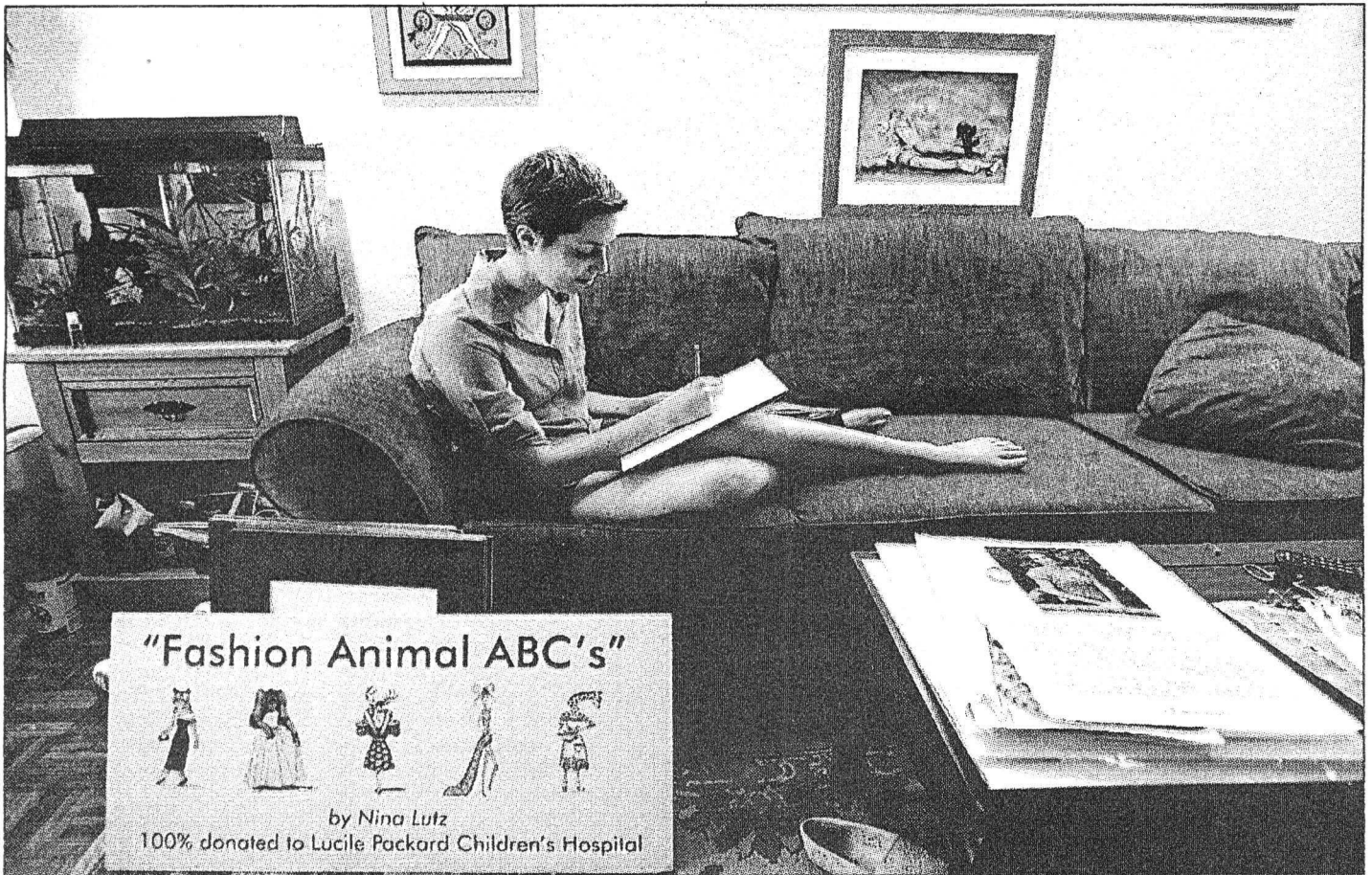


RARE FORM OF CANCER

# ART PROVES THERAPEUTIC FOR TEEN FIGHTING OSTEOSARCOMA

Nina Lutz selling her ABC book to raise money for cancer research



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Nina Lutz created the book 'Fashion Animal ABC's' while she was being treated for a rare type of bone cancer. Drawings by the 18-year-old artist will be shown at the downtown Santa Cruz library.

*Art + Art + Art + Art + Art*  
By JONDI GUMZ  
jgumz@santacruzsentinel.com

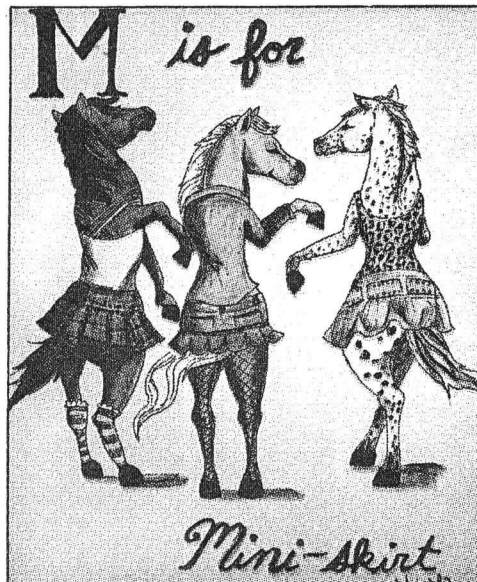
SANTA CRUZ — When Nina Lutz was diagnosed at 17 with osteosarcoma, a rare bone cancer, she drew and painted her way through chemotherapy and surgeries.

Today, the talented young artist is looking forward to an exhibit of her children's book, "Fashion Animal ABC's," opening Friday at the Santa Cruz Public Library downtown, graduating from Santa Cruz High School on June 14, visiting Ireland and Germany with her sister this summer, and studying at UCLA in the fall.

At the opening reception from 4-6 p.m., she will autograph copies of her book, which features horses in miniskirts and a gorilla wearing a gown, to name a few.

"It was something I could do even if I wasn't feeling good," she said, inspired by an exhibit of designer Jean Paul Gaultier, who is well-known for designing Madonna's outfits.

The book sells for \$15, with proceeds benefit-



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

One of the drawings from Nina Lutz's book, 'Fashion Animal ABC's.'

6-5-13  
**IF YOU GO**  
MEET THE  
ARTIST

**WHAT:** Artist reception for Nina Lutz, illustrator of 'Fashion Animals ABC's' children's book  
**WHEN:** 4-6 p.m. Friday

**WHERE:** Santa Cruz Public Library, 224 Church St., Santa Cruz, second floor  
**COST:** Reception free; book costs \$15, proceeds for childhood cancer research

**DETAILS:** <http://firstfridaysantacruz.com> and <http://www.ninalutz.com>

SEE CANCER ON A3

# CANCER

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ing the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital in Palo Alto, where she was treated. She has raised \$2,000.

"When I was there in the hospital, everyone would be doing all this stuff for me, and I couldn't do anything," she said. "The nurses were so sweet. I felt I should give back."

## A STRANGER'S KINDNESS

Osteosarcoma is rare, striking 5 in 1 million U.S. children, affecting more boys than girls. The cause is unknown but researchers believe genetics play a role.

Each year, about 400 cases are reported for people younger than 20, mostly teens, according to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, one of the top cancer care hospitals in the nation.

Osteosarcoma tends to affect the knee. Treatment generally requires surgery and sometimes amputation of an affected limb. The five-year survival rate is 60 percent to 80 percent when the cancer has not spread, lower when it has.

Nina, who turned 18 in February, got encouragement from her mom, jewelry artist Lynn Guenther, her father Lui Lutz and her art teacher Katie Harper.

She also found support she hadn't expected from a stranger.

Her art teacher suggested she get in touch with Cliff Sammet, a 2005 Santa Cruz High alum who played on the state basketball championship team his senior year and survived a bout with osteosarcoma two years after graduation.

Nina held back at first.

"I was nervous calling him," she said. "Then I was having a tough time, I needed to talk to someone. No one else knew what it would be like. ... In the beginning, I called him at 2 o'clock in the morning."

He gave her a new perspective, telling her, "This is a time for you to push forward and find yourself."

Though Cliff, 26, is eight years older than Nina, the

two connected, frequently going to the movies. Both had a sore knee diagnosed as osteosarcoma and both had knee replacement surgery.

He works for Dominican Hospital in physician relations, getting feedback from doctors on how to improve the patient experience.

"Nina's awesome," Sammet said. "She definitely taught me a thing or two."

## AN UPBEAT ATTITUDE

A fan of actress Amy Poehler, Nina traveled to see the set of her hit TV show, "Parks and Recreation," thanks to the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Actor Chris Pratt gave her a UCLA Bruins bear and cast mate Adam Scott, a Santa Cruz native, surprised her with a visit.

"When you see them, you feel like you know them," Nina said.

She kept a positive attitude, despite the chemo that made her hair fall out, the knee surgery that put her on crutches, the surgery to remove cancer cells that migrated into her lung.

"Every time you'd see her she'd have a smile on her face," Sammet said. "Without the hair, with the crutches, we'd go out, she'd have a smile on her face. She didn't let the distractions get her down. I'm happy I was able to be a help for her ... Briana was there for me."

That's Briana Clarke. She battled osteosarcoma to graduate from Santa Cruz High in 2009 but it took her life before she could attend UC Santa Cruz.

A sophomore when she was diagnosed, she was finishing her treatment when her mom reached out to the Sammets.

"She described it exactly as it happened," said Cliff's mom, Cindy. "It helped me to not be shocked."

Two years ago, Cliff set up a Facebook page called Manifest Desk where people can post positive thoughts, with the idea of turning them into action. Like the Ralph Waldo Emerson saying, "You cannot do a kindness too soon for you never know how soon it will be too late."

Next he recruited Josh Kemp, a conditioning assis-

tant he met at a local gym, and web consultant Noah Kerrigan, to create a site called <http://ManifestDesk.com>, where wristbands and T-shirts with the Manifest slogan are sold. Proceeds from one wristband are designated for Jamil Newirth, a young man without health insurance and diagnosed with brain cancer.

Said Nina, "I think it's cool what he's doing."

## NINA'S FUTURE

Nina was ahead of her classmates in course credits before her diagnosis, according to her mom, and is taking only two classes this semester: economics and creative writing.

She won the Melissa Smith Memorial dance/drama/arts scholarship for \$1,000 from the Surf City Kiwanis and received a special award from the Santa Cruz Art League at the countywide High School Art Exhibition for her book.

Twice a week, she has physical therapy.

"I haven't run in a year, it's weird to think," she said.

Other than that, she feels "really good."

According to her mom, the prognosis is "good for now. She is theoretically cancer-free and we hope she stays this way."

Since the osteosarcoma was in Nina's right knee and she experienced nerve damage, she was thrilled to be able to drive.

"That was a great victory," her mom said.

Nina plans to major in English and minor in film.

"I want to do art as a hobby," she said.

Follow Sentinel reporter Jondi Gumz at [Twitter.com/jondigumz](https://twitter.com/jondigumz)