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Final Haley's Run for a Reason Color Run on Fourth of July

By Sora O'Doherty



Pictured: Aislinn Welch, Jacqueline Welch, Suzanne Tom, Jeremy Martin and Brenda Martin.
Photo Sora O'Doherty

This year will be the last "Haley's Run for a Reason Color Run" in Orinda. After organizing the event in support of the Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood Foundation for the past 14 years, organizer Suzanne Tom has decided that it's time to move on. But she is ending with her most colorful run ever. This year runners will be able to run through blue, magenta, purple and chartreuse color stations.

Tom began the run about five years after losing her daughter Haley to Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood, which is like Sudden Infant Death Syndrome but occurs after the first year of life. When Haley died, her sister Megan was just 19 days old. Megan is now 18 years old, and Aston, Tom's son, is 16. If Haley were alive, she'd be leaving college and starting on her new life, so Tom thought that this was a good place to stop.

she acknowledges that this is a difficult issue for many people, not knowing whether it is more painful to speak of lost children or to never mention them. But Tom says that for the past 14 years she and her family have imagined the bright, playful little girl growing up.

She started the run in part because it pained her to realize that people had stopped talking about Haley, and

When Haley died in 2000, there was no such thing as Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood. Two moms started the SUCD group as a part of a SIDS program. Since then SUCD has grown into its own foundation with a board of directors. Last year saw the first SUCD conference being held for medical researchers and SUCD families. Although it is a very rare condition, only 1.5 out of 100,000 toddlers die of SUCD, there are now some 600 affected families worldwide. At the conference it was revealed that scientists have been able to identify the cause of death in a child who died two years after Haley. Seizures appear to be a big factor in the condition.

Tom will continue to be an SUCD ambassador, more involved on the national level than currently. It is possible that another SUCD family may want to continue the fun run in the future. In the past 13 years, Haley's run has raised over \$350,000 for the SUCD foundation. Families that experience SUCD are now immediately provided with resources, which is amazing, Tom said. Haley's family has made a very conscious decision to maintain a happy family life.

"How heartbreaking it would have been for Haley if she looked down and we'd been sad," Tom added. Also, "we don't put things off until later." Tom realized that she had very few photos of herself with Haley, as she had usually been the photographer, so she encourages other families to take a lot of photos with all family members.

"Grieving is a very lonely process," Tom concluded; "I'm glad there is a support group for moms now."

Check in and late registrations for Haley's Run for a Reason will be from 7 to 8 a.m. on July 4. The 5-mile run and the 2-mile family walk will start at 8 a.m.

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