



Totally Rockin' It!

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JON CANCELINO

After being diagnosed with Langerhans cell histiocytosis, Sydney Martin wanted to do something to make treatment easier for those diagnosed with the disease in the future. In the last two years, she has raised more than \$75,000 by selling her Syd Rocks for LCH necklaces.

By Evangeline Politis



Most tween girls on the North Shore cannot claim to be both a highly generous benefactress and a wildly successful entrepreneur. But 12-year-old Sydney Martin can. In two years, Sydney has raised more than \$75,000 for the Histiocytosis Association of America (HAA) via her charitable business, Syd Rocks for LCH.

At age eight, Sydney began crafting rock necklaces from stones washed up on the beaches of Lake Michigan. She was fascinated by each rock's unique and beautiful appearance. Fastening the eroded rocks to a simple cord, she created original pieces of jewelry. Meanwhile, she was looking for a cause to donate the money she was raising through the sales of the necklaces.

Just two years later, Sydney was diagnosed with Langerhans cell histiocytosis (LCH), a rare pediatric disease that produced bone lesions in Sydney's cheek. "LCH is where histio cells gather up in one place in your body," she explains. "It could be an organ, skin, blood, or bone." Much like cancer, it is treated with chemotherapy and steroids but at low doses.

While in fifth grade, Sydney missed nearly 50 days of school for treatment at Children's Memorial Hospital. "During the first year I had a difficult time," she says. "For six weeks, I wasn't there on Thursdays. My classmates would ask me where I was and I didn't really want to talk about it because it was so hard to discuss." During this time out of school, she craved something to occupy her time and began making necklaces again, hoping to raise money for the HAA by selling them.

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—Tracy Martin, Sydney's mom

"My husband and I were so supportive of the idea of Sydney doing something to empower herself," explains her mother, Tracy Martin. "This really brought a lot of positives to the situation, especially when she wasn't in school—it gave her something to do."

Sydney worked with Higherest Middle School's social worker during this difficult time, and they decided that it would be helpful for Sydney to explain to the class why she was absent so often. During the discussion, she also handed out Syd Rocks to everyone. "I think it really helped me open up to my class," she adds. She also began selling the necklaces at book fairs and parties, and with the help of one North Shore boutique, the business really began to flourish.

When the store manager of E Street Kids in Highland Park complimented Sydney on her necklace, Sydney explained the story behind the jewelry and was soon introduced to the store owners, Kathy and Thomas George, who thought it was a great charity for the store to support. They bought 40 necklaces on the spot. The necklaces have been sold there ever since, with 100 percent of the profits going directly to the HAA.

To further help the cause, Sydney and E Street collaborated on a line of T-shirts playing on the phrase "Syd Rocks." In October of 2008, E Street started selling adult and children's shirts printed with sayings like "Love Rocks" and "Giving Rocks." Of each shirt sold, \$10 goes to the Sydney F. Martin Foundation, which plans to donate money to other charities that Sydney feels are important.

Sydney has also received a lot of support via several Web sites. During her treatment, she began blogging on Caring-Bridge, a not-for-profit Web site that connects family and friends during a critical illness, treatment, or recovery. Sydney's page, www.caringbridge.org/visit/sydneymartin, has acted as a vehicle for her to disseminate information and share her experience fighting the disease. The majority of the literature about LCH is rather clinical, so she thought this would be an excellent resource for kids who are also diagnosed. "That was largely why Syd decided to journal. When she was diagnosed, she wanted to read what to expect, but there wasn't much information suitable for a child," says Tracy.

Another conduit is the HAA Web site, www.histio.org, which sells Sydney's necklaces on the Histiocytosis eStore. "People from all over the world have found Sydney's story through both Web sites and have written to her about their treatment and with their questions," her mother explains. "I think this all gave Sydney great confidence. A lot of people come out of such an experience feeling down and insecure, but I feel

like it's different for Syd—she has evolved so much."

Now, nearly two years after being diagnosed, Sydney is disease-free, but she plans to continue making the necklaces for the HAA. "I really want to keep doing this for a long time or at least until they find a cure for LCH. The only funding right now is from families doing their own separate fund-raising. There really isn't any government funding," points out Sydney.

This past August, The Martin family held a

Walk for Syd Rocks during which participants walked along the Michigan shore collecting rocks. They were hoping to find 5,000 rocks to help them reach their ultimate goal of raising \$100,000 by the end of the year.

"By doing this, it's like turning lemons into lemonade," says Sydney. "I think the best part is I will help kids in the future that will be diagnosed with the disease."

For more information on SydRocks, visit www.sydrocks.com. □