



Kids Wanna Help[®] Fashion Show

RAISES FUNDS FOR LEUKEMIA
FOUNDATION AND SOCIAL
AWARENESS FOR GIRLS

by meredith knight



*SEVENTH GRADER SHOWS THERE'S
NO AGE CRITERIA FOR MAKING A
DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD*

It was Adlai Stevenson who first coined the phrase, "It's better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness." Twelve-year-old Mary-Brent Brown has certainly put feet to that sentiment. Not only feet but hands, head and heart.

When we adults hear the statistics on leukemia—40,440 adults and 3,800 children expected to develop the disease this year—the causes and risks are, for the most part, unknown—treatment is experimental at best—prognosis amounts to an educated medical guess—it's easy to feel helpless.

Or, like this spunky seventh grader, we can look for a way to light that candle against the darkness of this devastating disease. The seventh grader is Mary-Brent Brown of Covington. Her "candle" came in the form of a fashion show fundraiser for girls in fourth through seventh grade.



"I hate to admit it but, when Mary-Brent and her little sister, Beverly, first came to us with the idea of organizing a charity fund raiser, we were skeptical," said their mother, Stacy Brown. "At age eleven and eight what did they know about the amount of work that goes into putting these things together."

But Stacy underestimated her daughters' resolve. "Mary-Brent originally got the idea of putting on a charity fashion show from a book she read. When she and Beverly approached us with the idea, we agreed to let them do something small at the house," she said.

But something small was not what the girls had in mind. It wasn't until Stacy came across a notebook in Mary-Brent's room that she realized how committed her daughter was to this project. "Here was this notebook listing contact names and phone numbers at local hotels. Mary-Brent had already called and gathered information on pricing and sizes of available rooms. That's when I got it. This was something Mary-Brent was determined to do."

The Browns weren't surprised when their daughter's next question was, "How do I set up a corporation and apply for a trademark?" And the non-profit Kids Wanna Help® was born.

"I called Tchefuncta Country Club and set up an appointment to discuss renting the club house for a fashion show," Stacy said. "I made the appointment and drove Mary-Brent there but she went in alone." Once a

location was secured, Mary-Brent's next order of business was designating a worthwhile charity to receive the proceeds.

Lisa Pellegrini, a friend of the Brown family, told them about an organization called the J. L. Foundation, a non-profit group that helps leukemia patients and their families with expenses that aren't covered by insurance. Mary-Brent met with the founders, Bob and Janet Leslie, who named the foundation after their daughter, Jennifer Leslie, who in 2001 lost her fourteen year battle with leukemia.

"Mary-Brent knew right away that this was it," Stacy said. "She liked the fact that 100% of all donations go directly to families who need it with nothing taken out for overhead. She left the Leslie's more determined then ever."

As plans for the fashion show came together, Mary-Brent got the idea of incorporating an all-day workshop before the show for girls in grades fourth through seventh to learn lessons on etiquette, diet and social responsibility. She found older girls who would serve as role models and teach them about dressing modestly and resisting peer pressure. Covington Mayor Candace Watkins even agreed to come participate.

"Our big fear was that no one would sign up for the show or the workshop," Stacy said. They started putting the word out. The response was immediate and overwhelming. "Twenty-four girls signed up to model and calls kept coming. We finally had to cut the

number of models off at thirty-three and started taking names for a waiting list." The workshop filled up just as quickly. They were selling tickets to the show as fast as they could keep up with them and donations started pouring in for a silent auction.

Mary-Brent's next idea was to extend an invitation to a child with leukemia to model in the show. "We met a little girl named Madelyn who is six and has leukemia," Mary-Brent said. "She was excited about the show but her mom explained to me that it would depend on her treatment and if she was sick or feeling well the day of the show. We wouldn't really know until that day."

The idea of the fashion show became a big deal to little Madelyn—such a big deal that she convinced her doctors to postpone a necessary bone marrow transplant long enough for her to make it down the runway. And make it down she did along with the other thirty-three girls. The workshop was a ripping success. The fashion show with silent auction was standing room only.

The proceeds from the entire weekend were an amazing \$11, 105—all because one young girl didn't understand that she was too young to make a difference.

"It's unbelievable," Mary-Brent said. "We're already making plans for next year. I want to raise a lot more money then." And life just got a little brighter for leukemia patients and their families. To learn more about the J.L. Foundation visit www.jlffoundation.org.



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