

My name is Amara Strande.

I am 20 years old, and at the age of 15, I was diagnosed with Stage 4 fibrolamellar hepatocellular carcinoma, an incredibly rare form of liver cancer that occurs in 1 in 5,000,000. Due to its rarity and low survival rate, there is no standardized form of systematic treatment other than surgery. There are no curative options, no road map, and no plan.

Thanks to its unpredictable nature, fibrolamellar at times feels like it kills in ways too cruel to comprehend. I've had over 20 surgeries, including two liver resections and one open chest surgery. My first tumor weighed in at a hefty 15 lbs, putting me in a coma that lasted over a month. While my body underwent the horrors of surgery gone wrong, kidney failure, and over 75% of my liver removed, my mind went through a series of neverending nightmares that felt all too real. Haunting me to this very day through PTSD and a scar on my abdomen spanning more than a foot long.

Since that time, I have undergone several rounds of chemotherapy and radiation that had no effect. I have had many surgeries that had kept the cancer at bay. 2022 is the year that my cancer became unstoppable. Last spring, I learned that all four of the tumors removed in the December of 2021 surgery in New York City - All of them grew back, now worse than ever before. The tumor in the brachial plexus grew back wrapping around the upper right side of my chest fracturing my first and third rib, with an additional tumor growing next to my heart. The pain it has created in my right hand is excruciating. And it has affected my voice as well. And little can be done to subside it - the pain.

They can't do surgery this time. There are no more treatments to try. I can no longer move my fingers to braid my hair or play piano.

Growing up I lived in the 3M plume and attended Tartan Senior High School, where I met many classmates also directly affected by cancer as a result of what we now understand these chemicals to be, PFAS. When toxins in the environment hit a person's DNA at a particular vulnerability a cell mutates, resulting in cancer or other serious illnesses. One of my cells mutated, and cancer began to grow.

Unfortunately, people being subjected to dangerous chemicals unknowingly happens far too often. It's a repeated offense that has festered in our land, water, and bodies for decades. And despite public knowledge of said environmental waste dumping, little has been done to clean up or hold those deemed responsible for the deadly cause and effect that has robbed my community.

We have all paid a high price due to large corporations carelessly dumping known toxic chemicals. However, we have yet to see public health repaid for the time, money, and the emotional turmoil inflicted by these same chemicals at the expense of our lives.

I've spent the last five years fighting cancer with every ounce of my being. And I will for the rest of my life. Corporations must stop the production of these toxins and be held accountable and pay for the damage they've done. Through no fault of my own, I was exposed to these toxic chemicals. And as a result, I will die with this cancer. My life has been forever changed by this disease and the physical and emotional toll it is taking on me and my loved ones is unimaginable.

But my story is not unique.

In my community, I see neighbors and friends who have also been affected by these toxic chemicals. This is not just an individual problem. It's a community problem, and it's time for action to be taken. We need stricter regulations on the use of PFAS chemicals and more research to be done on the long term effects of exposure. We also need more education for the public, about the dangers of these chemicals so that people can make informed choices about the products they use.

I also want to see the cleanup of these toxic chemicals and the corporations held accountable for their actions. The health and well-being of our communities should be a top priority, and we must take action to protect ourselves and future generations from the devastating effects of PFAS. I care about this issue because it has personally changed the direction of my life and the lives of those around me. PFAS robbed my sister and I of a normal childhood in our teenage years.

But it is not just about me. It is about the health and safety of all of us.

We must come together to demand change and hold those responsible accountable for their actions. I urge all of you to take a stand against these toxic chemicals and demand change. Together we can make a difference and protect ourselves and future generations from the devastating effects of PFAS.

Thank you.