



You Are Not Alone

Designed by Anna Kristina, Age 11

Hometown: San Antonio, TX (born in Bratislava, Slovakia)

Medical Condition: Her brother, Peter Lukas, was diagnosed with cancer

Anna Kristina's younger brother, Peter Lukas, was diagnosed with a yolk sac cancerous tumor when he was just 10 months old. The illness brought its share of trauma to the young boy and tears and stress to his entire family. However, Anna Kristina and her siblings showed great compassion towards their kid brother, playing with him and praying for him whenever they could.

"My kids never said they were jealous of all the attention given to Peter Lukas even though they might have felt less attention from us," says mom, Alena. "The experience made them stronger."

The Alfaros feel very fortunate to be a part of Starlight and its Great Escapes family activities program. Alena shares, "When someone in your family is sick and there is suddenly a black cloud hanging over your home, the last thing on your mind is to go out and have fun. Between a sudden diagnosis of cancer, immediate surgery, frequent check ups for Peter Lukas, four children at two different schools, work and bills, we simply didn't have any energy left to plan fun activities. When we finally became a part of Starlight and were given opportunities to attend Great Escapes, it helped us remember that the brighter sides of life still existed and it was so exciting to meet other people with similar challenges."



Anna Kristina created 'You Are Not Alone' to remind young people who are ill that they are, in fact, not alone. The images of figures surrounded by other figures are meant to remind hospitalized children of the communities of support that surround them -- their parents, siblings, friends, and other young children around the world also facing illness.

"I felt so happy when I learned I had won," shares Anna Kristina. "I never thought I would win a big contest like this -- to me, it was one of the best things ever. I hope my drawing brings young patients happiness and joy, knowing they are surrounded by people who care for them. If they just believe in this, then I know they will feel better."

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Melody of the Sky

Designed by Myron, Age 16

Hometown: Des Plaines, IL
Medical Condition: Diabetes

Myron was diagnosed with diabetes when he was 9 years old. He remembers how his life underwent many changes after the diagnosis -- his days were suddenly tasked with constantly monitoring his sugar and diet. It was also after his diagnosis that his family became a part of Starlight.

"My experience with Starlight has been positive, and it makes me appreciate that organizations like this exist" he says. "My family shares nice times together when we attend Starlight events."

Thanks to Starlight's Great Escapes family activities program, Myron has attended bowling parties and trips to the circus, however, his favorite event was a dinner cruise off Chicago's Navy Pier.

"My family sat there on the boat sharing a meal while we watched the sun set in the horizon. It is a great memory."

Myron recreates this memory in his art work, 'Melody in the Sky.' His design is a series of suns and moons blowing out rainbows and music notes against a sky changing from day to night.



"I wanted to create a soothing piece of art because that is what kids need most in a hospital -- visuals to help them relax," says Myron. "Sitting in a hospital bed with suns and moons to look at would have certainly brought me some relief during my own hospital experiences as a child. It felt cool when I learned I had won. My only hope was to create something that would help brighten a child's day -- and night."

Myron is an aspiring artist who constantly draws in sketchbooks. Interestingly, he was caught working on 'Melody in the Sky' while he was at school and got in trouble with his teacher. When he explained it was for hospitalized kids, she let him off the hook.



One Small Star

Designed by Noah, Age 15

Hometown: Chicago, IL

Medical Condition: Asthma

Noah has had asthma since he was 10 years old. He remembers the days leading up to his diagnosis: "I was so sick. I couldn't breathe. I had been sick before but I knew at the time that there was something different happening inside of me - I wasn't only miserable. I was in actual pain." Noah was finally taken to the doctor, who shared that Noah not only had asthma but that it was brought on by his father's smoking. Noah's world seemed to grow smaller after his diagnosis. He had to avoid places that were dusty or filled with pollen or dander. He couldn't be around his father while he smoked. He also could not take part in strenuous activity.

"It was -- and continues to be -- so frustrating," says Noah. "No matter how careful I was in selecting what places I could actually visit, there was always that risk of suddenly having an asthma attack and not being able to breathe." Through it all, Noah has learned to be vigilant.



Noah became a part of Starlight four years ago. He enjoys Starlight's Great Escapes family activities program because these events remind him he can have fun in spite of his illness.

Several years ago, Noah was invited to share his story at Starlight Midwest's gala. His family was taken to the event in a limousine.

"It was an unforgettable experience," Noah says.

Noah's biggest goal in life is to overcome his asthma, finish school and travel around the world. He often daydreams of the places he could visit if he had a magic carpet. These faraway places are the inspirations behind his art work, 'One Small Star.' Locations in the design include the Great Wall of China (Noah often hears stories about the landmark from his uncle who often goes to China on business trips.), the Taj Mahal (His family is of Indian descent) and the Golden Gate Bridge (Noah hopes to make it to California one day to pursue acting).



A Touch of Neon

Designed by Rebecca, Age 14

Hometown: Manhattan, IL
Medical Condition: Crohn's Disease

When Rebecca was a young girl, she was always sick. Doctors could never fully explain the cause behind her chronic diarrhea and stomachaches. Her own mother assumed it was always the stomach flu.

"It would have made sense if my symptoms were not going on for months at a time," shares Rebecca. At the age of six, she was finally diagnosed with Crohn's Disease. "It was the first time I had ever heard of the illness, but it was not the last."

Rebecca's diagnosis definitely impacted her family's social life. It was not always easy for the family to get out of the house whenever Rebecca fell ill. Eventually, she and her older sister were pulled out of school to be home schooled.

"Although we were active in our church and other youth organizations, my sister and I did not get the 'full' grammar school or high school experience, as some would say." However, this does not bother Rebecca. "I honestly don't know any different," she says.

Throughout her journey, she has learned the importance of loving people for who they are, including herself, and is thankful that her disease did have one positive effect -- it brought her family closer.

Rebecca has been an active member on Starbright World -- Starlight's online social network for seriously ill teens and teen siblings -- for the past two years. There, she says, she has gained friendships stronger than any other she has ever known. Thanks to Starbright World, the teen has also gained a better knowledge about illness - not just her own, but those of her friends as well.



"When I learned my drawing was one of the winners, I was home alone and started screaming. I picked up the phone and called my mom in hysterics." Rebecca's love for bright colors shines through in her drawing, 'A Touch of Neon.' "Bright colors always lift my mood and I am a huge fan of stars, hearts and peace signs. I hoped that by combining all of these colors and images together, I would create something that could lift others' moods as well. If I could lift a young patient's spirits -- even just a little -- that would mean the world to me."