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Dressage rider inspires those fighting cancer

Twelve-year-old Elexis Ortlieb is a fighter. She's an extraordinary girl who doesn't believe that winning is everything but that life is about learning. She rode in the Provincial and Regional Dressage Horse Shows held in Red Deer Sept. 11-14. Elexis was representing Leduc and Amberlea Meadows as a junior rider. She also represented a special and rare group of young children who are battling cancer. "I have had cancer for five years. I've been in remission for three years," said Elexis. "The doctors call me a miracle, which they don't say to many kids that are dying." Ellen Ortlieb, mother of Elexis and owner of Amberlea Meadows, said that it was wonderful watching her daughter be able to ride in such an esteemed horse show. "Watching her ride this weekend was a real thrill and then have her do so well, it's amazing," said Ellen. Elexis placed third in the province and third overall in western Canada, a very impressive finish for her

first year of competing. "I was amazed. I didn't think I was going to do that well because it was my first time at provincials and regionals and basically my first time really showing," said Elexis. In 2000 Elexis was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. "My first bout lasted two years and eight months. I got through that. I mean, it wasn't easy. It was definitely easier than the second bout," said Elexis. On Christmas Eve morning in 2002, Elexis did not want to get out of bed. Her mom took her to the hospital and when they got there, the doctors had bad news. "They told us we were going to be there for a while," said Elexis. "The first part was ok, but then I got really sick with a fungal infection that took over basically all of my major organs. I was in intensive care and stayed in the one closed room, with one nurse, for really, really, sick kids." "They told my mom and dad that I was probably going to die," Ellen did not accept this and kept on fighting for a drug that could save her daughter's life. After extensive attempts to get any one to listen, one of the doctors finally listened and found a drug that they could get from Paris. "It took a lot of time and paper work," said Ellen. The drug had never been used in Canada before and it helped Elexis beat the fungal infection. And it saved her life. "I was the first person in Canada and that saved my life. Now it is saving other kids lives," said Elexis. Elexis said that she doesn't consider the memories to be horrible. "I don't think they are terrible memories. It was the worst thing I could ever imagine but, it taught me something, and it taught my family something and it sure teaches you who your real friends are too," said Elexis.

"Some people say, 'I bet you don't want to talk about this,' but I say 'why not?' Because I'm glad to be here, that's something we have to rejoice." Elexis said that her horse Harrison, a 19-year-old gelding who she rides six times a week, all the horses in the barn, her crazy dogs and especially her mother helped her pull through the tough times. "I'm very grateful to the doctors and everyone who helped Elexis through her illness, and also helped us, all of us get better," said Ellen. Elexis fondly remembers a time when her horse was there to support her. "I was really upset about one of my rides one day. I was so mad, I tied him up by the stall, and I was crying inside the tack room. He untied himself and he came into the tack room looking for me. He nickered when he opened up the door, because I had the door closed." According to Elexis, Harrison has a cushings, which means he cannot eat hay or grass. Instead of going out the open door to eat grass, he came to the tack room to comfort her when she was upset. Elexis wants to learn to jump one day on her horse, but for now she is content with riding dressage. "My mom always rode dressage and I've watched it ever since I was little, so dressage is good for me at this time," said Elexis. Elexis' dream is to continue riding, help find a cure for all cancers and inspire people. "The important thing is to never stop dreaming," said Ellen. "And keep on believing," added Elexis. Ellen and Elexis wanted to give back to the Kids With Cancer Foundation by raising money with their annual Jump For Hope, Kids With Cancer Horse Show which they started in 2001. "The horse show has been growing, leaps and bounds every year. Cancer is one of the most horrible things to have happen to your family, it's great to have every one enjoying it together, pulling on one rope," said Ellen.

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