Dear Younger Me,

Cancer was something that you never expected would be a vital turning point in your life. You were freshly 18, a freshman in college, with a positive outlook on your future just beginning as a young adult branching out into the world. Then suddenly, your life changed on that daunting Friday evening on December 3, 2021. You were in that hospital bed for hours, being poked with needles repeatedly, wondering when you'd ever be able to leave the hospital and if this was your permanent new life. Cancer was the only thing you now saw as your future, and your only future.

You had so many questions; you didn't understand how you got cancer and why it was suddenly impacting you so roughly now. Why did it have to start as soon as you began college? You went from being physically independent to depending on nurses to help bathe and feed you. You were constantly getting blood taken and a new medicine almost every hour of the day. You were stuck in that bed, aching, and just ready to move. You don't know this yet, but you got out of that bed.

You get out of that bed, and one day you leave that hospital. You return to school, and you go to classes. Life is different at that point, but you make it; you do it. Despite all of the odds, you DO it. You see your 19th birthday, and you become a sophomore on time. You progress through your college years, and you graduate on time. You experience milestones that any other person your age would experience: new relationships, family outings, networking. You become and grow as a BUSINESS student through college, and you grow in so many other areas of your life.

You end up graduating college at 21 years old with your bachelor's in marketing, and since graduation you've worked at not one but two banks. You thought you had your major figured out when you first began: finance. Who knew you'd change to marketing? Graduating and doing so with a completely different major, wow. That's something you never thought you'd be able to do on that bed at 18. Before you graduated, you began your real estate career too and got your Alabama real estate license. In less than a month, by the way, and at 20 years old. You're still figuring this career path out, but you realized this is your passion. At the beginning of college, you didn't even fully know what your passion was.

That's not all, though; you are in school AGAIN, but this time, you are on the pre-nursing route. Yep, Healthcare. You realized that you would love to be able to help others and especially take care of them during their most vulnerable moments. Since you know what it's like to be in that bed, you can't wait to bring so much love and support back into those rooms, but this time as the caregiver. In addition to that, this year, you are a certified home health aide. Two licenses down in just two years.

You should be amazed at the growth that you've experienced. Yet, you never thought you'd get out of that bed. You did just that AND more.

You've had so much support through a very special organization, Cancer for College, that would end up becoming family in more ways than one. They helped you get through college financially

and provided so many resources. They helped you see the SCHOLAR in yourself. And today, with pride, you can say that you've excelled and are a scholar in multiple areas of your life.

I'm so proud of you. You didn't know it then, but you will know soon enough. You are going to do so many wonderful things. Your journey isn't over yet. Don't ever give up; we still have so much more to do in our near future. You've got this.

Take care,
Nekiyah

