



Jessica's footprint

A step closer to a cure for paediatric brain tumours

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Jessica's Story

On March 21, 2002, parents Wendy and Rob Durigon and big sister Alyssa happily brought home two-day old Jessica from Guelph General Hospital. Exactly one year later, on March 21, 2003, Wendy, Rob and Alyssa returned home from Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto *without* Jessica because she had died from a cancerous brain tumour.

Jessica developed like any other healthy baby for the first four and half months of her life. She grew and changed on a daily basis. Suddenly, in the matter of only a week or two, something was terribly wrong. Jessica wasn't herself. On August 22nd, Jessica was taken to Sick Kids and diagnosed with an ependymoma brain tumour.

Jessica withstood an original seven-hour surgery and then many "routine" surgeries for shunts and feeding tubes. She suffered through hospital infections and daily unpleasant procedures.

And yet, Jessica was this amazing little person who won the hearts of all those that met her.

After ten long weeks of hospitalization, Jessica came home. There were good days and bad days, but Jessica so often had an encouraging smile. She even resumed her developmental milestones and everyone cheered her on. After clear scans and seeing some real changes in her overall well being, there seemed to be hope for the future.

Then on March 17th, doctors discovered the tumour had returned and that Jessica would never survive another surgery...that she would never come home again. She was connected to a morphine pain pump.

On March 19th, Jessica celebrated her first birthday. She seemed to rally that one last time. She played, hugged and giggled with her sister Alyssa. She slipped into a coma and then died in her Daddy's arms two days later on March 21, 2003.



Jessica's doctor makes an astonishing discovery

Jessica's tumour was donated to her doctor, Peter Dirks and his research team at Sick Kids Hospital. Recently, they have found information that may have dramatic effects on the way brain cancer, as well as breast and testicular cancers, are treated in the future. Drug testing is currently underway.

This discovery has received international interest and on May 1, 2006, CBC, The National, covered Jessica's Story along with the details of how the research team at Sick Kids may be one step closer to finding a cure.

Making Strides in Guelph

Brain tumours are the leading cause of cancer deaths for children under the age of 20 and the statistical rate of a child getting cancer is now 1 in 2 in their lifetime. The only paediatric brain tumour research centre in Canada is at Sick Kids in Toronto.

The Durigon family in Guelph is doing all they can to help the Sick Kids research team further their findings by raising money in Jessica's memory. They need your help.