LBP student grows locks extra-long for cancer research

By Brock Weir

Enjoy the luxurious mop of locks on top of Jakob Israel's head while you can, because they won't be there very much longer.

The Grade 4 student at Lester B. Pearson Public School is getting in the zone to undergo a head shaving at the school's Touchstone Assembly on Monday, June 16, all for a good cause ? and he has been growing his hair extra-long for the occasion.

With help from barbers from Aurora's Yellow Orange Salon, Jakob is planning to make a clean sweep to raise money for cancer research.

Jakob was inspired to undergo the head shaving by his older cousin, Kai, who successfully battled brain cancer when he was just five. Cancer-free, he is now about to turn 17.

?I was thinking of what I could do to raise money and I thought of my cousin, Kai,? says Jakob. ?My first idea was to make bracelets and sell them, but we changed that. Almost everyone who has cancer loses their hair and I wanted to support them. Some people exclude them because they are bald and I just want to help them feel like they are not the only ones who get made fun of and stuff.?

According to his dad, Steven, Jakob originally set a goal of $500. By the time they sat down with The Auroran last week, their numbers had swelled to a whopping $2,332 and, thanks to online canvassing, these donations then totalled just over $2,500 by the end of our interview!

?The money is coming in mostly from my family, students, and some from teachers,? he says, noting he has taken some ribbing for what he wants to do. ?Everybody thinks, ?That's nuts! You're really brave to be doing this. Aren't you going to miss your hair?' But I answer, ?No, it is for a good cause.'?

As Jakob speaks about his fundraising initiatives, Steven beams with pride. He and Jake's mom, Natalie, are both ?incredibly proud? of their son and what this has become, particularly as this is an initiative Jake has taken on all on his own.

After running the idea by Lester B. Pearson principal Arin Otis, Jakob then came to his parents with his idea. That idea, says Steven, also spurred them into action.

?I get emotional when I think of it,? he says.

I am trying to think what I was doing when I was nine years old and what I was thinking about. He mentioned Kai, his grandmother also battled breast cancer, and there are a lot of cancers within our family. For him to want to support them in this way is tremendous.

?This has morphed on its own. We definitely care about other people and one thing we have always done with Jakob [and younger brother Henry] is we find a lot of parents don't talk to their kids about everyday life and they feel they are too young to know what is going on. We have always tried to talk to Jakob and let him know what other people are dealing with and what other people are going through, and to be thankful with what he has. He has always been a kind and giving individual, but the fact he has taken all of this on, on his own, is just tremendous. We are very excited to see how large this has become.?

As for Jakob, while he undergoes his head-shaving and as his fellow students see the results, he wants to break down barriers and also create a dialogue.

?I want my classmates to know that just because you have cancer, that even if they had surgery and stuff, they are just like us, they have just had a problem,? he says. ?I want them to treat people just as they would treat me. [With fundraising] whatever your heart tells you to do, you should do it and just try your best to get what you want to get.?

To support Jakob's initiative, visit convio.cancer.ca/site/TR/Third partyevent/IFE_ON_CommunityPartnerships_? px=5725638&pg= personal&fr_id=15142.