

Young Laura loses brave battle with cancer after inspiring school and community



By Brock Weir

Hope was in the cold winter air last January as students, parents, and friends of the St. Joseph Catholic Elementary School community came together, along with musicians and performers from across York Region, in solidarity with Laura Nowosad.

Laura, then a Grade 2 student at St. Joseph, had spent Christmas with her family in Texas, where she was receiving experimental treatment for an inoperable brain tumour. The evening was a tremendous success, raising thousands of dollars to allow the Nowosads to continue their stay ? and Laura's treatment ? in the United States.

But however much money was raised, all Laura's classmates wanted was for her to be there with them at the start of the school year this month.

Sadly, it was not to be.

Laura lost her battle with the brain stem tumour on August 11, aged just seven, her family announced.

?It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of our beloved Laura,? posted SavingLaura.com, a website developed not only to raise funds for the family, but also to advance a petition put forward by Laura's parents to open the doors to such experimental surgery in Canada. ?She went peacefully at home surrounded by her parents, Janusz and Mira, who never left her side. She held her parents' hands until the peaceful end.?

This past January, the family shared their story with The Auroran and expressed their deep thanks to the community for their support. They continue their thanks to this day.

?We would like to express our love and gratitude to all sponsors and others for their support, love, and hope,? says Janusz. ?We would like to thank everyone for unconditional support throughout for our family at this very difficult time.?

Laura was never far from the thoughts and prayers of members of the St. Joseph community. A group of parents, supported by principal Christine deHaas, took it upon themselves to organize the January benefit, after being struck by the financial struggles the Nowosad family were bearing to keep hope alive. Out of pocket \$25,000 on their first visit to the Bursynski Clinic, and with what was expected to be a \$30,000 course of treatment, they looked at ways they could help ease the family's burden.

One of the first initiatives students pulled together was a sale of bracelets called ?Rainbow Looms?. The initiative stemmed from earlier Rainbow Looms made at the school's weekly Friday art club, of which Laura was a member. Grade 5 student Julia came up with the idea to make bracelets specifically for Laura and through pre-Christmas sales made \$5,500.

The idea soon caught on with parents who eventually approached the school's administration with the idea for a benefit.

“One parent talked to another parent and it just started to grow,” said Ms. deHaas at the time. “The whole thing has been a humbling experience. People come into the school to drop off money, they have been dropping off auction items, and it has been unbelievable.”

While the family said they were overwhelmed by the support that came from the event, they were grappling with the realisation the treatments just weren't working. They then put their faith in antineoplaston, a new treatment currently under review by the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA). With approval still pending, the only way they could use this treatment in Canada was with permission from Health Canada to find a local practitioner through their Special Access programs.

Although they found a doctor in Toronto willing to carry out the treatment, they were unable to do so without Federal approval. Nevertheless, by the spring, Janusz told The Auroran he felt he had nothing more to lose.

“We want to come back to our home,” he said. “Laura wants to come back to her friends, if she is not able to come back to school yet.”