Imagine losing a husband or wife to a cancer that's not supposed to affect people in an age range specific to them. Now, imagine losing a child three years later to a cancer not usually found in children. How do you go on? For some, this situation is not something they will have to deal with in their lifetime. But for Pauline Patulli, this is her reality and through her struggle she has managed to start a foundation in her son's name to have his

legacy carried on. "Knowing my son, he would want me to go on, and my husband I know he would want me to for sure because we had talked about it," she says.

Married in 1983 to Carlos Gomes, Pauline who works in the hotel industry had her first child Jason in 1987 and her second, Nicholas in 1992. It was in 2003 that her husband Carlos was robbed of his life at only 44 years old on February 27th after surviving just over a year after his diagnosis. He succumbed to pancreatic cancer, a type of cancer that doesn't normally strike people at such a young age. Finding strength in each other, Pauline, Jason and Nicholas continued to live their lives. "We talk about their father. It's not a subject we don't talk about," Patulli says. "I made sure their lives were normal. We did the hockey, the soccer, they didn't miss anything. We just helped each other get through it."

But unfortunately their strength could not avert them from the tragedy that decided to strike just a year after the passing of Carlos. Jason Gomes, who was described as many as being very loving and kind-hearted, was diagnosed with the same disease that took his father. One of Jason's dreams was to play hockey, a sport he was extremely talented at, and attend Cornell University. In the spring of 2004, he got accepted to two prestigious Prep Schools in the United States. "When he got those acceptance letters, he was overjoyed," Pauline says with tears in her eyes as she remembers Jason's reaction to one of his greatest moments. "He worked so hard for that." But the joy was short-lived because just as he graduated from Collége Ste. Anne in Lachine, Jason got news that would turn his life upside down.

It started with what seemed to simply be a case of acid reflux but after a battery of tests, Jason was found to have stomach cancer with a lot of lesions on his liver, which is highly rare amongst young adults his age. His mother tried to be strong for him. "You try to be brave in front of him but you're thinking this can't be happening again," she says of her reaction to the news. "It was a nightmare." Because it was not a childhood disease, Pauline decided to take Jason to the Jewish General Hospital to be treated. After doing chemotherapy both intravenously and through pill format, it was discovered he was severely anemic and needed blood transfusions. At this point, Pauline decided to take Jason to Centre Hospitalier de L'Université de Montréal (CHUM), where Dr. Denis Soulières decided to investigate Jason's progress further. It was discovered that the treatment had not had any effect on him.

Jason then contracted a deadly streptococcal infection, which he fought against all odds. Dr. Soulieres, who deals with a lot of cases like this one, then tried a different approach to try and rid of Jason's cancer. Things seemed to be looking up. Jason enrolled at John Abbott College but in the summer of 2005, he started having other pains and it was found that the cancer had spread to his hip. By December it was in his brain and though they did radiation, making the brain tumor disappear and although he fought right until the end, his liver failed and Jason could no longer beat the odds losing his courageous battle on February 3rd, 2006. "He told me he didn't want to die," Patulli says of what her son wanted for himself. "All I could say to him was that I'd trade places with him if I could. I couldn't tell him he was going to get better. I couldn't lie to him because I didn't know the answer myself."

Out of such tragedy, came a little piece of hope for other sufferers in Jason's situation. Fonds Jason, an idea thought up by Jason's god-father and uncle, is a foundation in which Pauline is president. Its basis is to get funding for young adults with cancer. According to the foundation's mission

statement and as stated by Dr. Soulières, the survival rates for young adults are not encouraging because they seem to have a reduced tolerance to chemotherapy. "I don't know why this is," says Pauline. "I guess it's because they're still growing between the ages of 17 and 21 but more research is needed in this area." The foundation hopes to get funding in order to facilitate the research greatly needed in this area.



## La maladie n'a pas d'âge

## «Ces derniers mois ont été les pires de ma courte vie...»

L'auteur est patient au CHUM. Dans un texte fort émouvant, il nous raconte ici comment sa vie a basculé, en 2004, quand il a appris qu'il était atteint d'une forme rare de cancer. En bas de page, nous publions le texte de son médecin, le D' Denis Soulières, qui nous explique comment il est important pour des jeunes comme Jason de sortir de l'isolement dans lequel la maladie les plonge.

## Jason ne doit pas être seul

un jeune homme regardant longuement le sac de

ses veines... »

« Il y a dans une salle d'hôpital chimiothérapie, souhaitant qu'il finisse bientôt de s'écouler dans

The Canadian Cancer Society doesn't list any statistics on this particular age group, classifying young adults as being between the ages of 20 and 44 and although they have some support groups that help youths starting at age 18, there weren't any that could help Jason. According to Patulli, there is also a great lack of talk groups for people in Jason's age group. "I became his best friend," she says, being glad for that precious time she had with him since she works from home. "But of course as close as we were, there are still things you're not going to tell your mom. It would've been different for him in coming to terms with his illness if he would have had someone to talk to who was going through the same things he was."

She speaks about the isolation that could be felt by these youths, as demonstrated by Jason because not a lot of people understand what they are experiencing and this is why there is a need for support groups, even chat forums on the internet to be set up for youths like Jason. "One day his body could take him playing two hockey games and a soccer game in one day. Then all of a sudden you can't get your body to do what it's used to doing," she says of one of the many physical as well as psychological struggles her son dealt with. "They [youths like Jason] become so alone because their life is at a standstill while everyone else goes on with theirs."

For Jason, his family and friends gave him strength. In an article he wrote for La Presse last February, he explained what his family meant to him, writing, "My family and my friends are a great help in my struggle. Without them, I surely would not be here." Pauline says Jason was very family-oriented among many other things. She speaks openly about him, saying that it helps her with the healing process.

"He was a very serious kid but at the same time he was happy. He was very tenacious, courageous and just had a great aura about him," she says with a look only a mother could have for her child. She hopes the foundation will help carry his memory on. Pauline, along with other volunteers on the committee including Dr. Soulières, started an annual golf tournament which raised over \$40,000 last August. With the help of volunteers, she is also organizing a benefit dinner, starting a website and looking for corporate sponsorship.

"Knowing Jason, I'm sure this is what he'd want to do. He always wanted to be of help," she says. "I think what I'm keeping alive is that spirit." She says he was always generous with others even when he was sick. She remembers the time Jason had an elderly lady in his hospital room who was almost blind. There was nobody there to feed her in the mornings and Jason couldn't get out of bed because he was paralyzed on one side. "He wanted to help her eat," Pauline says with tears in her eyes remembering her son's caring spirit. "So he'd say to her 'it's on your left or it's on your right' until he was sure she had eaten all her

food. Then when her family came to visit later on, he'd tell them what had happened with her during the day."

It's this generosity Patulli hopes to convey through the foundation and in the foundation's mission statement, it boasts to "demonstrate to these youths that society cares about them." Through the foundation she'd also like to help families who can't necessarily afford the medication these youths need to fight cancer, saying that some of Jason's prescriptions used to cost her \$1,500 for 30 days. "I was fortunate because I have insurance and I work but some people don't have this and need assistance."

As for the future, Pauline finds strength in sharing Jason's story and telling people about his courageous battle. In his article in La Presse, Jason told his story of constant struggle openly as his mother is now doing. Just a year before his death, he shared with so many his love for life when he wrote, "I appreciate life so much more and I wake up every morning with a smile on my lips acknowledging all that I have today...and all that I hope and dream about for tomorrow."

Unfortunately his life was cut too short, his hopes and dreams not realized but his loving mom is hoping to make a difference for other youths who have hopes and dreams like Jason. "He's still around," she says. "He's with me all the time so I guess I just keep going because of that. I still talk to him. What gives me strength is knowing that he's gone but he's also still right here."



For more information or to donate to Fonds Jason: FONDS JASON, 3551 boul. St. Charles, Suite 249,

Tel: (514) 630-0110

Kirkland, QC H9H 3C4

Email: fondsjason@videotron.ca