



# STRONG IN COSPLAY

A family that cosplays together stays together.

by Maddie Michalik, senior editor

**N**ot many people can say that they have a personal connection to their favorite superheroes, but for Josh Strong, a love for comics runs in the family. Literally.

Josh's great-grandfather, Harry Sahle, was a Timely Comics (later to be known as Marvel) artist during the Golden Age of Comic Books in the '40s. He worked on several iconic charac-

ters, such as Captain America, Bucky Barnes, and Human Torch. Growing up surrounded by comics books, naturally, Josh became a comics fan ever since he was a tiny tot and was able to look at pictures and start reading.

Having a tie to characters that you have loved since a young kid is pretty incredible, which also set the foundation for Josh to start building his own

character-based costumes and props. In 2005, Josh's then-girlfriend Trish photographed his first cosplay as Nightwing. A couple of years later, he put together his first Batsuit and created pieces as Captain America and Spider-Man.

Today, high school sweethearts Josh and Trish are married with two daughters — and now the whole family is involved in cosplay. The duo owns two

photography studios, which is super helpful in capturing the whole family's epic portrayals as Marvel, DC, Disney, and Star Wars characters.

"People said it's very inspiring to see us with our kids and immersing them together as a family," Josh says. "For me personally, having started by myself and now gaining my daughters and my wife doing it is awesome and humbling."

Josh and Trish's 6-year-old daughter Adeline (Addie) has been cosplaying since she was 2 years old. Josh took her to a Hudson Valley Comic-Con costume contest event that he was judging and created a last-minute Captain America costume for her. At the event, she completely immersed herself in the character and had the time of her life on stage in front of an audience of several thousand people. Now, one of her favorites is a custom costume of Bucky Barnes as a partner in crime to her Dad.

"Doing some of the characters that I've done, what is Comic Cap without Bucky? He's his ride or die," Josh says. "My daughter cosplaying as Bucky is probably the coolest thing she's ever done. She is all about that character. Before any shoot, she's always wanting to look on Google and pick her poses out."

Scroll through the @strongincostume Instagram handle, and you'll also find 4-year-old Ayla's cosplays of Star Wars' Rey and her own Captain America costume.

One of the family's most popular photos was a tribute to Stan Lee shortly after he passed away in 2018. Josh and Addie

were both dressed as different versions of Captain America, Josh symbolically passing the shield to the next generation. The photo went viral and caught Marvel's attention.

Josh and Trish thought they were getting pranked when a production team reached out to Josh on Instagram to be involved in Marvel 616, but it turned out to be a very real opportunity. The show, which is available on Disney+, is a documentary series that explores Marvel's history, impact on pop culture, and highlights the fandom. The Strong family is featured in the fifth episode "Suit Up," which follows five cosplayers getting ready for New York Comic Con 2019.

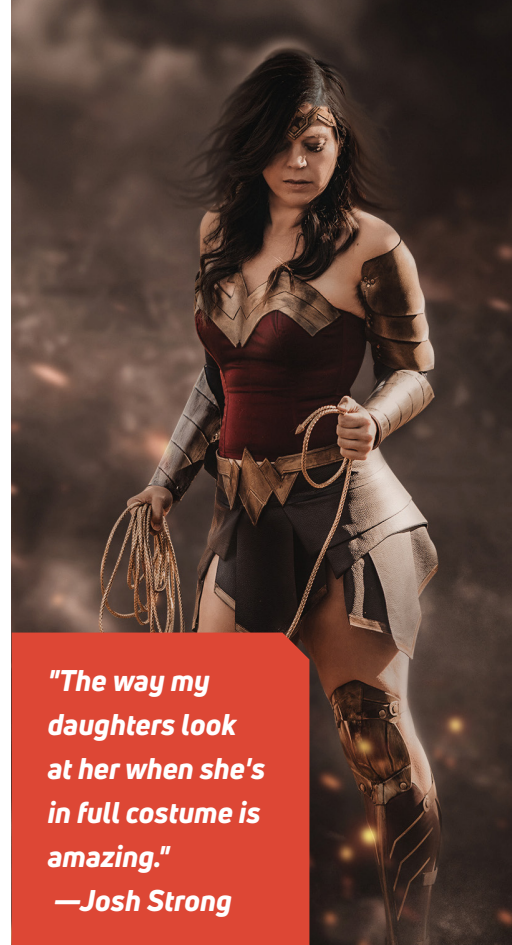
The episode shows Josh creating a comic-book-accurate Captain America costume for the convention. It was a particularly special con for the duo because Trish went as Peggy Carter for her first cosplay ever. The crew filmed for a tiring two weeks and captured their everyday lives as genuinely and as real as possible, Trish says.

"Now, as a family, it's been a lot of fun — more fun than it ever was," Josh says. "I think being able to portray different characters like Cap and Peggy is just so awesome as a couple who has been together for so long and has the kind of love that we have. I see a lot of us in them."

Trish also cosplays as Wonder Woman, a character who she resonates with having gone through a huge health journey of her own (you can follow her on Instagram at @tinier\_trish\_), because of an attitude that you can get through anything no matter how hard it is. "I've always been driven toward strong female characters who can also physically be strong," she says. "I just feel like Wonder Woman stands for that, that you can overcome anything."

One of Josh's latest costumes is the Batman Tactical suit, one that he has been working on for a year. He uses 3D printers to create hard pieces of his costumes and combines them with the right fabrics and soft goods. Josh also runs an Etsy shop where he prints props, from Scarlet Witch's headpiece to Batman's emblem, for other cosplayers to complete their looks.

As more nationwide restrictions lighten and it becomes safer to visit hospitals



**"The way my daughters look at her when she's in full costume is amazing."**

**—Josh Strong**

and children's homes again, Josh and Trish hope to continue to give back to their community by interacting with kids while portraying iconic superheroes.

"I think that will be so fantastic for kids to see such a strong, iconic role model in Trish," Josh says. "Because the way my daughters look at her when she's in full costume is amazing, the gleam in their eyes. I think it's a little different, seeing Dad do it versus Mom do it. Wonder Woman is such a strong, meaningful character."

In the future, Josh and Trish hope to tackle cosplays like Iron Man and Venom and Catwoman and Wonder Woman in Asteria armor, respectively. Addie and Ayla also offer new ideas to their parents every day. It's only a matter of time before the girls start running the show! 🌟

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Maddie is a senior editor at the Pop Insider and the Toy Insider, where she fuels her geeky heart with the latest in pop culture, what show to binge-watch next, and the coolest products. She is also the editor-in-chief of the Toy Book, making sure the toy industry is up-to-date on the latest toy and entertainment news.

