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Mother and Daughter Vow to Fight Cancer as Teammates

By Nick Marnell



Fighting cancer is a family affair for the Browns. Photo provided

The Brown family of Moraga had just survived a terrifying experience, but an encore lurked in the shadows.

Finley Brown beat kidney cancer late last year, making international news as a group of her biggest fans, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District firefighters, escorted her to her final chemotherapy treatment.

"I never knew it was possible for someone to look forward to going to chemo," said her mom, A.J. Brown, as her 6-year-old daughter beamed from the fire engine on the way to the hospital.

But instead of emitting a massive exhale, Brown, general manager of the California Academy of Performing Arts, fought through a constant state of anxiety. She did not feel relieved at all. "We just went through something really tough for our family. Why aren't I walking on air?" she said.

The answer came out of nowhere.

The Browns were about to depart on a mid-April Hawaii trip, presented to Finley by the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Before the family left, Brown visited her Lafayette dermatologist for a Botox treatment, and she asked the doctor to check out a mole on her leg. The dermatologist removed the mole and called Brown after the biopsy result.

"I know what you just went through with your baby girl,' the doctor told Brown, "but this is melanoma." Brown, whose family has a cancer history, knew it was the deadliest form of skin cancer. She set up an appointment with a plastic surgeon in Lafayette for when she returned from Hawaii.

"I appreciated the irony of taking Finley on her Make-A-Wish trip; meanwhile I'm the one with cancer," Brown said. "My vanity saved me. I'm probably the first person in history who can say Botox saved my life."

The surgeon cut out a chunk of Brown's leg, with Finley nurturing through the procedure and the rehab. "It was magical to see her growth and her wisdom," Brown said.

Brown initially felt angry - that the family should have been done with cancer, that their quota was filled. Her spirituality helped dispel the rage. "You forgot what family you were messing with. You forgot that God has been doing beautiful work through Finley, and He was close by," she posted on her Facebook page in a "message to cancer." "He made sure we caught you before your tentacles got too deep."

As Brown continues to recuperate, she admonished Lamorindans to not take anything for granted. "Get checked out," Brown said. "Especially if you are over 40, with light skin and light hair and blue

eyes.

"What a shame it would be for anybody to lose their life over something that could be prevented."

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