



Wills's Story

Preface

I was recently asked to write a short synopsis of Wills's battle with cancer. In all honesty it's difficult to look back and not be over emotional regarding such an experience because it's so overwhelming and, in large part, a bit of a blur. However, I thought I'd give it a try and set out the events as they unfolded in as close to a 'factual format' as possible. I hope it will help everyone who reads it to try to 'live in the now' as it highlights that none of us know just what's around the corner and that 'at any time, at any moment, day or night, life can change in an instant'!

Normal day:

The first signs that something was wrong with Wills started almost imperceptibly. Saturday morning on January 28th, 2018 was just a normal Saturday. Perhaps a little bit special as that this particular morning Wills and I were headed to the ski hill to take skiing lessons. We'd been trying to get around to it for a few years but never given the bursting schedule of football (soccer), ice hockey, swim kids and play dates it was hard to fit anything else in. That said, the ski resort is very close, only about 30 minutes' drive from home and by 10:30am we were standing at the top of the bunny hill ready to make our first attempt.

Given all the hype Wills seemed reluctant to ski at first and although it wasn't a particularly cold day almost immediately he seemed a little subdued and asked to go inside to warm up. I refused and said he would be O.K. if he 'got going' but he complained that he was too tired. Frustrated, I left him at the top, sitting in the snow and had a couple of runs on my own. Each time I came up to the top of the bunny hill again he would moan about wanting to go inside. After a few attempts I gave up trying to convince him and we went inside for hot chocolate and chilli dogs then packed up and left for home. I was pretty irritated after all the build-up and effort but leaving cheered him up.

Nothing else seemed untoward for the rest of the day until later in the afternoon. Wills became unexpectedly ill. He was physically sick a number of times (only three of four) throughout the evening and then into the night. Naturally I assumed that he had a 'tummy ache'. After all it was January and the school was full of coughs and colds at this time of the year. His little sister (Scarlett) was in kindergarten and seemed to 'collect' them.

Although the vomiting subsided, later that night Wills continued to feel pain and on Sunday he was off his food. As a precaution I gave him some Tylenol and the day off school on Monday. That Monday night he slept in my bed. He wasn't sick but he was crying out, on and off, and in discomfort. I was pretty sure it was a tummy bug although because he wasn't throwing up anymore part of me genuinely thought he may just be trying to deliberately prolong his symptoms in order to get out of his Tuesday morning spelling test. Literally I told him that "if he didn't calm down I would take him to hospital in the morning for a check-up", to which he bitterly complained because he 'didn't want a shot'!

On Tuesday morning, and against his wishes, I decided that I would swing by the local hospital on the way to school.

Hospitals have a policy of running a number of tests (blood, CT Scan, etc.) on any child brought into A&E with 'abdominal related symptoms' so I expected a bit of a wait. As it turned out we waited for some time (perhaps an hour) before the nurse came back in (swishing the curtain aggressively). Despite the wait she simply apologized for the delay and said they were still 'working on it'. Wills was in no pain whatsoever but was 'going up the walls' with boredom and actually 'wanted to go to school'. A first!

A further few hours passed and, now at 3 hours, at this point we had become very frustrated and simply got out of the hospital.

Diagnosis:

Eventually the doctor did return and I was nonchalantly asked if I would go with her for a chat. I was taken to a private room. Just two chairs. Nothing else.

I remember that she asked me to sit down, then grabbed the other chair and sat, very deliberately, about 2-3 feet directly in front of me. Face to face.

With hindsight I should have been in panic-mode but even though she looked very nervous I thought it more 'odd' than worrying.

She calmly and very 'exactly' explained that the doctors had discovered a cancerous tumor on Wills's kidney.

Oddly, I wasn't conscious of the actual conversation at all. and only now realise that I went into shock and blocked her voice out. I remember stopping the doctor mid-sentence and blurted out: "did you just say the word cancer a few moments ago"? The doctor, nodded and began to apologize profusely.

Clearly under stress herself, she informed me that there could be no doubt and that the tumor was significant in size (about the size of Wills's lung). She stated that this indicated that he had been suffering from the condition, undiagnosed, for a considerable period of time.

She asked me whether I wanted to contact anybody. I fumbled for a second and she suggested: 'a family member, a counsellor or maybe a priest'?

I'm not deeply religious but for some reason that particular suggestion impacted me immediately. I felt suddenly devastated and in disbelief. Wills was a normal, over-exuberant and active 7yr. old. He played in a football (soccer) team and attended the football academy, played ice hockey, attended swimming classes and could run like the wind. Plus, only 3 days before, both Wills and I had been booked in for ski lessons at the local hill. It was crazy.

Perhaps in order to reassure me the doctor stated that while we had been waiting, behind the scenes the medical authorities had already swung into action. Teams had been contacted and alerted at both the Kelowna General Hospital some 50km away and the Teck-Acute Centre (for life threatening and terminal conditions) at the BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver, some 400km away. Indeed, at that moment much analysis and discussion were taking place. As we spoke, an emergency surgical team in Vancouver were being assembled. They were preparing to receive Wills and conduct emergency surgery to remove both his kidney and the tumor attached to it. We had to go right away.

Need-less-to-say the trip to Vancouver was very emotional and difficult to comprehend given that it had all happened so suddenly but I tried, as best I could, to play it down. Once we arrived we were immediately briefed on the situation and more comprehensive tests were carried out in preparation for the procedure.

Unfortunately, during these tests it was discovered that in addition to the presence of a large tumor and the failure of his kidney, Wills had a further 8 cancerous tumors in his lungs.

Although the specific type of cancer was still to be identified, given the progressive stage of the tumors the team were able to quickly establish that Wills was in 'Stage 4/5' of his condition and that he may have had cancer since birth or, more incredibly, in the womb.

The surgery was delayed a few nail-biting days in order to ensure the correct team members were in place and following a number of preparatory meetings with the surgical and oncological teams, Wills was scheduled to undergo surgery to remove both his kidney and main tumor with a plan to then 'pivot', if this was deemed successful, and tackle the remaining tumors post-surgery.

The discovery of the cancer in both his abdominal cavity and respiratory areas meant that from a medical standpoint, there were actually two separate storylines playing out: the removal of the main tumor and kidney with post-chemotherapy treatment and the treatment of the 8 tumors on his lungs which, as they could not be cut out, required chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

These dual approaches and conflicting treatments/ procedures held inherent risks and the oncological and surgical teams were at great pain to spell out the different scenarios in order that we could make sense of it all.

In general terms we knew that the main tumor and kidney could ultimately be cut out. Although the possibility of cancerous cells around the infected areas could not be discounted as we didn't know how invasive the cancer was. However, the lungs posed different risks. Not least because if they did not respond well to

treatment there would only be a finite number of attempts possible to nullify them before the lungs themselves began to deteriorate irrevocably due to radiation treatment and that treatment would be discontinued rendering the situation 'terminal'.

Treatment 1: Kidney and Tumor

The days leading up to the operation were a complete blur (as was much of the year). Extremely stressful. Unbearable. You want to be fresh and ready to go but you end up being desperately tired, full of anxiety and spent.

Unfortunately, once the surgical team began the operation they found that due to the size and longevity of the main tumor, it had 'fused itself' to a number of other internal organs within the internal body cavity (including his pancreas and spleen). Unable to remove the tumor or the kidney safely, they elected to abandon the surgery and conduct a biopsy instead.

Following days of uncertainty about potential treatments and the nature of the cancer itself it was decided to place William into 'intense chemotherapy treatment' for a period of 12 weeks. This was in the hope that the main tumor would reduce in size and therefore 'peel-itself away' from other internal organs and be more safely removed.

The treatment was complicated by Williams deteriorating condition as he succumbed to the intense rounds of chemotherapy drugs, severe weight loss and the increased doses of morphine required to keep the tumor from haemorrhaging and reduce the pain it was causing.

During the early stages of his treatment time was taken to further evaluate Wills's condition and following consultations with a specialist unit in Columbus, Ohio in the US the cancer was finally identified as being 'Wilms'. Not an uncommon cancer but certainly one that is ordinarily caught far earlier than the stage 4/5 that Wills was carrying. The cancer is known to attach itself to the 'hosts' kidney and having reached optimum size begins to manifest itself to other areas of the body including the lungs, and bones and again, can very often begin while the child is still 'in the womb'.

Following 12 weeks of chemotherapy, medical analysis of the results showed that while some progress had been made, the main tumor had not responded as well as had been hoped and that surgery was still impossible.

A further round of intense chemotherapy was initiated despite the fact that Wills medical condition was declining due to prolonged treatment, lack of nutrition and stress. Indeed, his fragility was becoming a serious concern and as such treatment itself was becoming counter-productive as it prevented him from gaining the nutrients he required.

At the end of the second period of chemotherapy further evaluations took place. The tumor had continued to reduce in size however, once again, this was not as much as had been hoped for. Although, it had reduced enough to provide a better picture of what was going on inside Wills's body cavity.

Sadly, these clearer images showed that the tumor was also fused to numerous other internal organs and (in addition to the kidney, pancreas and spleen) the upper colon, stomach and diaphragm and some aortal tubes were also affected.

Time was now of the essence as the tumor was increasingly fragile due to the daily onslaught of chemotherapy drugs and the doctors were forced to schedule surgery. Ironically, and despite of the presences or invasiveness of the cancer, surgery was also in itself life-threatening due to a number of unknowns, the potential inability to remove the tumor from other organs and the fragility of Wills's overall constitution at that time.

The days leading up to surgery were sobering and we took time to enjoy every moment we could and to calm Wills, who had no concept of the true risk but was none-the-less petrified of the surgical process itself.

The day of surgery came about and was booked for 6:30am. However, it was delayed and did not begin until 10am stretching nerves further.

Of course, once it began, time simply seemed to stop.

The operation was conducted by a 10-member team and scheduled for some 8-10 hours. Dramatically, only 4 ½ hours into the procedure the lead surgeon came out of theatre to speak to us.

To everyone's surprise the surgery had gone expectantly well. Once inside the body cavity it was discovered that the chemotherapy had 'done its job' vis-à-vis loosening the tumour from the walls of other organs and the surgical team has been able to simply 'peel back' the tissue as they went along. The tumor and kidney were successfully removed and no damage or incisions were made to any other areas of the body. Of course, there was also relief that Wills's constitution had withstood the trauma of surgery itself and he stable and in the recovery room.

Treatment 2: Lung Tumors

Wills's convalesce was slow and took many weeks. He was temporarily taken out of chemotherapy in order to give his body a chance to strengthen so that we could then all 'pivot' quickly and begin to tackle the 8 tumors still remaining on his lungs. The number of blood transfusions were 'upped'. He was painfully thin and his fragility continued to cause concern to the medical team and nutritionists. In the background multiple tests continued to be carried out to see if any cancerous tissue had been left 'in-situ' but he seemed to be clear and we all kept our figures crossed that with one major hurdle overcome the next would be successfully tackled too even though it was far trickier.

After about 2 months treatment began again and he started the long slog of chemo and radiation-therapy. This lasted some 6 weeks and although less intense on the surface, naturally the months of treatments had really taken a toll on him; both physically and mentally.

The first round of treatments showed limited results and, following constant scans and evaluations, there was initial concern that the tumours were too resistant to both chemotherapy and radiation treatments. The situation was all the more worrying as surgery to remove the tumors was not an option due to their locations 'in the lungs'.

That said, the medical team persisted and, after tinkering with the process a little, switch up the cocktail of drugs.

Thankfully, after many weeks, 4 of the original 8 tumors were discovered to have reduced to microscopic sizes. As for the remaining 4, they had reduced in size but were still stubbornly in place.

That said the oncological team felt that the remaining tumors had 'stabilized' and following successive rounds of radiation, it was felt that treatment should be discontinued to ensure that radiation levels stayed within safe limits. As such it was decided that chemotherapy should also be halted albeit temporarily and that Wills be allowed to return home subject to regular checks and evaluations which were, and continued to be, conducted at the Teck-Acute Centre of the Vancouver Children's Hospital.

Moving forward:

Of course, this respite allowed Wills to recover from the pro-longed cycle of treatments and regain some sense of normality in his life. Most importantly, the psychological pressure was relieved somewhat and he set-about integrating himself back into day-to-day life. He was once again active with his friends and in the community but remained fragile.

The prognosis moving forward was that he would remain at 'high risk' for some years and for the foreseeable future there was a significant chance that he would suffer a break-out of the cancer, a relapse, which would unfortunately be more virulent the second time around.

Statistically he faced a 30-35% risk of recurrence over the next 2-3 years. However, we all remained optimistic that, being on the 'right side of the numbers' Wills would beat the odds as they were in his favour. After all, on the flip side, 70% we would take any day of the week.

In the meantime, we tried to enjoy each day and saw it as a gift. Another opportunity to enjoy life and each other. It wasn't easy. Like any family home we continued to have 'time-outs' and squabbles' but overall, we never took anything for granted. We understood that life was fleeting and could change in an instant, so we made the most of every moment.

Moaning, whining, defiance, arguing, it was fantastic and all part of life's rich tapestry. We felt so incredibly lucky in-spite, and because, of what had happened.

Relapse:

We continued testing for a year. Every two months or so we would pile into the car and head the some 400km back to the specialist unit at Vancouver Children's Hospital. The purpose built 'Tech Acute Centre'. We'd spend two days of tests and evaluations that culminated in a brief meeting to review the results.

The trips became more like mini-getaways as the hospital visits took a backseat to Science World, Kidstropolis play Centre and way too much junk food.

The main thing though was that Wills was clear. No cancer, no hassles, no worries.

Wills's one-year anniversary was more of a festive occasion and we were pretty much viewing it as a 'celebration' (having made it to that landmark moment). Unfortunately, we were stunned when the CT Scans came back with what looked like a spot on his left lung. On screen it looked so uneventful. A silly little white spot in a vast expanse of black healthy lung.

We sat looking at it in a sort of daze. Not really sure what to say. Almost tempted to scoff at it and say "oh that's fine".

However, the head of Oncology was pretty direct: I'm worried, theirs reason to be concerned but there is hope".

This was a subtle but seismic shift in language. Throughout the previous two years nobody ever expressed any concern or stated that they were worried. In fact, it had all be quite positive in as much as they had a definitive plan to get us through.

This was a noticeably different approach and by far the worst comment. The one that set the alarm bells ringing was to be told that "there was hope". This was truly frightening. After all why would we need "hope"?

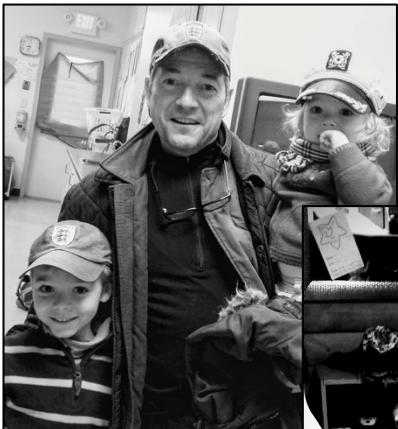
Test result meeting were always held on Fridays and to further add to the drama we were told to "go home, pack for an extended stay and be back by next week".

It was all moving to, to fast.

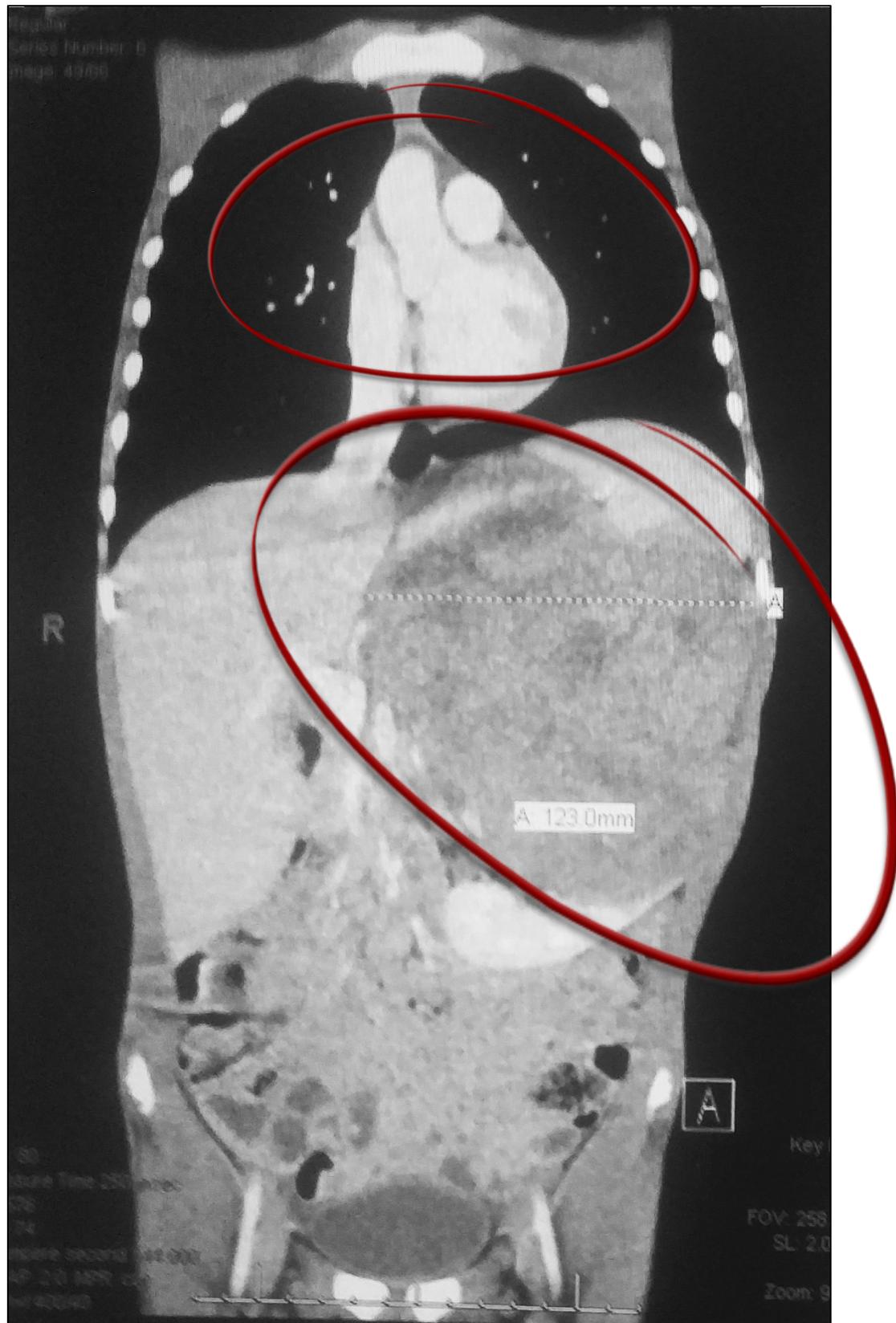
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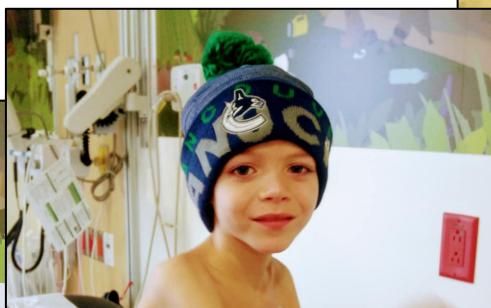
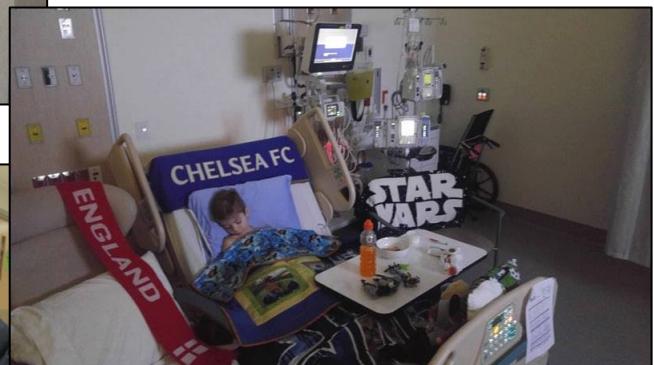
Pre-diagnosis...

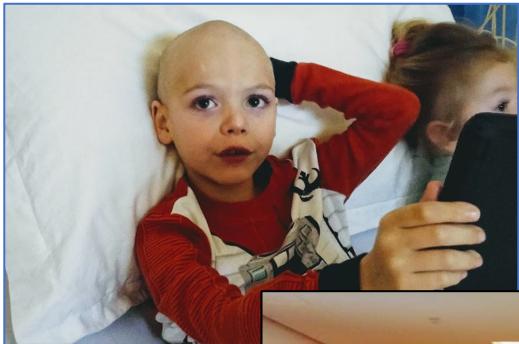


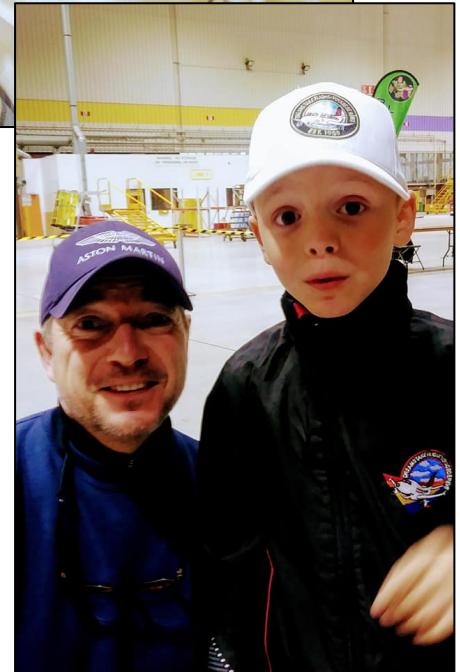
Diagnosis...



Pre-treatment...







Events, Newspaper and Social Media Articles...

FUNDRAISER IN SUPPORT OF

Wills' FIGHT AGAINST CANCER

Wills Hodgkinson is beginning a long fight against cancer. Join us to send messages of support and encouragement, and raise money in support of the family.

SUNDAY, MARCH 11TH 2—4:30PM
AT THE SOCCERPLEX

Follow "Fundraiser for Wills" event on Facebook for further details

Activities by donation: Soccer games, balloon pop, bouncy castle, glitter tattoos, "Wishing Will"

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Update: February 5, 2018

Facebook posts

I'm sure everyone can forgive me for the break in communication but the past few days have been incredibly challenging.

As some of you may know my spectacular, beautiful little boy (my 'best mate') has been struck down with cancer.

We are all stunned and overwhelmed at present. The world is a far richer place for his magical and inspiring presence... Truly.

So much of what lays before us is unknown and I (we) can only pray for the best and put our trust in the professionals around him.

What you should all know is that my son is incredibly loved and appreciated. Not just by us but by so many of you and that's terribly humbling.

So make no mistake; "I will fight to the last" to ensure Will's gets through this unexpected turn in the road and that he strides confidently forward in good health and with positivity.

In the meantime, I genuinely want to thank all of you who have reached out to us at this difficult time and have shown so much unconditional love to our little boy.

We appreciate it so, so much.

Update: March 8, 2018

Facebook posts

It's been a good few days for Will's. Although frail and short on energy we managed to get him out for some much needed R and R after the stress of recent weeks.

I was able to get him to a Whitecaps game (the home opener) with surprise visitors and mum (Neeley) managed to arrange some big surprises at Rogers Stadium with the Vancouver Canucks.

We're aware that this is a brief window of opportunity before the chemo begins to really kick in and indeed even now it is starting to have an impact. Nonetheless Will's grasped the moment/s fully and everyone's spirits were lifted.

Update: May 8, 2018

Facebook posts

As previously stated; we had the results of the past 12 weeks of chemo on Friday and met with the head of surgery and the anesthesiologist yesterday morning regarding Will's imminent operation.

The surgery has been scheduled for Wednesday morning and we are to be at the hospital for 6:30am.

The tumor on his kidney has reduced in size (perhaps 30%) although it has not peeled away from other organs completely.

As it currently stands we are looking at the removal of the kidney and tumor in addition to part (or all) of the pancreas, the upper area of the colon, stomach and diaphragm.

As you can imagine this creates additional complexities as each organ has different considerations. As such a number of issues cannot be predicted or assumed until the surgery itself begins and the medical team have visual identification of the affect areas.

That said, we are still optimistic that the surgery will be successful despite the complexity and we can move through to tackle the lungs with radiation and chemo.

Update: May 8, 2018

Facebook post

He's in theater now. Very distressing. Lots of tears (Neeley and I).

Update: May 9, 2018

Facebook posts

Surgery on kidney and main tumor a complete success!

Delighted to say that Will's operation went smoothly and indeed better than expected !!

The surgical team managed to remove the kidney and tumor without removing any other organ: in whole or in-part.

The lymph nodes were also removed and will now be checked in a biopsy but the lead surgeon is 'very satisfied' and happy at this point claiming: "the chemo did its job" (in 'reducing' the tumor). The tumor was still partially attached to his diaphragm but this was gently peeled back during the surgery.

We are now looking forward to a) the recovery stage and b) the tumors on Will's lungs.

Thank you for all your countless prayers, good wishes and compassion.

A great day !

Update: December 6, 2018

Facebook posts

Wills recently underwent a number of days scheduled evaluations at the Teck Acute centre at the BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver.

These evaluations were designed to evaluate a number of things. Firstly, the status of the four remaining tumors on Wills lungs and secondly, to check for a re-occurrence or break-out of cancer anywhere else in the lungs (with particular emphasis around the other four tumors that had been deemed 'inactive') and thirdly; the body cavity area around the removed kidney and main tumour.

'Preliminary' results concluded that the four remaining tumors have reduced slightly and, while they are still present, they are considered 'stabilized for the time-being'. In addition, no new cancer growth has been detected either in the lungs (including the areas around the other four tumors previously treated) or in the body cavity area around the removed kidney or main tumor. A decision has been made to stop treatment for the time-being and to monitor the situation pending more evaluations.

So for the moment Wills is convalescing. He is back at school, gaining strength and has been psychologically lifted by being at home.

Indeed, we crossed another milestone as Wills recently underwent minor surgery to remove his 'port'. This, combined with his general assessment, provides us with a fitting lead-up to Christmas and the prospect of a positive start to the New Year.

While we are optimistic about treatment schedules and the future generally, we need to caution that the remaining four tumors are still present and Wills will be classified as 'high-risk' for the next three years at least. During that time he will be required to attend regular testing, monitoring and evaluations in Vancouver. That said, all being 'well and good', his risk assessment would begin to diminish after that three year period.

Vancouver Whitecaps Football Club - Kid Captain

<https://www.whitecapsfc.com/post/2018/11/20/our-all-our-honour-meet-wills?autoplay=true&fbclid=IwAR0SdqhtC6gfBpWcQi2U5GECOX5C02Rm7W4uz0VV7q1eOSqcYliV4A0cxBc>

Support pouring in for Penticton boy fighting cancer Community support for seven-year-old cancer victim building

Feb. 28, 2018

It's a nightmare no child should ever have to suffer, but support is pouring in for a Penticton boy battling cancer.

Until recently, seven-year-old Wills Hodgkinson was a happy, athletic and active child, participating in soccer, hockey and swimming. Now he's in a hospital bed in Vancouver, preparing for an operation to remove a tumour attached to his kidney.

"I don't know if he understands the full thing in his head, but he's scared and he's resigned to the situation," said his dad Tim Hodgkinson. Tim, along with Wills' mother Neely Brimer and two-year-old sister Scarlett, are staying in Vancouver to be at Wills' side.

"He knows he's got to have the surgery, and we've got to move forward to make him better. He just wants to be home with his mates playing football (soccer). All our energies are supporting him."

It's a big mass and it's probably been in there since he was in the womb. Sitting there like a ticking time bomb.

Tim said that, according to doctors, the tumour has probably been growing since Wills was in the womb, but the symptoms came on quickly last month.

It started with a tummy ache and throwing up on a Saturday night.

"I took him off school on Monday, and on the Monday night he was crying out in pain," Tim said. Expecting just a childhood ailment, Hodgkinson took his son to the emergency ward at Penticton Regional Hospital. "An hour went by, and then another, and we're still there," said Hodgkinson. "The doctor came back and said 'Look, I've got to talk to you.'"

Wills has a Wilm's tumour, a rare kidney cancer that primarily affects children. The usual treatment is to remove both the tumour and affected kidney, and the outlook for most children is good.

But when doctors at the Teck Acute Care Centre, part of B.C. Children's Hospital, took Wills into surgery they found problems.

"When they got in there, they found the tumour had fused itself to his pancreas, his spleen and the top part of his colon," said Tim. "So they sewed him back up again because it was too risky at that point."

Wills is going through six weeks of chemotherapy and radiation treatments now, in hopes of shrinking the tumour enough that it peels itself away from the other organs.

When the medical team operates again, it's going to be very traumatic for the little boy's body.

"He's very frail at the moment. We are looking at six weeks of chemo, which will crush his defences and then go in, take a kidney out, a tumour that the body thinks is another organ, because it's been in there so long and it's so big," Tim said. Wills might also lose his pancreas and spleen, even then.

The nightmare doesn't end there. Doctors also discovered eight tumours on Wills' lungs. Tim said they won't be able to tell if those are treatable until the chemotherapy begins to take effect.

"There are so many big questions at the moment. It's all just a blur, it's so overwhelming," said Tim. "Despite it all, you have to pull through. Wills is the most important thing here."

Wills' two-year-old sister Scarlett has proven to be a bright spot. Tim said their decision to keep the family together at Wills' side was a good one. Scarlett is too young to understand what is going on, so she is having a good time running around with the nurses and enjoying the hospital playrooms.

"Every morning she comes in to Wills and she was kissing his hand and asking 'are you happy today Wills?'" said Tim. "She's two, she doesn't understand the extent of it but she knows Wills is sick and she loves her brother very much."

Growing up with a British father, Wills is naturally a major football fan, and he's been visited by members of the Vancouver Whitecaps, along with their mascot Spike. He's also received a letter from Gary Cahill, captain of his favourite team, the Chelsea Football Club and also the current captain of the England team. "The whole team sent him a card too, with all their signatures," said Tim, adding that Penticton Mayor Andrew Jakubeit also sent Wills a video.

"We're completely overwhelmed by the generosity of people's thoughts and messages. It's truly humbling. Nobody ever wants to find themselves in this situation, but the support people are giving us is humbling," said Tim

Back at home in the Okanagan, community support is pouring in for the family via a fundraiser organized by Margie Hibbard and Tricia Hernes.

There are now over 800 people in a [support group](#) set up on Facebook, Hibbard said.

Since announcing the fundraiser, Hibbard said they've learned there is another student at Wills' school, Holy Cross Elementary, that has cancer.

"We are donating a portion of the bake sale to that student as well. Most of the bake sale is going to come from Holy Cross volunteers," said Hibbard.

Besides the bake sale, the fundraiser on March 11 from 2 to 4:30 p.m. at the Adidas Soccerplex will include a silent auction, bake sale, glitter tattoos, bouncy castle, soccer skills competition, and crafts for the kids. It's also a chance to send messages of love and encouragement to Wills, via a scrapbook, photos and videos provided by Moments Under Frame.

There is also a GoFundMe page set up at [7 Yr Old Wills Set To Fight Cancer](#).

Hibbard said the outpouring of messages of support and items for the fundraiser has been amazing.

"I think people can really empathize with the stress, the fear, the loss of control that is going on there. It's such a young child and he will have such a battle," said Hibbard. "It's just a testament to how much people want to see good in the world."

Hibbard added they are still accepting silent auction items and bake sale goodies are needed. Anyone who is able to donate items can drop them off at Time Flies.

Organizers Hernes and Hibbard can be reached through the event page on [Facebook](#) or via email at triciahernes@gmail.com or Margie_hibbard@hotmail.com.

Mountie visit brings a smile to Penticton kid fighting cancer

Fundraiser for Wills Hodgkinson takes place on Sunday

Mar. 9, 2018 7:20 a.m.

Margie Hibbard says the response to the [Sunday fundraiser for Wills Hodgkinson](#), a Penticton child undergoing cancer treatment at the B.C. Children's Hospital, is amazing.

"We're looking at close to 100 silent auction items," said Hibbard, adding there will be events for both kids and adults, like the adult-only balloon pop, which will have a selection of pizza, coffee, beer, wine and similar adult prizes.

"There's the bake sale, mostly supplied by the Holy Cross volunteers but other people from the community are bringing baking," said Hibbard.

Hodgkinson [is a seven-year-old Holy Cross student](#) who was recently diagnosed with a rare form of kidney cancer, a Wilm's tumour. In Hodgkinson's case, his doctors say the tumour has likely been growing since before he was born and has grown so large that it has attached itself to his spleen, pancreas and colon.

Related: Support pouring in for Penticton boy fighting cancer

Hodgkinson is undergoing six weeks of radiation and chemotherapy at the Teck Acute Care Centre at B.C. Children's Hospital in Vancouver, in hopes of shrinking the tumour enough so it detaches from his other organs and can be removed safely, along with the kidney it is attached to.

Will's father, Tim, reports that the chemotherapy is starting to show its effects on the little boy's systems. "We had a couple of good days in a row where Wills was recovering from the aborted surgery and feeling quite good," said Tim, adding that Wills has just gone through another round of chemotherapy, stepping up to the stronger doses.

"The chemo is kicking in, it needs to do its job, but it's distressing for him," said Tim. Wills' mother Neely and two-year-old sister are all staying by Wills' side through the ordeal. "The irony is, that's a good sign." Hibbard and Tricia Hernes have been organizing a fundraiser to help support Hodgkinson and his family through this crisis. The event takes place in the Adidas Sportsplex on Sunday, March 11 from 2 to 4:30 p.m.

One person sure to be there is RCMP Cpl. Dan Moskaluk. A kidney cancer survivor himself, he paid a visit to Hodgkinson in Vancouver last week.

"It was very very touching and very special day for everybody. We were just glad to be able to do it," said Moskaluk. "We're kind of kin in the sense that we both suffer from kidney cancer, different types of kidney cancer, but nonetheless kidney cancer."

"So I can certainly try and brighten up his day. And so Sheanne (Dan's wife) and I headed down there." Moskaluk said they were at the acute care centre for a couple of hours.

"We spent quite a bit of time one on one with Wills and then there was at least four other families that kind of gathered around and the kids as well," said Moskaluk, adding it was rewarding for him to cheer up the kids, visiting in his red serge uniform, and being able to empathize with what they're going through.

"At a younger age it must be even much more difficult for them," said Moskaluk, confirming his plans to be at the fundraiser. "It's a matter of supporting him and showing community spirit — this and mindfulness for him that day."

Another feature will be a wishing well in the Sportsplex lobby. People can make donations there, but at the same time, they can write a wish to Hodgkinson and pin it onto the roof of the well.

"Then we'll collect all of those wishes and put them into a scrapbook to send down to Wills," said Hibbard, adding there will also be craft tables for the younger set, like making cancer ribbon glitter tattoos in gold for kidney cancer.

"On the field, we will have the bouncy castle from Par-T-Perfect. The Pinnacles coaches will be running some soccer activities and we've got the archery set from LocoLanding," said Hibbard, adding that the field activities are only from 2:15 to 3:15 p.m., in order to make room for previously booked soccer events.

"The silent auction itself is going to close at four o'clock, so people will be able to place bids from 2 to 4 p.m. and they will be able to buy baking from 2 to 4:30 p.m. Tim Hortons is also coming with hot chocolate and coffee and, I believe, donuts and muffins."

Tim said he and Neely are humbled by the support the community is showing.

"Both Neely and I, we've been in a bubble, so we were unaware of the extent of what's been going on back in Penticton and Naramata," said Tim. "Honestly, we're speechless. It's unbelievable."

Hibbard said she and Hernes are the main organizers, but there has been no shortage of help or people volunteering donations.

"It's been amazing. We've got close friends of Tim and Neely that are taking the letters and putting them out to the community," said Hibbard, adding that about half the donations are coming from people who contacted them wanting to help. "It's not us spending our time seeking and collecting. People are just saying 'where can we drop it off?' and then they do."

Hibbard said it's really the community that's made it so easy to have the number of items at the fundraiser. That ranges from dreamcatchers, wine baskets, sports memorabilia, art, photography and gift certificates.

"You name it, we've got it," said Hibbard, adding that people who can't make it to the Sunday event are asking how they can donate.

We do have an account set up through Valley First Credit Union. People can make deposits there, or they can write cheques and drop them off to [Time Flies](#)(197 Warren Ave. E), just in trust for Wills Hodgkinson, or they can e-transfer to Tricia at triciahernes@gmail.com."

There is also a GoFundMe page set up at [7 Yr Old Wills Set To Fight Cancer](#).

Following his recovery from the abortive abdominal surgery 3 weeks ago, Will's has now been temporarily discharged to Ronald McDonald House pending a second attempt to remove his tumor and left kidney in 5 weeks time.

In the meantime, he will continue to receive treatment (chemotherapy, etc) to the abdomen and lungs whilst the family and medical team seek to increase his general well being (weight, etc) to ensure he is in the best possible situation for the upcoming operation.

Community shows support for seven-year-old battling cancer

Event for Wills Hodgkinson raises over \$17,000

Mar. 11, 2018 6:30 p.m.

People came to Penticton from up and down the Okanagan Valley Sunday to show support for a seven-year-old boy suffering from a rare form of kidney cancer, helping raise over \$17,000 along with 40 video messages recorded and nearly 100 notecard wishes collected to send to Wills Hodgkinson.

Tricia Hernes and Margie Hibbard, along with a host of volunteers, organized a fundraiser to help support Wills Hodgkinson, [a seven-year-old Holy Cross student](#) who was recently diagnosed with a Wilm's tumour. His father Tim, mother Neely and two-year-old sister Scarlett are staying with him as he undergoes radiation and chemotherapy at the Teck Acute Care Centre at B.C. Children's Hospital in Vancouver.

"The whole Okanagan has just banded together for Wills," said Hibbard, adding that it was about more than just raising money. "It was really important to Tim and Neely that this was something the community got something out of as well. It is their way of thanking the community for all their support."

Hibbard said the main goal was to get an event together that was centred around Wills' favourite things and to have a place where people could send him messages. Those notes and other messages will be collected in a scrapbook to be delivered to Wills along with a video that is being made of the event.

"That's the difference maker," said Hibbard. "When he is in his treatments, or he is not feeling well, it is something he can play again and again. Hopefully, that is going to make the difference, keep his spirits up and make it a little gentler. It's more about keeping his spirits up, keeping his strength up."

Wills' grandmother, Dee McDonald, attended the event. She said she was overwhelmed by the support. "The whole family is too. Absolutely overwhelmed," said McDonald. "What can I say? Thank you, a big, big thank you."

Wills Hodgkinson and family are on a long journey Ordeal intensifying for seven-year-old battling cancer

Apr. 4, 2018 1:00 p.m.

Tim Hodgkinson has been posting a lot of his pictures of his son Wills smiling, even though the seven-year-old is battling cancer.

"You want to post pictures of people looking happy," said Tim, explaining that it is also important to keep Wills' spirits up as the youngster makes his journey.

"The truth is there is a lot going on," Tim said, explaining that Wills is now into his second round of chemotherapy, with stronger drugs.

Knowing that Wills would lose his hair, they gave him a crew cut, like some of the soccer players he idolizes, to lessen the shock.

"It's always traumatic," said Tim, adding that Wills is suffering from the other side effects of the chemo: he tires quickly and is experiencing nausea and nosebleeds.

| [He has less up moments," said Tim.](#)

There's a roadmap for the treatment, and the family — Wills' mother Neely Brimer and his two-year-old sister Scarlett are also by his side — just have to follow it.

Cascades Casino is reaching out to the community to help support Wills and his family.

Cascades is hosting a by-donation pancake breakfast on April 10 in support of the family while Wills undergoes treatment in the Acute Care Centre at B.C. Children's Hospital in Vancouver.

Cascades Casino is hosting a pancake breakfast on April 10 in support of Wills Hodgkinson.

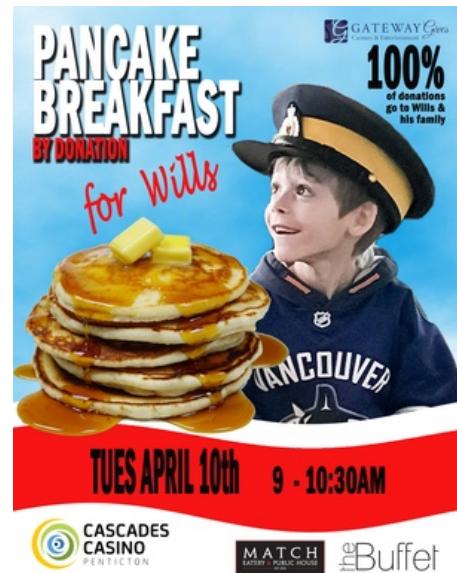
"We want to make sure that we, as a community, continue the momentum to support Wills' and his family during this trying time," said Michael Magnusson, Cascade Casino's general manager. "No family should ever have to go through this, so we want to provide Penticton and the Okanagan with another opportunity to show our support and love for this courageous young man while he undergoes treatment."

[Related: Support pouring in for Penticton boy fighting cancer](#)

Wills was diagnosed with a Wilms Tumour, a rare form of kidney cancer, earlier this year. Surgery revealed a tumour on his kidney that was too large to be removed and had attached to his spleen, pancreas and colon. Doctors also discovered another eight cancer spots on Wills' lungs. Wills has been undergoing weeks of chemo and radiation therapy to shrink the tumour enough so surgeons can remove it and the kidney it is attached to.

Wills is a student at Holy Cross School in Penticton and an active hockey and soccer player. His classmates will be helping out at the breakfast, bussing tables and helping to support the event.

All of the proceeds raised at the pancake breakfast will go directly to Wills' parents, Tim Hodgkinson and Neeley Brimer, so they can focus on Wills and his two-year-old sister Scarlett, rather than bills and travel expenses.



[Related: Community shows support for seven-year-old battling cancer](#)

The pancake breakfast will run from 9 to 10:30 a.m. at Cascades Casino Penticton on April 10, along with strawberries, blueberries, syrup and whipped cream as toppings. Juice or hot chocolate will be available for the kids and coffee and tea for the adults. For those who cannot attend the breakfast but would like to make a donation, the casino will keep the donation box available throughout the day at the guest services desk.

Tim said the support from the community has been amazing, and it didn't stop at the fundraiser for Wills in March. People have been contacting the family with words of encouragement and support.

"It's just incredible," said Tim. "It's that word again — it's humbling."

Tim said the family is also incredibly grateful for events like the Cascades' pancake breakfast. The family wishes they could be there to thank people in person, but of course, they need to stay by Wills' side.

"What lovely community spirit," Tim said, impressed with the lengths people will go to in order to support Wills and also to raise his spirits.

[Related: Mountie visit brings a smile to Penticton kid fighting cancer](#)

There have been visits from the Vancouver Whitecaps, Edmonton Oiler Connor McDavid and the Vancouver Canucks, one of whom took a particular interest in Wills.

Erik Gudbranson, Tim said, returned after the Canucks visit and even kept Wills' company through one of his chemo sessions, a kind gesture that helped keep Wills spirits up through the ordeal.

"He wasn't told to come by the team, he's just a really nice guy," said Tim.

Another is family friend Jason Wood, a Pentictonite now working on the coast with the Delta Fire Department.

"He has been all over this and very helpful," said Tim. He took Wills to the fire station and showed him the trucks."

"There are certain people that go above and beyond, and he's one of them."

Penticton boy helping launch B.C. Children's Hospital Christmas fundraiser Okanagan cancer survivor stars in Whitecaps/BC Children's Hospital promo

Nov. 23, 2018 6:40 a.m.

After being a poster child for the B.C. Children's Hospital Dream Lottery, Wills Hodgkinson is helping the hospital out once again.

This time it is kicking off their Christmas campaign, along with the Vancouver Whitecaps.

Last January, Wills was rushed to the hospital where doctors found a large tumour attached to his kidney, and eight more tumours on his lungs.

Ten months later, the kidney tumour is removed, the lung tumours have shrunken and Wills is back in school at Holy Cross, with no more chemo or radiation treatments, at least for now.

[Related: 'Hero' kid fighting cancer helping with B.C. Children's Hospital fundraiser](#)

"We are going to be here for Christmas and New Years. There was a time when we never expected ... that was looking ...," said his father Tim, trailing off and unable to put the possibility into words. "It's a gift to be back."

There are four remaining tumours on Wills' lungs, which Tim describes as "stabilized," and Wills goes back for more evaluations in January.

"Fingers crossed, if that goes well, then we could really be fully on the right road," said Tim.

[Related: Community shows support for seven-year-old battling cancer](#)

Wills has been back in school now for long enough it's back to normal for him and his classmates.

"Pretty good, but now it is getting pretty boring," said Wills, recalling a short visit earlier this year when he wasn't expected. "They all rushed at me and freaked out."

For much of the last 10 months, the children's hospital was home for Wills, with his father, mother Neely Brimer and younger sister Scarlett, staying in Vancouver to be at Wills' side.

"Anything we can do, or that Wills can do, that can support the B.C. Children's Hospital and the good work they do ... we're happy to do, no question," said his father, Tim, about Wills participating in the promotional video. "It's fun and very exciting for him, but the main point is anything we can do to help shine a light on what they do."

The Big B.C. Snowball Fight for Kids aims to be the largest virtual snowball fight in the province, which every donation to the campaign until Jan. 6 counting as one snowball thrown.

In his video, an obviously delighted Wills runs around, throwing snowballs at Whitecaps players and participating in their practice.

Wills, a soccer player and fan, developed a strong bond with the Vancouver Whitecaps while in Children's Hospital.

"The Whitecaps have been so much a part of our lives, they've been so good. Eric Hurtado, plus Kei Kamara and Jake Nervinski, those three have been amazing, but particularly Eric," said Tim.



Wills also has the honour of being named a kid captain by the Whitecaps.

Though he still has far to go, Wills' attitude towards his cancer is positive, saying he's done with it, though he's planning to stay in touch with all his Whitecaps friends.

"It's really cool. I know everyone on the team now," said Wills who scores a goal on Kamara in the video. "Our players and staff have had many interactions with Wills this year and they have come away truly inspired by his love for life and soccer. He's a fighter who lights up every room he's in. We hope that in some small way we've helped Wills and his family through a difficult period in their lives because they have certainly made a positive impact on our club," said Whitecaps FC president Bob Lenarduzzi.

Wills, who is already back playing winter soccer, is clear that he plans to make a career of it.

"Of course! I am getting better every day," said Wills.

"I'm going to play for the Pinnacles, then when I move up to a club team, I'm going to play for Chelsea, then when I play for a national team, England."

For more information and fundraising ideas visit bcchf.ca/snowball. To throw your own snowball, make a donation at snowballfightforkids.ca.