

# Cancer can't slow young hunter

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A shoulder mount of a 300-class, 6x6 bull elk hangs in the Zebrasky home in Hartland. Visitors unfailingly ask Christian Zebrasky, the patriarch of the clan, where he hunted the animal.

That's when 13-year-old Brittany, Christian's daughter, breaks into a broad smile and tells the story.

"No, that's mine," she says. "Dad was on the trip, though."

Life's been like that for Brittany. Just a baker's dozen years on this Earth, lots of big experiences, many of them unexpected, and one in particular unrequested.

Cancer.

Brittany was just 5 when headaches, vision trouble and a seizure led to a series of doctor's appointments and the finding of a brain tumor. Due to its location, the tumor could only be partially removed by surgery. Two years of chemotherapy followed, then radiation, more surgeries and more chemo. Her shiny red hair helps hide an ear-to-ear scar over the crown of her head.

The tumors (she now has three in her brain) have never completely gone away. But neither has her zest for life.

"If I had to say, right now I'm most excited about fashion design and hunting," says Brittany, an eighth-grader at Northshore Middle School in Hartland. "I'm getting into kick-boxing, too."

Vivacious, intelligent, polite and strong, this is the young woman named Brit the world should know and care about.

At the moment, Brittany is preparing for the next chapter in her hunting life story. Along with her dad and mom (Tiffany), she will travel next week to Grand Rapids, Minn., for the Ruffed Grouse Society National Grouse and Woodcock Hunt.

Brittany will participate in the hunt as part of the society's Under Broken Wings program. Now in its third year, the program selects a young hunter with physical challenges and provides them with an all-expenses paid trip to grouse country.

Jim Hayett of Hartland, a member of the society's board of directors, will accompany the Zebraskys and hunt with Brittany.

"This is quite the event," said Hayett, a 20-year member of the society. "It's the most detailed study of grouse and woodcock in the nation."

Brittany will get outfitted with all the necessary gear. She'll also get shooting instruction from national-level shooting coaches.

But then she'll then have to put her skills to work on a team hunt with Hayett and Joe Chandler of Anchorage, Alaska. The team will hunt over Knotty, Hayett's 10-year-old German short-hair.

The team's two-day score (plus 5 points for a ruffed grouse, plus 3 for a woodcock, minus 1 for each shot and plus one for each retrieve) will determine their place in the competition.

"I'm really looking forward to it," said Brittany. "I hit a clay pigeon on my first time at the range, and that was with a huge shotgun that didn't fit."

Grouse hunting poses significant challenges even for able-bodied, fit adults. There's the physical test of hiking long distances through woods and clearings, often fighting through tangles and over and around deadfalls, all while carrying a shotgun and other gear.

And of course mounting and swinging and shooting the gun. All of which comes before you can even contemplate harvesting a bird.

The difficulties are obvious. The doubts are natural.

Christian remembers having the same thoughts before their elk hunt.

"I thought we would go and have this experience," he said. "You know, learn about the importance of conservation and camaraderie with other hunters and the things that are even more important than getting an animal."

Brittany learned and experienced all those things. When it came time to shoot, she sat on a phonebook and came home with a trophy.

Christian said he has taught his family to hunt because it is a healthy, natural part of life.

The last month has been a pause in the long line of treatments and surgeries - 18 in all - for Brittany. Her medical prognosis is poor but that's what the science says.

"I'm thankful for each day," said Brittany. "There's so much to do and see. I can't wait for next week."

She'll have a special, fitted shotgun in time for her hunt. And perhaps more important, her optimism and determination, honed over eight tough years of medical hurdles.

Brittany has accepted her own medical challenges so well that she thinks more about the needs of others. Brittany said she is second in line to run the United Special Sportsman Alliance in Pittsville, Wis., a group that helps grant wishes to sick children.

"I just like hanging out with the kids," said Brittany.

If form holds next week, Brittany will help provide a lift for Under Broken Wings. Soar on, Brittany. Soar on.

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