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Looking on the bright side

ZUMBROTA — As graduating Zumbrota-Mazeppa High School senior Hannah Brengman looks back at her school years, she relates fond memories of favorite teachers, best friends, field trips, pranks and endearing moments. But unlike most students, Brengman's most memorable time was one of tragedy ending in triumph.

By: **Ginger Holm**, The Republican Eagle

ZUMBROTA — As graduating Zumbrota-Mazeppa High School senior Hannah Brengman looks back at her school years, she relates fond memories of favorite teachers, best friends, field trips, pranks and endearing moments. But unlike most students, Brengman's most memorable time was one of tragedy ending in triumph.

Brengman was diagnosed with cancer 10 years ago when she was 8 years old.

"One of my favorite memories of this school, this town and living here, is when I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer," Brengman said. "The school and all the people in this town really helped me through that process. It was really cool. It was not like a community anymore; it was like a family."

Brengman underwent chemotherapy all that summer.

"While I was in the hospital, I remember probably receiving 10 cards in the mail every day," she said. "I still have this huge box of cards, and it wasn't just from people in our community. I have cards from Washington and California and Texas.

"People in my community were talking to other people they knew and their friends and relatives were sending me cards. Just to see that outreach of caring was really special to me."

Parents Mike and Laurie Brengman admit they "might be a little biased," but others who know the family say they have good reason to be proud of their daughter.

"Hannah is a remarkable young lady," English/German instructor Pam Peterson said. "She is willing to put in whatever amount of effort it takes to achieve the high standards she sets for herself. She is definitely a leader in the classroom and is well respected by her peers."

"Hannah has not let cancer hold her back," the girl's father said. "She has used this challenge in life to propel her forward. She understands that her successes in life are directly related to those around her and she feels obligated to do the best she can in all things, to give back to her community and to seek a future that will help others as she has been helped."

One example of Brengman reaching out to others is another girl named Hannah in the elementary school.

"She had gone through the same thing in fourth grade that I did," Brengman said. "I helped tutor her and her little sister and tried to be a mentor. We did a lot of things together. I understood what they were going through."

Brengman said she felt moved and honored to have been asked to mentor with the girls.

"You can choose to (dwell) on the negatives, but you are only wasting your time," she said. "Yeah, it sucks that I had to go through all that, but it has made me the person I am today. I have a better understanding of life and the full meaning of being thankful for what you have."

In January 2012, Hannah had her last mandatory checkup and the doctor gave her a clean bill of health.

Brengman tries to live each day to the fullest and never take anything for granted. Her battle with cancer has given her a heart to reach out to others and work to improve the world we live in. This year she was awarded the American Cancer Society Scholarship.

Brengman, a member of the National Honor Society, has helped with efforts like the local food drive, Toys for Tots and cleaning up the Zumbrota River.

Brengman keeps a busy schedule both in and out of school. Two hours a day she spends in the elementary school helping the secretary, Amy Hanson, with little jobs like answering the phone, making copies and filing paperwork.

"I also help with sick children in the health room," she said. "In the elementary school part of my job is painting the windows to look fun and colorful for students to brighten their day."

Brengman is involved in sports as well. A member of the golf team for six years, she was a captain this year. Coach Joe Sand said she has been essential in their success this season. She also played soccer.

Brengman plans to attend the University of Minnesota-Duluth to study biochemistry and molecular biology.

"Once I'm done with the pre-med, I have been thinking about going into radiology. It's a field that I think is amazing. I love puzzles, and it is kind of like a puzzle to look over C-rays and scans," she said. "Hopefully I am going into that, but if I change my mind, I'm pretty sure I want to go on to medical school."

What: 84 graduating students at Zumbrota-Mazeppa High School

When: 7 p.m. Saturday June 2

Where: 705 Mill St., Zumbrota

More information: 507-732-7395

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