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Photo: Courtesy Photo

Churchill High School student Natalie Trevino earlier this winter celebrated not only 11 years of being cancer-free, but being part of a state championship-winning competitive pep squad on campus.

The Noah and the Ark-themed scrapbook chronicled 14-year-old **Churchill High School** freshman **Natalie Trevino**'s childhood battle with osteosarcoma.

Letters filled with words of hope, prayers and good wishes accompanied pictures of Trevino through various stages of the cancer that affected her left foot.

The scrapbook is a reminder of what life may have been like if Trevino's parents would have agreed with doctors to have Trevino's foot amputated.

Trevino was 2 ½ when she was diagnosed with the most common type of bone cancer in teenagers.

“It wasn't textbook, to say the least,” Dawn Foster, Trevino's mother, said.

Foster remembered the Friday that changed her life. She said she had come home from work and noticed that Trevino's foot was swollen.

After placing ice on Trevino's foot in an effort to reduce the swelling, she called the daycare center her daughter attended and asked if there had been an accident.

Foster said she thought the swelling in Trevino's foot was caused by a hairline fracture.

Three days later, Foster said she accompanied Trevino to the first of many doctor's appointments, where Trevino's foot was placed in a cast.

Foster said doctor's initially told her Trevino did not have cancer. However, when the doctor removed Trevino's cast her foot had doubled in size.

The nightmare had begun.

After an extensive search, Trevino was sent to a San Antonio-based pediatric oncologist, who removed the malignant bone tumor in her foot through a series of surgeries.

Foster said she elected that Trevino not undergo radiation and chemotherapy treatments in favor of alternative medicines.

According to the American Cancer Society, there are about 800 new cases of osteosarcoma in the U.S. each year. About half of these are in children and teenagers.

Osteosarcoma is most commonly found near the ends of the long bones in the legs, such as the part of the thighbone or lower leg bone next to the knee.

The tumor usually develops during a period of rapid growth, with the average age of diagnosis being 15.

With these facts seemingly stacked against Trevino, Foster said she and her family turned to prayer to help them get through the difficulty of Trevino's diagnosis.

Throughout Trevino's surgeries, Foster said Trevino never really complained.

Even when Trevino underwent MRI tests in what she referred to as the “rollypollyolly donut machine,” Foster said her cooperation surprised the hospital staff, who thought they may have to sedate Trevino in order for her to stay still during the MRI tests.

Foster said Trevino, an only child, entertained herself by interacting with her imaginary canine pet.

The cast on Trevino's foot prevented her from playing with friends on the playground or jumping on a trampoline.

However, the cast could not keep Trevino from taking her first independent steps to greet her friend "Noodles" at the daycare center they attended together.

Foster said she and Trevino's family lived life from one day to the next, not knowing if, or when Trevino's cancer would return.

When Trevino's tumor actually did come back about four months later, her doctor wanted to amputate her leg to prevent the cancer from spreading to other areas of her body.

Foster refused.

Foster said her decision to not have Trevino's leg amputated and, instead, to seek a second opinion, was the subject of much ridicule by local doctors and medical staff.

"If it was me I might have been making different decisions," Foster said.

The search for a second opinion led Trevino and her family to a pediatric oncologist in St. Louis.

Two cysts on Trevino's foot were discovered. The cysts had grown off a bone graft implanted after the malignant tumor was extracted.

"If I'd have let that man cut her leg off... I knew in my heart that I was doing the right thing," Foster said.

Trevino and Foster, who works for Southwest Airlines, traveled to St. Louis numerous times to ensure Trevino's tumor had not returned.

Trevino underwent surgery to remove the final piece of bone graft in her foot.

On Feb. 18, Trevino celebrated 11 years in remission.

The anniversary also marked a state championship win, among others, for her and her Churchill pep squad teammates at the Pep Squad Showmakers State Competition at **Texas State University**.

Danielle Norman, Churchill pep squad coach and teacher, said the team also won a judge's sweepstakes award, first place, precision and showmanship in the pom, military and jazz routines, best in class and technique award in the military routine.

“They did a great job at state and they're a great group of ladies,” Norman said.

Trevino said she joined the pep squad, after taking dances classes on-and-off since she was in third grade, because she likes performing and can better express the way she feels through the movements.

“My mom is a performer, a singer. I take after her,” she said.

Foster said she is always excited to watch Trevino perform because doctors told her Trevino would never be able to dance.

Trevino said even though her big toe is significantly smaller than the rest of her toes on her left foot, orthopedic inserts in her dance shoes help her to maintain her balance to perform to the best of her abilities.

However, Trevino said, besides her best friends, she has not told many people that she was diagnosed with cancer as a child.

“There's no real reason. I goof around a lot and I feel like some people wouldn't believe me,” she said.

Besides the orthopedic shoe inserts and having to go to St. Louis every two years for check ups, Foster said Trevino is similar to other teenagers.

“You'd never know she was sick a day in her life,” Foster said.

Jordan Gass-Poore' is a Seguin-based freelance writer.

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