

Engaging Kids and Families in Sun Safety: The Sunscreeaming Summer Graphic Novel

The core message of the book series is empowerment through knowledge.

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In New York City, Dr. Tamara Lazic Strugar has made her mark as a leading dermatologist and a champion of skin health education. Trained at Yale University, Dr. Lazic Strugar has devoted her career to both treating and educating patients and empowering the next generation of dermatologists. As Associate Clinical Professor at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, she has earned numerous awards, but her influence extends beyond academia and the clinic. Most recently, she embarked on a personal journey of authoring her very own children's graphic novel series focused on skin health.

A Journey Across the World and into Dermatology

Before her accomplished career, Dr. Lazic Strugar's story began in Serbia where she was born and raised. After high school, she moved to the United States to attend the University of California Los Angeles. There, she decided she wanted to further her education in the medical field, subsequently attending Yale University. During a dermatology rotation there, she found her passion. She eventually settled in New York to practice dermatology, where she has remained and grown her family.

"I was really drawn to how diverse the field of dermatology is – from skin cancer screenings and biopsies, surgical procedures, managing skin conditions, and so much more," Dr. Lazic Strugar explained. That curiosity led her to where she is today, primarily focused on medical dermatology, emphasizing skin cancer screenings, early detection, and patient management.

Channeling Creativity in Challenge Times

While balancing her thriving career and being a mother to her two children, Mia and Luka, Dr. Lazic Strugar's life took an unexpected turn in 2022. She was diagnosed with Stage 4 colon cancer and had to put much of her life on pause to undergo various treatments and surgeries.

“My cancer diagnosis gave me a brief pause, and time to think,” said Dr. Lazic Strugar. She decided to use this time to channel her creativity in a positive way and accomplish something she wanted to do for a long time: write children’s books about skin health.

During the summer following her diagnosis, inspiration struck while spending time with her children and reflecting on her career. “I looked to my own children and asked myself how I could teach them about skin health in a fun way,” she said. This desire blossomed into the creation of a series of graphic novels, named SKINVENTUREZ, aimed at educating children about skin health. The first book in the SKINVENTUREZ series is titled [“The Sunscreeching Summer”](#) and was published the following year in 2023.

The Sunscreeching Summer Novel

The first book in her graphic novel series, “The Sunscreeching Summer” follows a group of young adventurers, named after her own children, on their summer break as they navigate the hazards of the sun. Vital information about UV radiation, SPF, skincare, and skin cancer prevention is weaved throughout.

“A lot of irreversible sun damage occurs in adolescence and young adulthood, and childhood sunburns can lead to serious consequences later,” Dr. Lazic Strugar emphasized. “It is important to get these messages out to children while they are still young.” To bring these important sun safety messages to life, she spent a year crafting the story with the help of her children and collaborating with artists from Serbia and Croatia to create the visual elements. The result was nearly 300 illustrations, merging art and storytelling with critical health information.

Dr. Lazic Strugar has planned an entire series of future releases, with new editions discussing skin conditions like warts, eczema, and acne. Following “The Sunscreeching Summer”, Dr. Lazic Strugar’s second book of the series [“Wart-o-ween”](#) was just published on October 1st, educating kids about warts and their prevention and treatment through a spooky Halloween adventure story.

“This project has been a creative outlet during a challenging time, and it’s been incredibly rewarding,” she shared.

Engaging Kids and Families in Sun Safety

The core message of Dr. Lazic Strugar’s book series is empowerment through knowledge. “I want children to feel they have a role and choice in taking care of their skin,” she explained. When it comes to sun safety, she acknowledges the challenges of getting kids to embrace protective measures.

And with the rise of skincare obsession among tweens and teens, she also sees an opportunity to educate kids on the potential harmful effects of certain products, while taking advantage of that interest and channeling it into sunscreen use. “If you can’t beat them, join them!”

Dr. Lazic Strugar is also dedicated to combatting misinformation surrounding sunscreen. With recent online trends raising unfounded concerns about its safety and necessity, she stressed the importance of reliable medical guidance around sunscreen and sun safety as a whole. “People often think, ‘It won’t happen to me,’ but skin cancer is one of the most common cancers diagnosed worldwide, and yet it is mostly preventable” she cautioned. Furthermore, she emphasizes that sunscreen is just one aspect of skin protection, along with seeking shade and wearing protective clothing.

As she balances her roles as a mother, educator, healthcare professional, and author, Dr. Lazic Strugar’s mission remains clear: to inspire the next generation to prioritize their skin health, ensuring they have the tools and knowledge to make informed choices.

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