

# The Toronto Star

## On Mother's Day, turning tears into hope; Meagan's Walk raises \$270,000 for research

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Illustrations: Aaron Lynett toronto star A tear rolls down the cheek of Shannon Burns, right, as she and husband Mark, close friends with Meagan Bebenek's family, wave to children in Sick Kids Hospital yesterday.

Sue McKechnie learned that her little boy, Shawn, had brain cancer on May 6, 2006.

Looking out the windows of Hospital for Sick Children, the stricken Orangeville mother saw hundreds of people marching up University Ave. in an annual fundraiser to fight childhood brain cancer.

As McKechnie watched the marchers in Meagan's Walk join arms around the hospital and "hug" the sick children inside, she thought, "Next year, I am going to do that."

So last year on Mother's Day, she and her extended family marched with Shawn. They raised more than \$6,000 for research and spent a precious day with many families like themselves, struggling to help a child through a terrible illness.

Shawn was two months short of his third birthday when he died on Oct. 1.

McKechnie celebrated Mother's Day yesterday by walking once again for Shawn and other ill children in a 2,000-strong throng that raised more than \$270,000 for cancer research. She was joined by 27 members of her family, including daughter Jayme, 5, wearing jaunty yellow scarves with the slogan "Shawn's Team."

"Mother's Day means a lot of things," said McKechnie quietly.

For some mothers, Mother's Day isn't about flowers or breakfast in bed or being treated like a queen. Instead, it is about fighting for your child's life and, if that battle is lost, honouring your child's spirit by helping other children.

Denise Bebenek, who founded Meagan's Walk after her daughter died of brain cancer seven years ago, said it was just happenstance that she got the first city permit for Mother's Day.

Saying she believed "that's a sign," Bebenek has kept the date ever since. More than \$1 million has been raised by the charity that holds the walk and a number of other fundraising activities for research into pediatric brain tumours.

The event's date has a deep resonance for a mother who has lost a child, said Sue Pacheco.

"Mother's Day is a great day to celebrate our child - to celebrate his life," she said, standing with her

husband Joe and more than 60 people from her Mississauga family who raised more than \$15,000.

On their shirts was a joyful picture of her son, Nicholas Pachero, who died last July at age 5 from a brain stem tumour. He's playfully striking a pose in the photo.

Joe Pacheco felt the picture caught the essence of his only child - "he was always outgoing, playful. This is his surfer attitude."

They walked in Meagan's Walk last year, pushing Nicholas in his stroller. This year they were going to visit his grave after the event.

For some, yesterday's event was also an expression of hope.

Charlene Robson's granddaughter Hannah Clare Colton is only 7 months old and in the midst of chemotherapy following the removal of a brain tumour. The Ingersoll family has taken the child to London and Toronto for treatments.

Robson's three sons, including Hannah's dad, 28-year-old Josh, and a slew of relatives marched together in yellow shirts. Laughing and smiling in her dad's arms, Hannah was the centre of attention for the group that nicknamed her "Hannah Banana."

"We've had so much support from family," says Robson, who pushed her own mother along the route in a wheelchair. "I wouldn't be anywhere else today."

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