

# little warriors



For me, this story starts on a Fall afternoon in 2018 in my bedroom, as I held my daughter tight in my arms and she sobbed into my chest.

For May\*, my beautiful (then) 15-year-old child, this story began 6-weeks earlier during a family visit to our cabin at the lake.

Through sobs and bated breath, May finally disclosed the burden that had been weighing on her for weeks: a boy she was friends and schoolmates with had sexually assaulted her that day at the lake.

I listened carefully as May told her story. She said it happened after a party we had all attended. Our friends and neighbours had gathered for a pig roast and bonfire. May and her friends had stayed out a little later than us and when it was time to go, this boy walked May home.

When the assault happened, May was mere yards away from us, in a bunkhouse her Dad and I had designed especially for her. We had painted it her favourite colours. May had decorated it herself. She loved spending time in that bunkhouse. It was her happy place—until that one terrible night.

That afternoon in 2018, as I held May in my arms, the shock and disbelief soon dissolved into anger. I felt a fierce desire to protect my daughter and make everything okay again.

As the holiday season fast approaches, I wanted to share my daughter's story with you. It's a story of bravery, resilience and healing. My hope is that her story will inspire you to show your support to Little Warriors and the Be Brave Ranch this holiday season by making a donation. **Together, we can make sure that every child who has ever experienced child sexual abuse can receive the help they need when they need it. And this year, thanks to the support and generosity of the Sawin and Baldwin families, every dollar you donate will be matched up to \$30,000.**

In the weeks that followed, we reported the assault to the police and her school, with no meaningful result. An infuriating case of "he said/she said" meant no one could—or would—help us. May was

forced to attend school with her attacker, and she spent every day terrified of bumping into him in between classes or in social settings.

We watched helplessly as May, our straight-A student and bubbly overachiever, became a ghost of herself. She dropped all her extracurriculars and distanced herself from family and friends. The girl who used to love cheerleading and playing rugby and hanging out with friends now relegated herself to her bedroom. She left only to go to school. Every afternoon she came home and refused to leave her room.



*Rugby, our therapy dog, with a group of children at the Be Brave Ranch*

May's sparkle, which had previously shined so bright it lit up the world, was losing its shimmer.

My husband and I knew we had to do something to help May, even if her school and law enforcement wouldn't. We connected with a child & youth advocacy organization for advice and support. Next, we went to a sexual assault centre where May received some counselling to help process what had happened to her and manage her crippling anxiety.

But May needed more help than a few counselling sessions could provide. We didn't know it at the time, but May was exhibiting tell-tale signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and she was clearly depressed.

One evening, at dinner with a close family friend I poured my heart out. I told him all about May and what she'd endured. It was from this friend that I learned about Little Warriors and the Be Brave Ranch for the first time.

**For more than 10 years, Little Warriors and the Be Brave Ranch has been helping children, just like May, who have experienced child sexual abuse—all thanks to the continued support of donors like you.** We got lucky. When we connected with Little Warriors to get help for May, they were able to enroll her right away. But that's not always the case.

Today, the demand for Little Warriors' world-class treatment centre is higher than ever before. There's a long waitlist and as time goes by, more and more children are suffering just like May was. This is why I'm asking you to donate to Little Warriors and the Be Brave Ranch, so we can get children off waitlists and into care, so they can find their sparkle again.

In March 2019, May enrolled in the Be Brave program for the first time. As you can imagine, she didn't like it at first. She was scared of being away from home, which had become her safe haven, and she didn't want to be away from me or her Dad and especially not her younger sister Maggie.

As May returned for each round of treatment, it got a little easier for her to be away from home. The counselling sessions were intense, sometimes they were even grueling, but May could feel herself starting to heal. On her first day, May chose a welcome quilt with a bumble bee on it,

in honour of her middle name. She also chose a toy from the Little Warriors Magic Closet, which she gave to Maggie.

Over the course of the program, May learned what her triggers were and how to manage them. She learned breathing techniques to help ease her anxiety (which she still uses to this day) and she learned alternative methods for channeling complex emotions: like practicing yoga or painting.

But perhaps the most significant things to come from her time at the Be Brave Ranch are the friendships she made with her fellow peer-cohort group and the realization of how much her family means to her. May told me that she's grateful for the trust our family has in each other and for how strong our family bond is because she's aware not everyone shares that experience.

In between May's stays at the Be Brave Ranch, we tried to live life as normal as possible. We found joy in maintaining our family traditions, like our Halloween goody-bag assembly line and our Ladies Bake at Christmas, where we bake homemade goods and donate them to local group homes. Our goal was to make sure May still felt connected to her life outside of treatment and apart from what happened to her.

Almost two years after the sexual assault, May graduated from the Be Brave program on January 17, 2020, with four of her peers—who to this day are still some of her best friends. May will never forget how special it felt to pick graduation gowns with her friends from the Little Warrior's Cinderella Closet. May and her friends were beyond proud of themselves for not only completing the Be Brave program but for overcoming such painful obstacles along the way.



*May's family Christmas baking tradition*

Our May got her sparkle back and with it, she lights up the world again.

**This is why the generous matching gift of the Sawin and Baldwin families is so wonderful. With your help, we can leverage these matching funds to raise upwards of \$60,000 in support of the incredible, life-changing (and often lifesaving) treatment Little Warriors and the Be Brave Ranch provides to so many children in need. With these funds, the Be Brave Ranch will be able to expand its space, add more beds and increase its capacity so we can get children off waitlists and into treatment.**

Following graduation from the Be Brave Ranch, May turned her whole life around. She started participating in things she loved again, like cheerleading and rugby and she re-dedicated herself to her studies.

Her transformation was truly inspiring. I don't think she could have managed it without the level of care and treatment she received at the Be Brave Ranch.



*Peace and love from the kids at the  
Be Brave Ranch*

May graduated from her high school with honours and at the top of her class. Today, she's almost 19 years old, studying Business at MacEwan University.

With the assault finally behind her, we wanted to commemorate the closing of that dark chapter and mark the beginning of a brighter, more joyful one. As a family, we decided to visit our cabin at the lake. Together, we gutted May's bunkhouse. We burned the mattress in a giant bonfire. We re-painted the walls. May re-decorated the entire room. We erased every trace of the terrible incident that happened there, and May got to reclaim not only her happy place but her power, too.

**The treatment May received at the Be Brave Ranch was so intense and all-encompassing that it got to the heart of her trauma and helped her heal from the inside out.**

May isn't afraid to share her story anymore, especially if it can help someone else and she's a more confident person than she was before the Be Brave Ranch. Now, May knows how to set healthy boundaries and communicate and process her emotions in a constructive way.

This holiday season I'd like to ask you to consider giving a special gift to Little Warriors. Our family is so grateful to the Sawin and Baldwin families for their thoughtfulness to match all donations up to \$30,000. We're also thankful to you for helping to ensure that children who have experienced the trauma of sexual abuse have a place to heal at the Be Brave Ranch.

Together, we can restore hope and resilience in thousands of children, so they can live the lives their wildest dreams are made of.

Sincerely,

*Dahlia\**

– Proud parent of a Be Brave Ranch graduate

P.S. With the unconditional love and support of her family, combined with the specialized therapy at the Be Brave Ranch, May was able to overcome the trauma of sexual assault to go on to pursue her dreams with resilience and newfound joy. This wouldn't have been possible without the continued support of generous donors like you. Today, your gift to Little Warriors will help us create a better tomorrow for even more children, for generations to come.

little  
warriors



**Prevent It!**  
A little warriors program