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# One Lakeville family and their race against the odds

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By Joseph Palmersheim - Sun Newspapers

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One of the first things a visitor to John and Erika Hauschildt's Lakeville home might see after entering is a large photo of a beautiful little girl on the wall. She beams confidently, and it takes a moment to realize that her right eye is crossed.

The photos were taken of the Hauschildt's daughter, Ella Hope Hauschildt, a few months before the seven-year-old died from the diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma tumor in her brain that took her speech and ability to walk before taking her life in November 2008. Now, the Hauschildts will expand upon an event started last year to do something positive in memory of their lost little girl.

Race Against the Odds, a family event Sunday, Sept. 19, at Lakefront Park in Prior Lake, will raise money for the Minnesota chapter of the Cure Starts Now, a pediatric brain cancer organization. Last year's event raised nearly \$25,000 and drew a crowd of 600; Erika hopes to break \$35,000 this year. Part of the funds will go towards medical trials, including a prototype vaccination for brain tumors.

According to the Cure Starts Now, fewer than 10 percent of the children diagnosed with the type of tumor Ella had survive the experience. Within a year of having been diagnosed, after complaining of double vision, Ella was gone.

"I always look at Susan G. Komen, because it's obviously a very successful nonprofit," Erika said. "When you think of breast cancer awareness, you think of them. The issue I see in the pediatric world is that people want to remember their children, and they start foundations, but the awareness never gets there."

When asked whether or not it is painful for her to talk about Ella and what she went through, Erika smiles broadly.

"I love talking about my daughter," she said. "A lot of people won't bring her up because they think it will make me cry, but it actually does the opposite. We all want to make our mark in life, especially a child who didn't get to be around as long as you or I. For her and for myself, I need to focus on the positive, and doing something like this makes me feel that way."

Glancing up at the framed pictures of Ella with her crossed eye, Erika said the portraits were the last taken as a family, two months before Ella passed away. When someone has a tumor in his or her brain stem, Erika said, it can affect the control of the eye and is one of the first signs that a tumor is growing.

"We just love those pictures," she said. "It was a hard day. We'd found out the tumor was growing on Friday, and had the pictures taken on Sunday."

The Hauschildt's son Caden, now 7, is heading into second grade - the same grade his sister never finished. He worries sometimes that he is forgetting his sister, Erika said, but talks about her on a daily



Forever 7: Erika Hauschildt sits in her daughter Ella's room in their Lakeville home. Ella died nearly two years ago from a brain tumor, and the family is planning a second annual family event to raise money for a pediatric cancer organization. (Photo by Joseph Palmersheim • Sun Newspapers)

basis. Still, the little boy is having a hard time dealing with it, she said, and sometimes finds it difficult to be an only child. He gets upset when other children fight with their siblings, Erika said - which she described as "a very adult thought."

Down the hall from the kitchen, Ella's room is much as she left it, with dozens of stuffed animals and posters of Hannah Montana on the wall. The family isn't ready to change it.

"On her birthday, Caden went in there and ate his cake," Erika said. "He wanted to have his cake with Ella. It's a nice place to reflect."

Despite the stress of planning the second event, Erika said she felt it was her duty.

"It would be easy to turn off the switch and walk away, but I can't," she said. "I don't feel that everything happens for a reason ... you don't think it's going to be your child. It's random. It doesn't happen to certain people or things. Cancer affects every aspect of everyone's life, and you don't realize that until you are in it."

For more information, go to [www.raceagainsttheodds.com](http://www.raceagainsttheodds.com).

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