

Sweet treats sold to support Children's Miracle Network



By Sara Gottardi

On a sunny Thursday, Aug. 13, the resilient Mars Worsley and passionate mother, Leaf Worsley, were the advocates for the Bancroft Miracle Treat Day at Dairy Queen (DQ) in town. The day supported cancer research and bettering treatment systems to fight against cancer. With all proceeds made from the Blizzard Treats sold across the country at participating DQ locations, all funds went to local Children's Miracle Network hospitals. Since 1984, the Miracle Treat Days have helped raise over \$100 million for those in need, something Leaf Worsley feels extremely passionate about.

It was in April of 2013 Leaf's life took an especially difficult turn. After she had been diagnosed with stage three breast cancer a year prior in August 2012, her oldest son Mars Warsley, had a decline in health. He was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL), a cancer of the blood and bone marrow.

“Even talking with other parents of leukemia kids, the symptoms we each noticed were slightly different. We'd all gone through a cold, Mars just seemed to be taking longer to get over it. He'd be worn out after a day at school, get a fever at night but feel fine the next morning. He didn't get the bruising that is typical. Generally, unexplained weight loss, persistent pain, or constant fatigue are warning signs you should get checked out by your doctor,” Leaf said.

Mars was taken in to see a doctor in Bancroft, which quickly escalated into being taken by ambulance to the Peterborough Regional Health Centre where he was then taken by helicopter to Toronto's Sick Kids hospital as his hemoglobin levels ran dangerously low. As a common and curable cancer found predominantly in young children, doctors had found the cells in Mars's spinal fluid and Leaf recounted how thankful she'd been that they'd found the cells there instead of having waited before it had expanded to a greater area. “Testing the cerebrospinal fluid for leukemia cells is a relatively recent development. Leukemic cells like to hide there and conventional IV chemotherapy can't get rid of them, so kids used to relapse a lot more. Now, they test the spinal fluid for leukemia cells. When they are present – as with Mars – additional chemotherapy can be injected directly into the spine, and radiation is also used,” she said.

Leaf and Mars were in treatment at the same time and kept in touch via their iPads and FaceTime app between sessions to let each other know how they were holding up. Leaf's husband Nolan said, “Luckily, the overlap of them both having daily treatment wasn't long, and Leaf managed to get the rest of her follow ups switched to Princess Margaret across the street from Sick Kids.”

Mars and Leaf kept one another in good spirits as Mars also expanded on a game he would play while he was in his hospital room called: Ninja Stars.

“The Ninja Stars are a top secret way of combining five popsicle sticks (without glue!) into a ninja star. You throw them at moms or dads or brothers and they explode on impact back into five popsicle sticks,” he explained.

“We're happy to do anything to give back. We've received tremendous care at Sick Kids, as have what seems like hundreds of other Bancroft area families. It seems like everyone was, has, or knows a child who has benefited from care at Sick Kids,” Leaf says. For around the past 12 years, Leaf has been involved with raising money for cancer research and before Bancroft's Relay for Life started, she'd told her North Hastings High School students she'd shave her head if they donated enough money towards cancer research.

Having raised more than \$1,000 the first time, a couple years later she'd do it again to benefit one of the first Bancroft Relay for Life events, Nolan said.

All this has ?made us realize how lucky we are to live in a wonderfully supportive and caring town like Bancroft,? Leaf and Nolan said, and in bringing this cause to the forefront the Worsleys shared a piece of themselves through an extremely personal and turbulent experience that they, along with millions of others, have and are suffering from.