

Childhood cancer real fear

BY **JAMES CLARK**
Editor for the Southern Standard
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

One in 285 children in the United States will be diagnosed with cancer by the time they are 20 years old, according to Alex's Lemonade Stand, the Foundation for Childhood Cancer.

Warren County resident Andy Dunn was one of those children when he was diagnosed with neuroblastoma at age 4.

"Once your child is diagnosed with cancer, you are a changed family," said Andy's mother Dot Dunn. "There's not a good cancer out there. The news was staggering."

September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month and Dot says it's crucial for people to talk about this deadly disease. According to Alex's Lemonade Stand, cancer is the leading cause of death by disease in children under 19 in the U.S.

The American Childhood Cancer Organization says approximately 15,780 U.S. children under 19 are diagnosed with cancer each year. That's 43 a day.

"It's important for parents to be aware and pay attention to chronic symptoms," said Dot.

The Childhood Cancer Organization lists some warning signs as:

- Persistent fever, illness or vomiting
- Tendency to bruise easily
- Unusual lumps or swelling
- Loss of energy and pale complexion
- Frequent headaches



Photo courtesy Painted Barn Media
Emma Walker receives a yellow rose during a recent ceremony at WCMS in honor of Childhood Cancer Awareness Month.

- Lingering pain in one area of the body
- Sudden weight loss
- Limping

Dot says dealing with childhood cancer is such an emotional burden that 89 percent of parents with a critically ill child divorce during the process. Dot says she and her husband, Daryl, stayed together and Andy has been cancer free for 10 years. He's a sophomore at WCHS.

"I understand people don't want to talk about kids getting sick, but people need to be aware of the warning signs," said Dot, who said she has attended 40 funerals for children under 15 from friendships she developed during Andy's treatment. "I tell people fear still lives in our guest bedroom. Because of all the heavy chemo, there are so many side effects he could develop. And there's always a chance of relapse."

FACES OF WARREN COUNTY

McGee seeks to nurture young minds

BY **LUKE CAMERON**
Special to the Southern Standard
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

Caitlin McGee always knew she would become an educator.

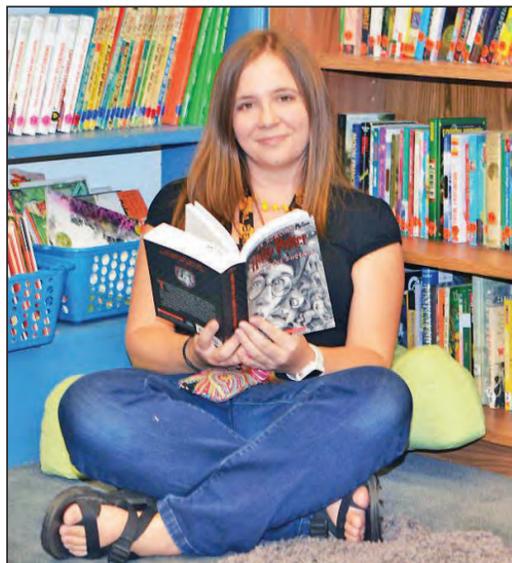
"I cannot remember a time when I didn't want to be a teacher," the Bobby Ray Elementary fifth-grade teacher says. Though not originally from Tennessee, she enjoys all McMinnville has to offer.

McGee grew up in the town of Sikeston, Missouri, a town with a population of about 16,000 located in the "Bootheel" (southeastern corner) of the state.

Growing up in Sikeston as the only child to her mother and father, a teacher and construction estimator, respectively, McGee excelled in school and enjoyed swimming, gymnastics, photography, and playing the piano and violin.

McGee graduated from Sikeston Senior High School in 2009, earning Top 15 percent honors, and packed her bags to attend Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tenn. While at the university, in addition to making good grades and the President's List, she stayed active with extracurricular activities.

One of her fondest memories at Freed-Hardeman occurred when she and her fellow Theta Nu Epsilon members went on a club retreat to a church camp near Birmingham, Ala. One night after the evening devotional, at an hour



Luke Cameron photo

Bobby Ray fifth-grade teacher Caitlin McGee is a bundle of energy, serving as the school's yearbook editor-in-chief and cheerleading coach, among other duties.

when most club members had gone to bed, McGee and some of her friends, feeling restless, decided to take an impromptu midnight hike down to a nearby lake. After arriving, the group star-gazed, had some fun discussions, and eventually witnessed the sun rise over the lake. Following this, afflicted with a case of the "munchies," the group visited a nearby Waffle House for food and more good times.

After graduating with her bachelor's degree in elementary education in 2013, McGee spent a year working toward a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. Then, beginning in the fall of 2014, she spent two years as a sixth-grade math and science teacher at Highland Oaks Middle School in Memphis.

In the summer of 2016, McGee applied for teaching jobs in Middle Tennessee in hopes of moving closer to her grandfather, who lived in Lawrenceburg. She got a call from Bobby Ray principal Monti Hillis, inviting her to come for an interview. She ultimately was offered the job and moved to McMinnville.

At Bobby Ray, in addition to being Team Leader for the fifth-grade teachers, Ms. McGee serves as sponsor to the Junior Beta Club (which will be attending the state convention at Gaylord Opryland Hotel for the first time this year), yearbook editor-in-chief, and cheerleading coach (along with ESL teacher Kristin

Grayson).

"I love all the kids," she says, and her goodwill also extends to the teachers, all of whom are friendly and fun to be around. Ms. McGee is especially close to Ario Zadeh, a fellow fifth-grade teacher and the voluble yang to Ms. McGee's deliberate and thoughtful yin, and third-grade teacher Samantha Lewis. "Samantha and I go on kayaking adventures," she says, and they also do after-school yoga in Lewis' classroom, guided by "how to" YouTube videos projected on the big screen.

When not kayaking, McGee likes eating steak hibachi and snow crab rolls at Saki Japanese restaurant in McMinnville, walking her dog (a Schnocker named Miko) at the Civic Center greenway, going to the cinema in Cookeville, having dog get-togethers with her friends and their dogs, and hanging out with Morrison Elementary School teacher Brittany Watts and the Watts family at Center Hill Lake on weekends.

Her favorite movies are "Moana," "The Lorax," and "The Lion King." Her favorite TV shows are "Big Brother" and "Survivor," and lately she has been listening to a lot of music from the band Mother Falcon. One of Ms. McGee's favorite quotations comes from the musical "Little Women" (a production of which she appeared in while in college): "I may be small, but I've got giant plans."

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