13-Year-Old Raises Melanoma Awareness To Honor His Grandfather

Mitch Diamond, 13, is asking others to help him raise awareness of and help prevent melanoma in honor of his late grandfather.

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Five years ago, when he was just 8-years old, Mitch Diamond lost his grandfather due to melanoma. Now, in advance of his Bar Mitzvah, he's asking his friends, family, and community to help him raise awareness of and help prevent melanoma.

Alex Morgenstern, Mitch's grandfather, was born in 1941 hiding under a barn in Nazi-occupied Poland. His grandmother gave him sugar cubes to keep from crying so as not to be discovered and caught. With his father, he fled Poland and settled in Germany as a non-Jew. After the war ended, he and his family traveled to Coney Island, New York, where they settled. In New York, he met Tamara Kormes, the woman who would later become Mitch's grandmother. The two were married for one-month shy of 50 years. He moved to Florida – where Mitch lives with his family – and started a business. In 2005, he was diagnosed with his first melanoma and was treated with interferon.

For almost a decade, melanoma was an afterthought. But then, a grapefruit-sized tumor developed in his groin. It quickly metastasized throughout his body including his brain. He underwent two craniotomies and participated in multiple clinical trials with Mount Sinai's Dr. Jose Lutzky. His battle ended peacefully in his home on March 22, 2015, surrounded by his wife, his children, and his sisters.

"I chose to honor my grandfather in this way because he was always out in the sun his entire life, yet never knew the dangers of the sun," says Mitch. "By raising awareness of melanoma, other people won't have to suffer through skin cancer the way my family has."

Mitch, savvy with social media, decided to create a campaign to raise the money needed to install sunscreen dispensers in high-traffic areas. He also sent letters to influencers across the internet – including the Melanoma Research Alliance – hoping to get the word out. So far, Mitch has raised $2,500 of his $3,000 goal – enough to purchase and install at least five additional dispensers. In addition to installing sunscreen dispensers, and after the COVID-19 restrictions end, Mitch plans to form an organization called Students Against Melanoma at his school.

Brooke, Mitch's older sister, also chose to advocate for sun safety for her Bat Mitzvah. She began

by collecting sunscreen and UPF clothing from companies. Then, she created a similar Facebook campaign to the one Mitch created and raised funds needed to install two sunscreen dispensers in Sugar Sand Park and two at the Swim and Racquet Center both in Boca Raton.

“I just wish people knew about the dangers of the sun and its deadly rays,” says Mitch. “One person dies of melanoma every hour and melanoma has become the second most common cancer for people aged 15 – 29. I hope my project helps to save lives!”

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