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Stanley Student to Participate in Bay Area Brain Tumor Walk

By Jean Follmer



Emily LaRoche Photo provided

When Stanley Middle School 6th grader Emily LaRoche was 4 years old, she faced a hurdle few children should: she was diagnosed with two meningioma brain tumors.

Meningioma tumors (the most common type of tumor found in the brain) are diagnosed in about one in 1,000 people each year and at least 138,000 people in the U.S. are living with one, but they are rare in children, according to the National Brain Tumor Society. Fortunately most meningioma tumors are benign, but they do require treatment since they can put undue pressure on the brain as they grow.

After brain surgery and proton therapy, Emily's tumors stopped growing. The treatment hasn't slowed Emily down. She currently plays soccer for the Lafayette Moraga Youth Association (LMYA), swims for the Rancho Colorados Wahoos and is trying her first year of track.

To underscore brain tumor awareness, Emily is preparing to participate in the Bay Area Brain Tumor Walk in Golden Gate Park on May 2. Emily participated in the walk with her father, Lindsay LaRoche, for the first time last year.

Emily said she learned a lot from the experience. "There are a lot of people that have brain tumors; I saw it wasn't just me," said Emily. "I met a girl there last year and we exchanged e-mail addresses."

Emily's father also had positive things to say about the Brain Tumor Walk. "It's quite an uplifting day," he said. "The walk is about three miles and there's no competition. One of the fun aspects is all of the teams that are there."

Because she enjoyed the experience so much, Emily is returning this year with her own team: Emily's Tumor Tamers.

Emily's Tumor Tamers is poised to be a formidable team this year. The LaRoches have 18 relatives, many from Canada, coming in for the event. In all,

about 40 people are planning to walk. Lindsay said they already have seven rooms reserved at the Lafayette Park Hotel.

"I'm really excited for my cousins to come and for us all to walk together as a family. I'm also really happy that they're all taking the time to come here from Canada," said Emily. Emily's mom, Deborah LaRoche and her big sister, Katie, will be there too. Katie has been a tremendous source of support for her little sister.

The LaRoche Family set the team fundraising goal at \$25,000. All money will go to support brain tumor research and patient services at the National Brain Tumor Society. The family invites members of the Lamorinda community to join them in the walk on May 2. Participation includes a team shirt designed by Emily, emblazoned with an elephant she drew.

"I think they're really strong," said Emily. (But they're clearly not as strong as Emily.)

For further information about the walk or to make a contribution, visit Emily's website which can be found at www.braintumorwalk.org under "Emily's Tumor Tamers."

Reach the reporter at: jean@lamorindaweekly.com

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