

## Team Telomere Scholarship Essay

As anyone with a telomere disorder would know, there are series of challenges that must be overcome. The last year has been another challenging one for me. I was hit with cancer for the third time in my life, and this is my second fight with squamous cell carcinoma. As I visited my doctor last summer, he noticed my tongue looked “angry.” A biopsy found cancer on my tongue; it looked like it was probably stage one cancer. Last November, I had the cancer removed, but it was larger than we had thought--stage two cancer. The protocol then is to have lymph nodes removed. That was done last January. This pathology report showed that there was cancer in the lymph nodes as well--stage three cancer. I had to undergo 30 radiation treatments to my neck, which I finished in April 2021.

I am hopeful that the radiation treatments are successful and the cancer does not return. Unfortunately, I had to put my education on hold during the radiation treatments because it burned my skin, made me nauseous, and sapped all of my strength. On top of all the cancer treatments over the last year, what was supposed to be a routine doctor appointment ended up with an emergency appendectomy. All of these surgeries happened during COVID-19 restrictions, meaning I had to face them alone without any support from my family. However, today, July 1, 2021, I registered for my next course at Liberty University On-line because, as I have said before, I will not let my telomere disorder define me. I am ready to continue my degree plan to get my degree in psychology.

The Nancy Cornelius Scholarship will have a positive impact on my life. It will not only help me pay for my courses as I only get a small disability check each month. But more importantly, I want to use my degree to help the children of military members that suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. My own father has PTSD and traumatic brain injury from his

combat service in Afghanistan. I know that the children of these heroes also suffer from the invisible wounds of war. It is fascinating to learn about treatments for these heroes in my psychology courses like cognitive behavioral therapy, but more needs to be done to help the spouses and children of our brave service members.

Their families are sacrificing as well. Sometimes when a veteran is suffering from PTSD and TBI, he or she can unintentionally direct anger and frustrations toward family members, which can cause harmful psychological symptoms for the entire family. This can also cause a negative downward spiral. I have heard many people tell me how I inspire them by how I deal with my own health issues, and I want to be there to help the children of service members. Whether it is writing a children's book or volunteering at my local military hospital, this scholarship will help me be able to support others.