



LIFE

After Loss

BY Deepti Babu

One mother remembers her son's time at the Stollery Children's Hospital with sadness and gratitude

COLLEEN BRODYK'S SON AARON WAS JUST TWO-and-a-half years old when he was diagnosed with an aggressive form of leukemia. He had been healthy and they had no family history of cancer, so when doctors told Colleen and her husband about Aaron's disease on April 3, 1982, they were stunned. "We went to the hospital and didn't know much about the cancer," she says. "Then we started to read about it, speak to other parents." Aaron's parents steeled themselves for his battle against the disease, helping him through many long months of an incredibly difficult treatment regimen. Finally, they heard good news that made it all worthwhile: Aaron was in remission.

Over a year later, when Aaron was nearly five years old, he developed a fever. Colleen brought him to the Stollery and her worst fears about his leukemia materialized. "It came back and it wasn't looking good," she says. His prognosis was grim. Aaron's cancer care team tried more treatments for him but, sadly, he passed away on August 4, 1984, just four days after his fifth birthday. Aaron died surrounded by his loved ones, and peacefully in Colleen's arms.

Aaron would be in his 30s today. Colleen gets emotional when she tells Aaron's story because, as any parent who has lost a child knows, the loss never goes away. There were times when Colleen thought she wouldn't be able to survive.

An experience like this could have caused anyone to shut down. And, while reflecting on Aaron's fight and his ultimate death from leukemia, Colleen certainly recalls moments of despair. However,

Aaron would be in his 30s today. As any parent who has lost a child knows, the loss never really goes away.

Colleen turned her grief into a motivation to give back. And Aaron, whom she calls her hero, is a major reason why she does.

Colleen is a regular monthly donor to the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation, and has been for many years. Despite the difficult challenges she went through with Aaron, she looks back on her time in the Stollery with fondness and gratitude. As she describes it, "I thought the Stollery did such a wonderful job with the kids, for what they and their families were going through." She mentions Dr. John Akabutu, Aaron's hematologist-oncologist, describing him and the staff as "amazing."

"They were so good to Aaron and to us," she says. "They were very accommodating and empathetic. I have nothing but good things to say."

Colleen's regular donations keep her connected to the Stollery, even though it has been years since Aaron was a patient. She feels that her donations helped her cope with Aaron's death and realize that she could survive it, because it allowed her to actively give back and move on. She also hopes they help other parents see that they, too, can survive – that there can be life after the loss of a precious child.

There are many ways someone can give back, but Colleen specifically chose the Stollery Foundation to receive her funds. Her donation honours the memory of her son, but it also works to establish the Stollery as a centre for excellence in research and patient care.

"I think the Stollery is a world-class facility for children," she says. "I just want the wonderful care there to continue, for all the other children and their parents." 🐾