

Isabella Juliet Valera (Bella), Cancer Survivor & delegate of the California Rodeo Salinas to the WNFR

At a mere 5 months old, Isabella Juliet Valera (Bella) was diagnosed with LCH. Bella is the 4th child in the Valdez-Valera family and was lovingly named after her sisters favorite heroines. Bella was immediately welcomed and cherished as the baby of the family. A few weeks after returning to work as a Community Health Initiatives Director for the American Cancer Society, I received a call from Bella's grandmother. According to grandma, Bella just didn't seem right and needed medical attention. While Bella demonstrated the symptoms commonly associated with an ear infection, her specialist ordered a biopsy. Never did Nancy imagine that she would be told that her daughter had a malignant tumor in her left ear canal. Nancy was told to take Bella to Lucile Packard Children's Hospital (LPCH), to treat this rare disease.

Bella received a 9 month chemo treatment plan, and was hospitalized twice due to complications. While other babies her age were celebrating their first Holidays, Bella was dressing up in full princess attire and taking her favorite baby doll along to the weekly medical visits. Bella demonstrated enormous bravery in the face of chemo treatments and frequent tests. For several months, Bella was isolated from others in order to protect her immune system. As a result, she would be just as happy to see her doctors and nurses and as she was to see her own family. Since completing her treatment, Bella is now adjusting to life and is slowly starting to understand a "new normal" of life without daily doctor visits.

She is now 6 years old and is my superhero. Because of the continued generosity of ACS family and friends, I am able to share my personal story and not dwell on the treatment she went through, instead focus on the celebration and blissful moments yet to come in Bella's life. This summer, we celebrated her 5 years of remission at the happiest place on earth, California's Disneyland Park. She met all the princess and no matter how long the wait was to meet the princesses, we stayed till the park closed.

Nancy Valdez