

Brave Beyond Her Years

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Each year cancer strikes thousands of families, throughout the United States. In our country alone, more than 35 children a day are diagnosed with this terrible disease. We often define *survivors* as those who win their battle with cancer; but in every family affected, there are *those who survive*. No matter the outcome, there are those who

go on living; those brave souls are the *survivors*.



Anya Strzalkowski was only five years old when her sister, Amelie, was diagnosed with brain cancer.

Anya's life changed dramatically after cancer. Amelie began treatments, requiring lengthy hospital stays. No longer could Anya count on having both parents at home when she returned from school. Although her family was facing crisis, Anya kept going. She kept learning, reading, drawing, and making her family smile.

Anya was Amelie's best friend and took great pleasure in making her sister happy. Anya often created gifts for Amelie, whom she lovingly referred to as Amie, such as magnetic paper dolls and drawings. These gifts brightened days darkened by chemotherapy, doctors, and unhappy diagnoses. Anya even designed "Team Amie" buttons for others to wear in support of her sister. Anya's button design was an instant success, providing people all over

the country with a way to display their love and encouragement.

Anya supported her sister in many ways. She did not complain over the countless nights her mom spent at the hospital or the holidays spent with just one parent. Towards the end of Amie's life, Anya attended a camp for children of families facing cancer. In the past, the entire family had come to see her off; but this time was different. This time, Amie was too sick to leave the house so Anya and her dad went alone. Anya, while saddened by the fact that her mom and sister could not be with her, was not angry. With insight beyond her years she explained, "Daddy, I really want to have Mommy and Amie here with me, because that's what we've always done. But that would be too hard for Amie, so I understand why it can only be you."

Anya Strzalkowski truly shows you are never too young to make a difference.



Anya and Amie were the best of friends, as shown in this family photo. (2013)