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## University of Lethbridge student and Horns rugby player Karlee Durfey offering a rainbow of hope

University of Lethbridge kinesiology student Karlee Durfey and her family understand fully how your world can be turned upside down in a manner of moments and how that can lead to the creation of something totally unexpected. The day-to-day priorities of school, work and relationships fade to the background upon the sudden illness of a child.

Shortly after Durfey's two-year-old niece, Bo Smith, complained of tummy pain in December 2019, a routine trip to the doctor resulted in a shocking cancer diagnosis. For the next few months, their lives revolved around Bo's health as she fought her cancer battle at the Alberta Children's Hospital. A GoFundMe page was created, and support rolled in from friends and family in their home community of southern Alberta, helping offset the loss of work, the trips to Calgary and the hotel stays.



A year later, Bo, minus a kidney, is a healthy three-year-old and in remission. Her checkups will be many and the spectre of her brush with cancer will always be a part of their lives. Now, on the other side of the crisis, her family is looking to support other families whose worlds are similarly being upended.

"We spent quite a few days at the hospital and honestly, it gets boring, so we were looking for



things to do,” says Durfey, who is in her fourth year and also plays for the Pronghorns women’s rugby team. “So, my mom took us to a sewing store, and we started embroidering. The first thing I ever embroidered was a rainbow — Bo loves rainbows — they kind of signify the light after the rain, after a hard thing.”

When the clouds lifted on their own lives, Durfey said her sister (Bo’s mom) had an idea.

“I was still embroidering, and she said we should embroider clothes and sell them, not necessarily to make a profit but to give to families that needed help when their kids are sick — just like the support our family got,” says Durfey. “She spent a lot of time in the hospital and saw a lot of families and a lot of kids going through the same thing who could really use some help.”

Not long after, Bo Smith & Co was created. An online shop, it offers T-shirts and sweatshirts designed by Durfey and her sister that feature the rainbow she first embroidered in a Calgary hospital room. The model, of course, is Bo.

“We donate any money we raise straight to families we know who need help,” says Durfey. “We’ve also collaborated with another mom who had a little girl sadly pass away recently. We’ve given gas cards to families needing to travel up to Calgary, money for hotels and food, things like that. Those are huge costs you don’t think of and where my sister needed help.”

For Durfey, the entire experience has been eye-opening and heartwarming.

“Childhood cancer, before this, was never really a topic for me. I never really understood it,” she says. “I feel like most people dealing with cancer they never truly understand it until maybe someone very close to them is going through it.”

She’s thankful for the support she received from her Pronghorn teammates and coaches, faculty members at the U of L and the southern Alberta community that continues to patronize Bo Smith & Co. The demand for product has outstripped their capabilities, even with her other two sisters chipping in to help. They now order shirts from a wholesale company, and rather than hand embroider each individual piece, have two machines to help with the process.

“I feel like most people love the opportunity to give money to kids with cancer and this has opened up a lot of people’s minds and hearts to recognizing there are many kids going through this,” she says.

In November, Bo Smith & Co teamed up with former Pronghorns track star Aaron Hernandez to create mustache shirts to raise awareness for prostate cancer and Durfey is enthused about other initiatives she says are in the works. In addition to a possible

career as an occupational therapist, she wants to see how much more they can do with Bo Smith & Co.

“We plan on collaborating with other people to spread awareness, and not only for childhood cancers. We really want to help anyone we can,” she says. “And we understand not everybody has the means to donate or the money to buy a shirt, so simply sharing our story, sharing our website and our Instagram and following us — even that helps.”

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To view online: <https://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/rainbow-hope>

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