A few days passed and I just stayed the same.

On February 22, 2014 my mom came home from work and told me that we needed to go to chop because my doctor wanted to do a few more tests. Irrattated I complied and got up out of bed and went and got in the car with my mom and dad. As we were driving to the hospital we passed a Mcdonalds and I asked if we could stop and grab a soda and a milkshake, my mom said sure and we pulled in. That's when I knew something was wrong. My mom? Stopping at fast food upon my request AND letting me get soda and a milk shake? There was no way everything was ok, but I kept that thought to myself. We left and continued on our way to chop. Once we
got there we were taken straight back and into a room. Doctors came in the room and my parents stepped out. Oddly they felt my stomach for a solid thirty minutes. The doctors then left the room and came back with my parents. They looked at me and calmly said, ‘you have Leukemia, a type of cancer and will require chemotherapy’.

My mind could not wrap itself around the idea that I had cancer. It just could not process it. My first thought was that I had some special type of cancer where I would be better in a week or two. All this had happened over the span of a day, I was exhausted and could no longer think straight, I was then given a lot of information and sent up to the oncology floor. Nurses came in and out of my room for hours, giving me blood and having me take things. It was the most chaotic day in my entire life. It sent me on a two year journey full of ups, downs, loops, and twists that included being diagnosed with an entire different type of cancer

I believe that it is not possible for someone to go through such an epidemic and not change as a human. Whether it be for the better or worse, they will change. Looking at myself as a human being before my fight with cancer and currently, I feel as though I was forced to grow up too fast. That I was forced to quickly become more mature for my age then I normally would’ve been. This was the greatest impact cancer had on me, was being forced to grow up and mature faster than I would’ve if I had not been diagnosed.

I was 14 when I was told I had cancer, it’s not something a 14 year old should have to deal with or hear, ever. Yet it happened to me and there was nothing I could do about it but fight. I was not a fighter when this all started, nor am I now. I’m a kid who wants to survive and if that means voluntarily allowing people to put poison into me then so be it. That is something cancer changed in me, is my will to continue surviving. I refuse to die at this point, when I was 14 I did not have a do or die mentality, but now as a 16 year old it is clearly something I have been forced to develop, a do or die mentality.

The greatest change I went through mentally while battling cancer the first time was an appreciation for the smaller things in life. That sounds like such a cliche as I sit here and type that but it’s true. I don’t walk down the street and smell the flowers like in movies, but I can take joy out of the fact that it's a nice day and I can go walk outside because I’m not stuck sitting in a hospital room dying. The simple fact that I can get up right now, go into my kitchen, eat something, and not throw it up immediately after eating it is a wonderful feeling. It’s the small and weird things like that, that I notice now. Only because it was taken from me and I know what it's like to lose such simple things.

The last and most complicated change that I have been able to tell is my priorities and my maturity level. Lets face it, most high school students find a way to try underage drinking. I guess it’s just something that fascinates us and intrigues us. I can not give you any good reason for why we’d want to drink but we do. Ever since my cancer I have had restrictions put on what I can and can’t do because I am immune compromised. For example I am not allowed to be in crowded areas not matter what. This is a very frustrating thing to have to deal with as a 16 year old boy, but I can’t do anything about it. I feel as though I was forced to mature earlier than other people were because of my situation. It’s not a bad thing but it can be hard to deal with. I see the
dumb decisions made by friends or the pointless drama of high school and I shake my head and sigh knowing what's really important and what kids think are important are two very different things. Now you might be asking how does any of this tie into the drinking and parties. Well I have to make the choice to not go to these types of events with my friends because I'm immune compromised. I have to make the more mature choice because for my safety. It all ties back to the fact that I was forced to grow up too fast. I see things in a different way then another kid my age does. I have to make harder choices than most other 16 year olds do.

The changes in my life due to having cancer were both good and bad. I matured which is a great thing but I now see the world in a different way which does make my life harder. I matured in an aspect of appreciation and decision making because of my situation. I strongly believe I am a better person because of the changes I was forced to make, but I also believe that I truly was forced to grow up too fast and that’s how cancer affected me.