

# Messengers of hope

25 portraits



leucan 



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leucan 

Leucan's Head office  
550 Beaumont Avenue, suite 300,  
Montreal (Québec) H3N 1V1  
Phone: 514 731-3696 or 1 800 361-9643  
Fax: 514 731-2667  
[www.leucan.qc.ca](http://www.leucan.qc.ca)  
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# Table of contents

<b>Leucan</b> .....	4
---------------------	---

## **ACUTE LYMPHOBLASTIC LEUKEMIA**

Carol-Anne .....	6
Dominique .....	8
Isabelle .....	10
Jean-François .....	12
Joanie .....	14
Kim .....	16
Michelle .....	18
Nancy .....	20
Nancy .....	22
Pascal .....	24
Sébastien .....	26

## **ACUTE MYELOID LEUKEMIA**

Patrick .....	30
---------------	----

## **BRAIN TUMOR**

Christine .....	34
-----------------	----

## **HODGKIN LYMPHOMA**

Annie .....	38
Marie-Ève .....	40
Philippe .....	42
Yanick .....	44

## **NON HODGKIN LYMPHOMA**

Guillaume .....	48
-----------------	----

## **OSTEOSARCOMA**

Marc .....	52
Marie-Ève .....	54

## **RARE TUMOR**

Matthieu .....	58
----------------	----

## **THYROID CANCER**

Hélène .....	62
--------------	----

## **WILMS TUMOR**

Émilie .....	66
Philippe .....	68
Véronique .....	70

<b>Acknowledgments and credits</b> .....	72
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Note: Interviews and photos date back to June 2003





Leucan, an association whose mission is to help cancer-stricken children and their families, is a not-for-profit organization that was founded in 1978.

Through its leadership and excellence, Leucan carries out its mission and helps cancer-stricken children and their families believe in a brighter future.

To achieve its primary mission throughout Québec, Leucan relies on the dedication of its volunteers as well as a group of experienced employees with diverse training.

At its head office in Montreal as in its nine regional offices (Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Estrie, Laurentides-Lanaudière, Mauricie-et-Centre-du-Québec, Montérégie, Montréal-Laval, Outaouais, Région Québec, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean), Leucan has put together competent and diversified teams who:

- provide services to cancer-stricken children and their families;
- ensure a presence for members, volunteers, partners and the general public;
- carry out fundraising activities.

Leucan looks after its families at each phase of the illness by providing specific and adapted services, whether it be at the hospital, at home, at school, in social life or in the public eye:

- welcome, emotional assistance and support services
- financial assistance
- massage therapy
- hosting and support services in playrooms
- socio-recreational activities
- school life services
- end-of-life and bereavement follow-up services
- support to Québec's four pediatric oncology centres
- Leucan Information Centre
- lobbying activities

Leucan cooperates with all health-care, social services and education professionals to ensure children receive the care and services that are best suited to their condition.

Leucan, a family history since 1978!





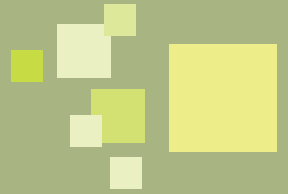
# Carol-Anne

21 years old

Saguenay

Acute lymphoblastic leukemia

Diagnosed at four years old. Ten treatments of radiotherapy, in addition to three years of chemotherapy.



“How it began? I woke up one morning and my legs wouldn’t work. Just like that, no warning.” After several blood tests, Carol-Anne, who was then four and a half, learned she was suffering from leukemia. But at that time, “I didn’t really understand what that meant. I was too young.” The shock was much greater for her parents. Carol-Anne was their first child: “I was their baby. But slowly, we got used to it,” she says.

Carol-Anne’s most difficult memory is the bone marrow transplant she had to go through. “It still gives me shivers when I think about it today.” But she was determined to get through it. Armed with exceptional courage, even though she was so young, she barrelled through her harsh treatments with her head held high. A few IVs now and then and trip to the big kids’ playroom were all that was needed to make Carol-Anne happy. “In truth, I have very fond memories of the hospital,” she recalls. Leucan, which was already very involved at the time, also had a positive impact over her recovery. “My mother later got involved (in Leucan) and I couldn’t resist,” she says. “I now volunteer for Leucan.” Somewhat pensive, the 21-year-old woman fully understands the extent of her involvement, the impact of what she does. Luckily for her, it all ended well. “I was never truly discouraged. It all went well. I was very lucky.”

The support she received from her parents greatly helped Carol-Anne persevere through her treatments. “They were always in a good mood, which I found very encouraging.” Smiling is contagious, you say? Carol-Anne is more than certain of it. The nurses, her family, her friends, all played a role in her fight to some degree.

Dynamic, energetic and cheerful, Carol-Anne is now entirely cured. These days, she makes sure she sees everything she starts through to the end. “My illness clearly influenced me in that regard. It was already a part of my personality, but today it’s even more pronounced.” She just completed her second year in university, where she studies theatre. One more year to go, then she’ll be ready to tackle a whole new challenge: the job market. She knows she hasn’t picked the easiest field, but her strong personality will undoubtedly allow her to go far. She has long dreamed of becoming a director so she can create her own plays. The energy that radiates from this petite woman shouldn’t be discounted.



"Don't be afraid to encourage your child. Relapses happen. But your presence and the confidence that you show are necessary. You have to be part of the illness and of the cure."

Carol-Anne

As someone once taught her, Carol-Anne now advises those around her to have fun no matter what happens. While that's certainly easier said than done, "you must find the positive in what happens. You must keep faith that it will all work out." Carol-Anne was determined to get through it. She believed in it and she did.







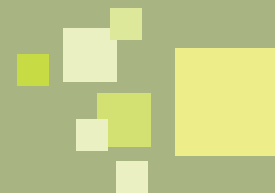
# Dominique

19 years old

Centre-du-Québec

Acute lymphoblastic leukemia

Diagnosed at nine years old. Radiotherapy for two weeks, chemotherapy for two years.



When Dominique was nine years old, one of her lymph nodes had been swollen for some time. She wasn't in pain, so it didn't seem necessary to see a doctor. Eventually, her mother, who had to go in for a scan herself, decided to take her daughter along to have her checked out. The doctor discovered that Dominique's spleen was three times bigger than normal. Then other symptoms emerged. Even before her illness was officially diagnosed, Dominique was transferred to Sainte-Justine Hospital to undergo chemotherapy treatments. "They were that certain of what I had," she says.

But Dominique wasn't really frightened by her illness. "It's as if you'd told me that I had the flu. The worst part was that I had to stop playing soccer. That was the hardest part!" she recalls. She also wasn't worried about losing her hair. Before she was told she would lose her hair, she met her roommate: "Mom, I'm very unlucky. My roommate is a skinhead!" But she wasn't scared of losing her own hair after it was explained to her. "After all, my hair would grow back."

She remembers the days spent in the hospital as mostly happy times. She had lots of fun when she wasn't undergoing treatments. Slightly reckless, Dominique jumped right into all the games and activities that came her way. She was a little tomboy who livened up the floor she stayed on! Of her many adventures, her expedition to the hospital's roof sticks out in her mind: "It was my brother's idea!" she explains today. This happy atmosphere certainly contributed to her recovery.

It must also be noted that her spirit was ironclad. "I always try to see what's positive. And at nine years old, that vision was already quite present in the way I lived my life." Furthermore, she never hesitated to talk about her illness. She says it really helps to do so. She believes that talking about it helps others understand the illness, and "if they understand the illness, then they understand you as well." Now 19, she says this positive attitude was reinforced by her experience: "People used to say that I looked at life through rose-coloured glasses. I still wear them today, so everything's good!"

Faced with these trying times, Dominique's family obviously grew closer. Her mother, who was her best friend throughout her treatment, continues to be a pillar in Dominique's life. Her grandmother, who was always present at her side, is also very important, as are her father, uncles and aunts. They all gave Dominique the support



"Never lose hope. Talk with people who've gone through the same experiences. It really helps a lot."

Dominique

she needed to heal. Dominique considers family to be the most important value of all. "It allows us to always go further. Your family will always be there, through good times and through bad times." She says it all boils down to love, since "there can't be life without love."

Leucan, who mostly helped her mother at the time, still plays a very important role in Dominique's life. Her grandmother helped develop a new brochure for parents. Dominique also recalls how the "summer camps were really cool." The privileged contact she had with qualified personnel and remarkable children also had an influence on her career choice. Today, she aims to be able to help others by teaching either kindergarten or elementary school since she "loves being in contact with kids."

"I've always looked straight ahead," she says. In Dominique's mind, hope is something in which you must really believe.





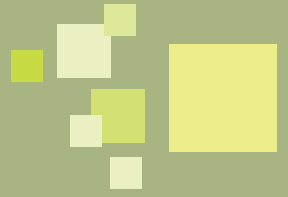
# Isabelle

28 years old

Laurentides

Acute lymphoblastic leukemia

Diagnosed at 17 years old. Eight months of chemotherapy and cranial radiotherapy interspersed with chemotherapy and maintenance chemotherapy.



10

At 17, Isabelle suffered from severe tonsillitis and chronic fatigue. Fearing mononucleosis, she visited the hospital for blood tests. Her diagnosis turned out to be much worse: she was suffering from leukemia. At first, she didn't quite understand the illness was a type of cancer. She also didn't understand everything that implied. Her only references, at the time, were a character in a novel she had read and another one from a TV series. Isabelle, who was very much into sports at the time, didn't understand how she could have cancer. "I didn't believe it and I hoped it was a mistake."

Isabelle, who was hospitalized for two months, saw her treatment get off to a rocky start. She lived through unexpected circumstances and had to face several trying events, but she remembers the quality of the medical staff. "The nurses and the doctors were very stimulating, very motivating, and they often made me smile." They took the time to explain everything in detail, which helped Isabelle better understand her illness. She grew very close to her doctor, a man she greatly admires. He had a human side that she found remarkable.

Surrounded closely by her family and her loved ones, Isabelle tackled her illness head on. Her friends and family were always there to support her. When she was feeling down, Isabelle surrounded herself with her cousins to cheer herself up. That helped take her mind off things since she loves children so much. That may be why today she's an elementary school teacher.

Leucan greatly helped her and her mother, especially by offering them tremendous support. Isabelle went to their summer camp at 18. Ironically, she had been a day-camp counsellor in the same region at age 16. She remembered a "very nice and very relaxing experience." Isabelle also enjoyed the massages: "They helped me recover, especially when I got an oedema on my arm because of the IV."

At 28, Isabelle is married and the mother of a little boy. She loves gardening, cooking, reading and riding her bike with her baby. Patient, sweet and dynamic with children, she loves getting involved in new projects. "I love everything that's new and I love change. I never want two school years to be identical," she says. Love is one of the values that she holds dearest. Since her illness, Isabelle better understands how precious life is and how important it is to cherish its moments. For example, her marriage proposal and the day her baby was born are



*"Stand by your child, listen to him  
or her and give what he or she wants!"*

*Isabelle*

forever etched into her heart. "I love being alive and healthy. I have to enjoy everything that comes my way!" she says.

Family is now what's most important in Isabelle's life. When she was lying in her hospital bed, she'd wish for two things: a loving family and a red brick house. Her perseverance and determination got her that red brick house... and her family! "When you're ill, hang on to your dreams and, more than anything else, trust your gut. That can take you far!"





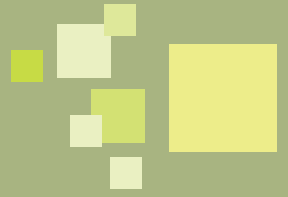
# Jean-François

26 years old

Lanaudière

Acute lymphoblastic leukemia

Diagnosed at 17 years old. One month of intensive radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Physical therapy due to drowsiness. Extravasation caused by radiotherapy. Intestinal infection.



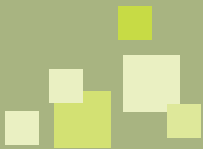
A banal case of gastroenteritis landed Jean-François in the doctor's office. Finding this 17-year-old a bit pale, the doctor ordered a few blood tests. Jean-François got the feeling that something was wrong after he was bumped from one hospital to another. A prolonged stay at Sainte-Justine Hospital confirmed his fears: he was not suffering from anemia, but from acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

He was with his family when the diagnosis was announced and his parents took it very hard. But Jean-François was already familiar with the illness and he knew that his chances of pulling through were very good. "So, when do we begin the treatments?" he asked. The side effects turned out to be much less severe than he had anticipated.

A month of intensive radiotherapy and chemotherapy tested his resolve. After fighting through various complications, Jean-François felt his spirit weakening. "The burn on my hand due to the chemotherapy was really the straw that broke the camel's back," he remembers. But that dark period didn't last for very long, thanks to the remarkable support he received from his family. At that time, Jean-François wanted to get away from everything that might remind him of his illness, so he preferred to surround himself with his friends rather than with people from Leucan. However, in hindsight, he sees the important role played by the organization in his recovery, be it for him or for his parents.

In recovery for over two years, Jean-François now likes to take his time – to see, to listen, to live. He enjoys life like never before. His positive mindset is intact and he's always there for those around him. He lived his life full-speed ahead before his illness. More mature today, he takes advantage of all good things that come across his path.

A firm believer in authenticity, he has learned much about himself: "You have to listen to yourself." His illness has certainly helped him in that regard. Some might even say he's gained some maturity. One thing is for sure: Jean-François will always seek, consciously or not, the authenticity in those around him.



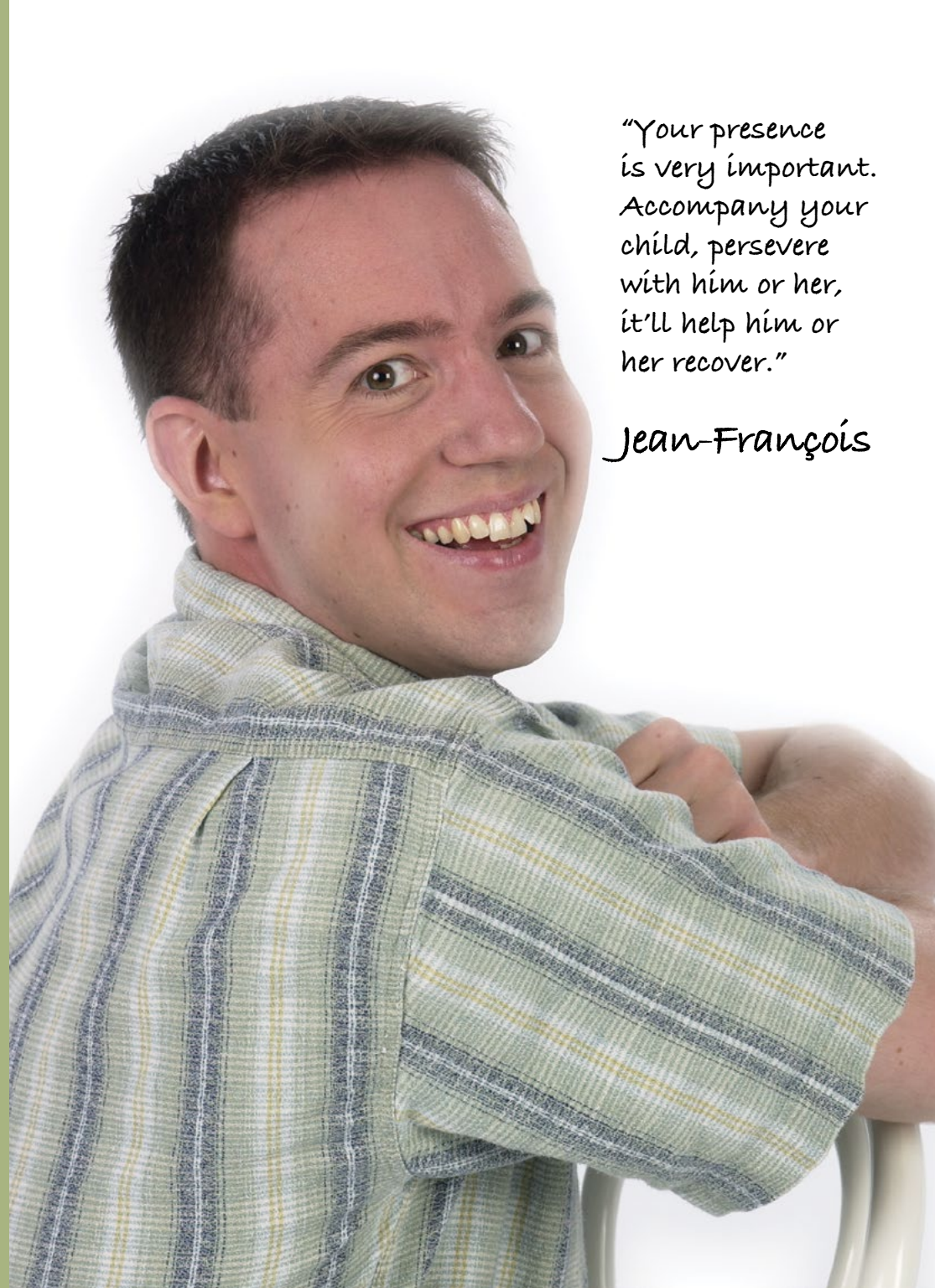


He now holds a B.A. in public relations from UQAM. He's obviously got several projects lined up, but he must first learn to see things in the long run. "When you're sick, you learn to live one day at a time, especially when the going gets rough." Now cured, full of health and very confident that life will throw good things his way, he's slowly moving away from that way of thinking. He likes the idea of buying a house and having a kid, "but no dog," he adds before bursting out in laughter. His laughter is strong and sincere, and pleasant to hear.

"I don't quite believe in God, but you must never lose faith." He says that a positive attitude and a good dose of determination can accomplish miracles. "You must always think that you'll pull through. And you must believe it."

"Your presence is very important. Accompany your child, persevere with him or her, it'll help him or her recover."

Jean-François





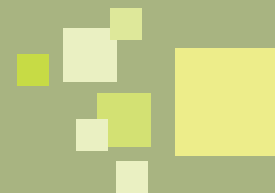
# Joanie

21 years old

Québec

Acute lymphoblastic leukemia

Diagnosed at 15 years old. Shock treatment for one month (one month of intensive chemotherapy combined with two sessions of radiotherapy each day, for two weeks). Remission after one month. Lower-dose chemotherapy for two years.



At 15, Joanie had just returned from a fantastic trip to Florida with her family. She was still short on energy. Her eyes were dull, her skin was pale and she felt weak. Her family decided to take her to Sainte-Justine Hospital. The diagnosis hit them like a sledgehammer: severe anemia due either to a virus she contracted in Florida or a problem with her immune system, or possibly leukemia. And to think they were expecting a routine jaundice!

“As soon as I heard the word “leukemia” I knew there was a chance I might die,” Joanie remembers. Hospitalized on a Friday, the final diagnosis came on Monday: acute lymphoblastic leukemia. If her doctors hadn’t prepared her, the news might have had a devastating impact on her life and her spirit. But Joanie says the greater shock came not on the Monday, but on the Friday. Over three days, the medical team had given her a good dose of confidence. Over three days, she had understood that dying from leukemia was unacceptable from her doctors’ point of view. Over three days, she had come to terms with the fact that she’d be losing her long, brown hair. Her trip to the oncology department had the desired effect.

Despite her illness, Joanie celebrated her 15th birthday in full, with all that implies. The young woman says that her illness brought her “much closer” to her family. Her laugh, heard when we met her for this interview, hints at several funny situations that probably arose from the meeting between leukemia and a teenager. She herself admits to having had several “quite salty” conversations with her parents at that time. The illness allowed her family to rediscover its true values. She believes the illness is harder on the loved ones than it is on the child. “We know that we’re strong, that we can face everything. But our parents don’t always realize how tough we can be.”

During her months of treatment, Joanie says she never saw her parents down. They only recently confided that, at times, their spirit was weaker than they were letting on. Her mother’s constant presence and the *Subway* meals that her father brought her were often enough to allow her to perk up. Joanie says that seeing her parents so strong and courageous had a positive impact on her recovery, which luckily occurred smoothly. “At 15, I knew what was happening to me,” she says. It was a huge obstacle, obviously, but she always knew that she’d emerge alive on the other side. She kept her spirit up by constantly reminding herself that “in two years, it’s all over.” But between now and then, she had to go on living! The loss of her hair didn’t keep her from participating fully in fashion shows or from attending her prom, quite the contrary.



Joanie will tell you the strength that she shows today comes, in part, from her illness. "Before, the littlest thing was like the end of the world." At 15, she already believed in fate, a belief that has garnered new strength over the past few years. "Nothing happens without a good reason. There's something good in what happens to us. Sometimes you don't see it, but it's there."

On the verge of completing her second year of business studies at McGill University, Joanie is looking to the future. She's studying finance, a field that's opened many doors, but she hasn't quite made up her mind as to what she'll do with her life. Joanie's not worried, she adds. "I believe in fate."

In closing, here's what her grandfather once told her: "If it's happened to you, there's a reason. It's happened to you because you're strong. And after that, you'll be even stronger."

"Have faith in  
your children.  
Don't see them as  
being weaker  
than they are, and  
never forget what  
they're capable of."

Joanie







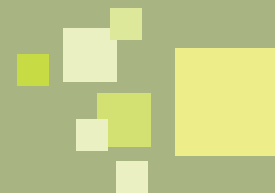
# Kim

23 years old

Montréal

Acute lymphoblastic leukemia

Diagnosed at nine years old. Two weeks of intensive radiotherapy. Chemotherapy once a week for two years.



The illness appeared at age nine. Despite her young age, little Kim complained of a pain in her bones. Many unfortunately believed that it was all in her mind. However, certain signs, combined to a great fatigue, led the doctors to something much worse: acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

Like most kids her age, Kim didn't really understand what was happening to her. The illness meant nothing to her. The shock was much greater when the doctor explained that she would lose all her hair. "I remember crying a lot... my long blond hair... it was quite a shock."

Her parents, however, always remained strong. Her family gave her a lot of support. Even her uncles and her aunts helped her take her mind off things. "They gave me a lot of attention. That's often what kids are after," said the young woman. Armed with a lot of chocolate milk and *Jos Louis* cakes, her parents worked hard to get Kim to take all her pills. Comforted by their strong and kind words, Kim was soon back home taking care of her little brother – "my doll" – and playing with her sister. Furthermore, the promise of a trip at the end of her treatment gave her even more determination to get better, since Kim has always liked new experiences. After those trying times, family became a fundamental value for Kim. "It's at the root of everything. No matter what happens, your family will always be there for you," she says. She adds that when a family member is ill, it's not only that person that we must take care of, but all the members of the family as well.

Hard-working and responsible, she knows full well that her illness is behind her determination. Or rather, that it's made her even more determined! When Kim wants something, she does all she can to get it. Furthermore, some would say that Kim, who is now 23, is a lot more mature than other young women her age. This is probably due to the fact that the childhood of a child who has to battle leukemia, and all that this entails, is not as "carefree" as that of other children.

That experience obviously had an impact on how she sees life. She now lives her life "full speed ahead." Her agenda for the next few months is full, and Kim wants to have a good time. She says that her illness is now only a memory. "I'm looking ahead," she says. Today, she wants to share her experience with others, thanks to Leucan. The organization helped her and her parents tremendously. "As I grew older, I realized that I had to do



something about that,” she explains. Today, as a messenger of hope, she strongly advises both parents and children to talk about what they’re going through.

She came very close to fulfilling what was, at the time, her childhood dream, which was to meet singer Roch Voisine. Today, she has another goal: getting a job in a field that she loves, namely human resources management. With a diploma in administration in her pocket and with 18 months of university behind her, there is no doubt that this young woman’s perseverance and dynamism will take her far.

“There is always hope. The therapies available are more and more effective. You must hang on and believe that you’ll get better.”

Kim

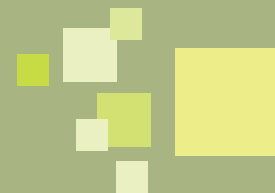




# Michelle

35 years old  
Laurentides  
Leukemia

Diagnosed at 12 years old. One month of radiotherapy. Chemotherapy, lumbar punctures and bone marrow punctures over three years.



“My symptoms weren’t really worrisome,” Michelle remembers. A few bruises here and there, a bit of fatigue, nothing more. Her mother decided to take her daughter to the doctor when a bit of blood appeared in Michelle’s eye. A mother’s gut feeling is never wrong.

Barely enough time to pack a suitcase and Michelle is expected urgently at Sainte-Justine Hospital. After three days of tests, the mystery was solved. The child isn’t suffering from a routine infection, but from leukemia. Many years later, she’ll discover that, at the time, she was terminally ill.

For her family, those three days of uncertainty represented the worst period. The doctors were awaiting the test results and wouldn’t say a word. That silence was very hard on their spirit. Michelle, for her part, admits that the loss of her hair was horribly difficult. “At 13, you want to be pretty and I didn’t feel pretty,” she says. Wearing a hair piece helped her tremendously. Luckily, she didn’t lose all of her long hair: “I had hair like a baby. Psychologically, that helped me. There wasn’t a lot left, but at least I had some left!”

A friend would bring her homework to the hospital, which allowed her to keep studying despite being ill. Another friend even broke the school’s rules and came to her bedside. All this help, on top of that provided by her father, her mother, the nurses and the doctors, meant that Michelle doesn’t really have bad memories from that period. Obviously, some times were better than others: “I told myself that I had the right to be sad, but it always passed in the end.”

Michelle has always been willing to discuss her illness. She hates being the center of attention and she thinks that readily talking about her experience has helped keep the curious at bay. “When those around you don’t know your story, they always look at you funny. I preferred to talk about it openly, and then it was over. We could move on to something else.” That hasn’t changed over the years: today, some 25 years later, she still prefers to remain in the shadows. Calm, laid back and thoughtful, she is certainly stronger today, but she remains, at her core, the same person.

Michelle took on new challenges as soon as she had recovered. At 17, she was ready for a new life: more advanced studies, the work place and love. Her illness was nothing more than a bad memory. However, she says, “at 30, I think about it a bit more.” A mother of two, including a preteen, she is now more interested in life’s small



*"The survival instinct is very strong, and believe me, your child has a lot of energy!"*

*Michelle*

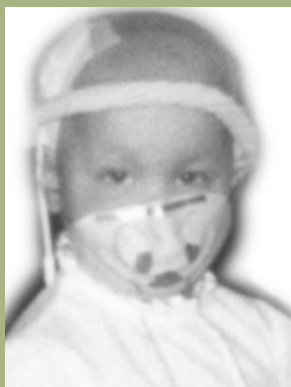
pleasures. "If I have to choose between my housework and playing with my daughter, I'll go play with her. That has allowed me to re-centre my values." Her wisdom is also catching up to her. "Now I see what my parents went through," she adds.

This is why she recently decided to become one of Leucan's messengers of hope. She says the information that's distributed and the help that's offered to the parents are very important. Michelle understands how beneficial it is to talk and share.

Having always had a strong relationship with her parents, Michelle today wants to share what they always told her: "An illness is never easy, but you get through it. During the worst times, learn to live day to day. Good news will eventually come, never lose hope." Life always ends with a smile, apparently.







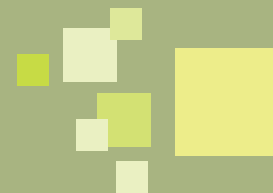
# Nancy

16 years old

Lanaudière

Acute lymphoblastic leukemia

Diagnosed at two and a two-and-a-half years old, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and bone marrow transplant.



Nancy was two and a half when her worried parents took her to the hospital. The child had an infection of the urinary tract. Then, after a wait of more than an hour, the Baribeau family's universe capsized. The doctors rapidly diagnosed leukemia, but her shocked parents refused to believe it. "It's a bit as if they'd taken our daughter's life," her mother explains.

While her crying mother held her in her arms, little Nancy caressed her back and said, "It'll be alright, Mom, don't cry." From that moment, members of the Baribeau family rolled up their sleeves and decided to fight and to surround her with all their love. In fact, she's the one who provided them with the strength they needed to beat the illness. Luckily, the family was knit very tight and they were all there for each other during the worst moments. Tommy, Nancy's twin brother, saved his sister's life by donating his bone marrow. During the transfusion, Nancy kissed the tube and said, "Thank you Tommy, thank you Tommy!" When he woke up, it was Tommy's turn to exclaim, "I gave my marrow to help my sister." The hospital staff, devoted to little Nancy and her family, was moved by this moment of mutual aid between the twins.

Hard-headed and determined, Nancy finally overcame her illness. Family has become one of her core values and represents everything for the teenager that she is today. "If my family hadn't been so present, I don't think I'd be here today," she says without any hesitation. Even though Nancy was very young at the time and even though she only has vague memories from that period, there are physical sequelae that remind her of what she went through. Her hair never grew back entirely and she has to deal with others' often inquisitive, but sometimes hurtful, gaze. She doesn't let that get her down and she keeps her spirits up. "I never lose courage, otherwise I'd have been out a long time ago." The 16-year-old says it's important to talk, not to keep your fears to yourself, and to welcome the numerous questions you are asked. Nancy also believes that a strong spirit plays a crucial role in the recovery and in life in general. "You'll never pull through if your spirit is down in the dumps, you have to keep it up!" she explains.

Unlike many teenagers her age, Nancy truly understands what life is about. She knows and appreciates how lucky she is to be alive and well. "I want to make the most out of life because that's what's most important for me," she says. Nancy has learned a lot from those difficult times when she was younger. She likes to help



people and wants to provide them with a little bit of the comfort they need. "I have to give back what I myself received, I like giving more than receiving."

Nancy's mother says, "Leucan is very important, for the parents as well as for the children." Mrs. Baribeau sees the summer camps as very beneficial times for the children and their families. Her daughter, for example, attended many of the organization's camps, and they did her a lot of good. Nancy was first with the kids five and younger, and she's now with the teenagers. "We've seen her evolve since the start, it's helped her throughout the year," her mother says. All the events organized by Leucan are greatly appreciated since, "with Leucan, you don't have to speak, a simple look is enough to understand each other."

"Never lose hope,  
remain positive and  
encourage your child.  
Courage is the most  
important thing."

Nancy





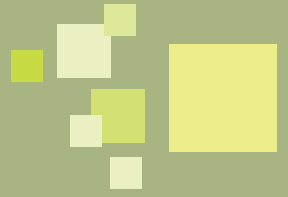
# Nancy

30 years old

Estrie

Acute lymphoblastic leukemia

Diagnosed at 17 years old. Chemotherapy for one year, three times a week. Seventy-two pills per day for four days. Bone marrow transplant.



Nancy sees a doctor on March 18, 1990, complaining of a pain in her neck. She's also got the odd bruise, here and there, she's lost weight and her eyes, usually so dark, are a bit lifeless, but leukemia isn't even close to being on her radar. That's still the diagnosis that she's handed.

"The shock was horrible. I cried, and I cried some more", she remembers with emotion. Like many others, she first wondered why this was happening to her. "I'm not such a bad person". Despite being quite aware of all that was happening to her, Nancy has no memories of the first two weeks of her treatment. "It was all happening so fast!". And even though she was going through a very difficult time, she felt ready to tackle her bone marrow transplant. After a year of treatments, she was determined to pull through. Incredibly determined, almost hard-headed, Nancy wouldn't hear about staying in the hospital for two long months. "I'd do everything they asked me to do". She was so determined that the doctors felt compelled to warn her parents. "Your daughter doesn't grasp the magnitude of the procedure", they said. Little did they know that she did get what she was getting into. "I really wanted to heal. That requires a lot of mental strength".

Maisonneuve-Rosemont Hospital had already performed about 300 bone marrow transplants. Nancy would set two records, becoming the first patient to leave the isolation room after only one month and the first to leave the hospital after only six months! Not everything was going wrong in her life...

Her family was obviously tremendously supportive. Her mother would cheer her up while her father fed her: "They made a great team". Her older brother, who was 19 at the time, was an irreplaceable source of energy, her "little ray of sunshine". When his sister began losing her hair, he got a haircut to match hers. And her little sister saved her life by donating her bone marrow. She was only 13 at the time, but today she says she wouldn't hesitate for one second to do it all over again. It goes without saying that the illness brought the Pelletier family even closer: "My family is my rock. Nothing will ever replace it", she says with great conviction.

Somewhat discrete, Nancy didn't like discussing her illness. She always turned down the chance to meet with psychologists. In fact, she refused all external help: "No, I'll manage alone", she'd tell them. A few years later, she admits that this refusal was a great mistake on her part. It goes without saying that if she had to do it all over again today, she'd accept the help: "I'd have taken care of a few things. Today, it's sometimes much more difficult".



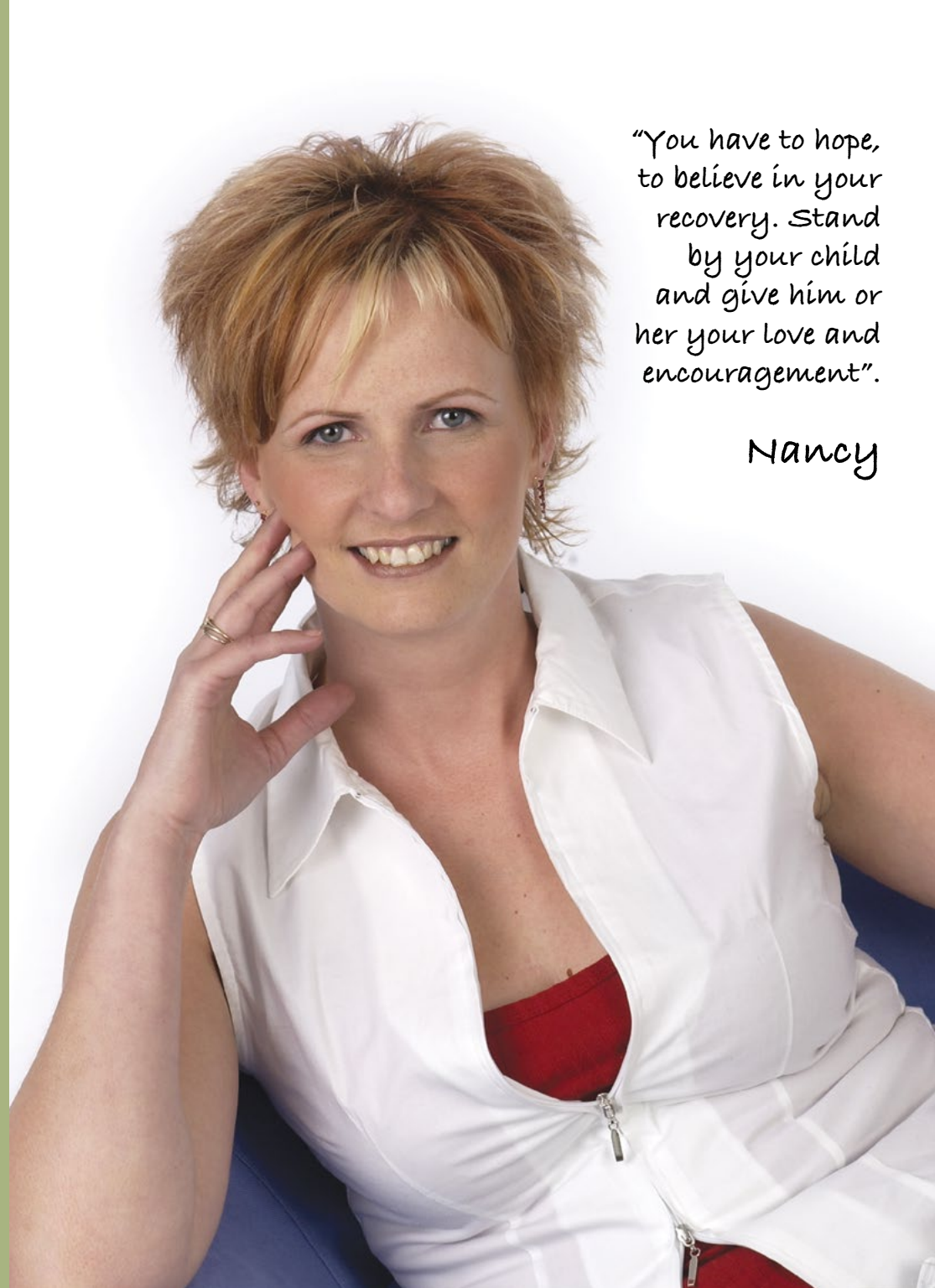
"I think that everything happens for a reason. Life always gives you the best outcome possible". Furthermore, her experience allowed her to realize just how determined she is. She discovered that she possesses a great inner strength.

Now married and the mother of a little girl, Nancy admits that her illness modified how she sees life. She appreciates life and enjoys every moment, one day at a time... Her secret? The joy of living. "If you lose your joy of living, you lose your life".

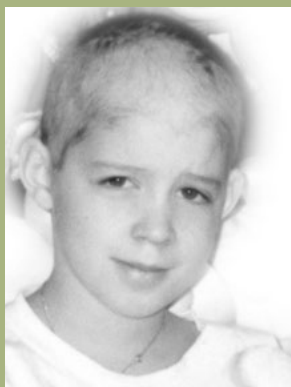
"You must never give up. You have to keep charging. Learn to be positive, despite all that's happening".

"You have to hope,  
to believe in your  
recovery. Stand  
by your child  
and give him or  
her your love and  
encouragement".

Nancy







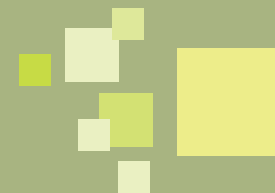
# Pascal

17 years old

Abitibi-Témiscamingue

Acute lymphoblastic leukemia

Diagnosed at nine years old. Forty weeks of strong chemotherapy, 64 weeks of regular chemotherapy and two weeks of radiotherapy.



At nine years old, Pascal was a great gymnast who had already won several tournaments. But at a certain point he steadily felt weaker and had trouble performing certain moves. He also felt quite sleepy after school, which was a bit unusual for a kid his age. It was only on his third visit to the hospital that doctors prescribed blood tests. They found that his level of white blood cells was much too high. He was suffering from acute lymphoblastic leukemia. “At first I didn’t quite know what to expect. You finally understand what’s happening, but only gradually.” Pascal and his mother moved into Montreal’s Sainte-Justine Hospital for two months. His mother was at his bedside every day. His father travelled between Val-d’Or and Montreal almost every weekend to be with his son. Family was therefore quite important in Pascal’s life. The support he received from his parents and siblings helped him recover. “I got through it thanks to my parents. They gave me incredible support and they never showed any despair,” he says.

At the time, Pascal was the only child in his region who suffered from leukemia, so he was invited to get involved for the cause. He got the chance to travel by air (transportation offered by Leucan). “It was fantastic! I travelled part of the way sitting next to the captain,” he remembers with some excitement. He even landed sitting in the co-pilot’s seat – an unforgettable experience for a 10-year-old. Later, he was made honorary president for blood drives and for the Children’s Wish Foundation. He was also nominated to represent his region at the Opération Enfant-Soleil telethon.

Young Pascal was strong-willed and he rarely complained. He never imagined, not for a single second, that he wouldn’t recover. “If you remain positive during chemo, it shows that you’ll pull through.” During his chemotherapy treatments in Val-d’Or, his almost-permanent smile earned him the nickname “little ray of sunshine.” He has good memories from that period, mostly of the doctors and nurses.

When Pascal, then 11, was finally told that he was in remission, he was about to enter high school. Proud and very sociable, he got involved in school life and even returned to gymnastics. Through his talent and determination, he was named best athlete in his region and third-best gymnast in Québec. Pascal now lives his life day to day, he never dwells on the bad times and he wakes up every morning with the same wise thought: “Today is a new day that begins, and everything is going to be fine.” The young man is now studying hotel management and he says he’s much more attentive to those around him.



He advises those struggling with an illness to remain positive. "It's hard, but it's not impossible," he says. It's also quite beneficial, he adds, to remain open and to surround yourself with people who know about the illness. The Leucan summer camps, which Pascal attended frequently, are good examples. "People are in a good mood and they give great moral support to sick kids, but also to their parents and siblings," he explains. In fact, thanks to his positive attitude, Pascal only has good memories of what he went through due to his cancer.

*"Be there for your child and, mostly, have faith in him or her."*

**Pascal**





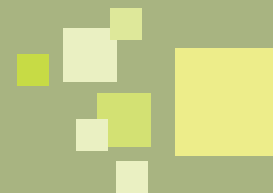
# Sébastien

20 years old

Montréal

Acute lymphoblastic leukemia

Diagnosed at 10 years old. Chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Nuclear medicine and magnetic resonance to treat necrosis in his ankle.



Sébastien's teacher noticed that some of his lymph nodes were swollen while he was quietly playing with his friends one day at school. Knowing the symptoms of leukemia, the teacher contacted his student's parents and suggested they see a doctor. Sébastien underwent several tests at Sainte-Justine Hospital. He received a grim diagnosis several days later: he had acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

Even though he was just 10 years old, Sébastien was somewhat aware of the gravity of his illness. He knew it could be deadly, but he also knew he had an 80% chance of recovery. "When you're young, the hospital is like a game. The doctors and nurses transform the treatments into different challenges that you must overcome," he says. The second week of treatments was the one Sébastien found most difficult. Bed-ridden and unable to walk, he felt powerless and his spirits were low. He gradually regained the upper hand thanks to the support of his loved ones and the different activities offered to him. He participated in activities with the nurses and other children, watched TV and played video games to help him get through the darkest days. The massages he received from Leucan also helped him in his recovery.

Sébastien's curiosity prompted hospital personnel to explain everything that they were doing to him. This information helped the young boy feel more confident and gave him a greater understanding of his cancer. Sébastien also developed great admiration for those who were recovering from cancer. He saw them as role models and looked up to them and their recovery when he felt his spirits sinking. "They were my hope," he says.

Family is an important value for Sébastien. He thinks it's "primordial to spend time with them." His illness brought him closer to his parents and his sister. "At eight years old, my sister knew that she might lose me and she enjoyed the time we spent together." There's nothing better than to help encourage your child to keep fighting. This difficult period also forced him to grow up faster, and his teenage years weren't as turbulent as those of other teens – to his parents' great relief. He was more mature than other kids his age.

A future pilot who loves the outdoors, Sébastien describes himself as someone who's simple, thorough and organized. "My illness gave me my simplicity. I don't search too far to find what I need, I'm happy with what I have at hand."

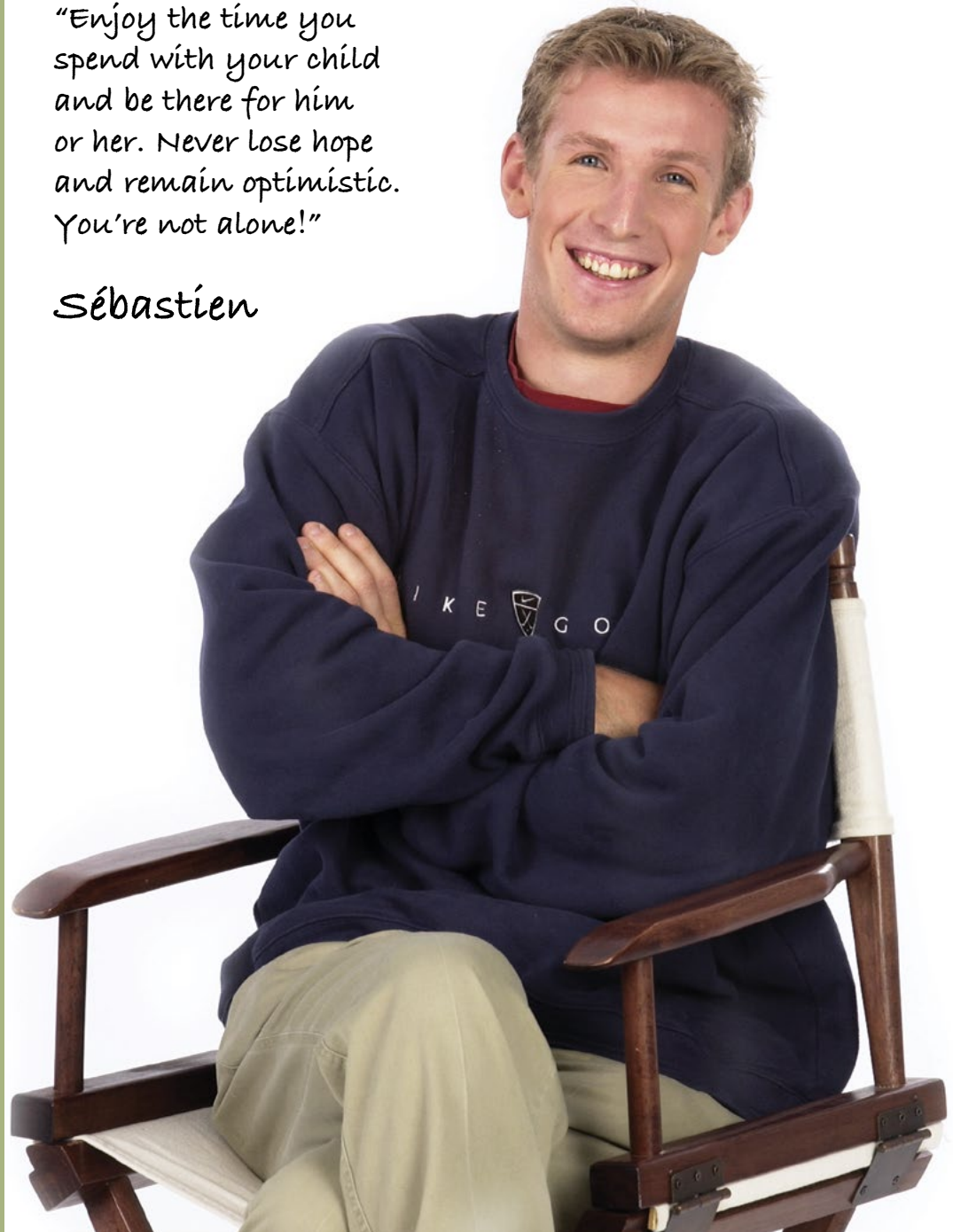


Messenger of hope for Leucan, Sébastien also attended the organization's summer camps for seven years. First as a camper, and today as a counsellor.

"Leucan helps kids forget a bit about the hospital, thanks to its activities. It helps us meet kids like us, and parents find someone they can talk to." Another excellent source of motivation.

"Enjoy the time you spend with your child and be there for him or her. Never lose hope and remain optimistic. You're not alone!"

Sébastien





# Acute myeloid leukemia

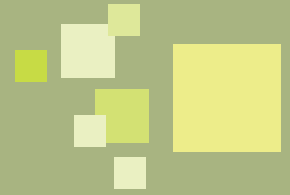
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# Patrick

28 years old  
Montréal  
Acute non lymphoblastic leukemia  
Diagnosed at four years old.



At four years old, Patrick complained of aches all over his body. His family brought him to see a few pediatricians, but they couldn't figure out what was going on. "This child is a "complainer"," they said. One day, a specialist finally recognized his symptoms and Patrick was rushed to Sainte-Justine Hospital. His life was turned upside down when he learned that he had leukemia. At the time, in the early 1990s, the rate of survival was only 25%.

Going back and forth between school and his treatments, Patrick felt alone. At the time, he didn't really understand what was happening to him. Today, he realizes just how much he cut himself off from the world. One of the keys to his recovery was a letter he received from Leucan, inviting him to join the ranks of the messengers of hope. But he only read the letter six months after receiving it.

Patrick didn't feel ready at the time to get involved in such a project. Talking, remembering, reliving – it was all still too painful for him. This short, harmless letter forced him to come to terms with his difficult past. "Before, the memories I had were very dark. But I realized ... by sorting through them ... that it wasn't all that bad," he says.

That's right, not all that bad. Patrick finally decided to return to Sainte-Justine Hospital, where pleasant surprises awaited him. First of all, he was pleased to learn that his doctor had nicknamed him a "little ray of sunshine." Also, seeing the old Tintin posters on the walls once again brought him some comfort. Not to mention the photos taken of him as a child. While he expected the experience to bring back bad memories of those difficult times, he was surprised to discover he had gradually come to terms with his past.

That doesn't mean it was easy. He says he still had a tough time appreciating his visits to the hospital, even after all those years.

But he still smiles when he remembers his trips to *McDonald's* after his treatments. "I also remember the little puppets that the nurses put on their fingers. They made me feel good," he says. It would seem that nothing is as dark as it first appears.

Patrick now has a better understanding of the meaning of his life. Before, the word "leukemia" provoked feelings of anger and sadness. He has since come to terms with his illness. "I'm calmer today," he admits. He's





slowly rediscovering who he is and what his true values are. "Having a daughter who's three and a half sure helps," he adds proudly.

His life is now completely different. But the process wasn't painless and is the result of a "long time spent working on myself." Generous, attentive, careful of others, Patrick now wishes to share his experience. He wants to write a document to help children learn to grow through their illness.

"The more you understand, the easier things are, the easier they are to accept," he explains. He also wants to help parents get over this difficult period. His new experience as a father helps him understand them even better.

After a long silence, Patrick goes even further and advises young patients to express themselves, to discuss their feelings. "Don't keep your anger locked up inside. Find someone you trust, and it's only by talking with that person that you'll relieve the pressure," he concludes.

His advice, enriched by his own experience, is a source of hope.

"Don't feel sorry  
for yourself. It's  
absolutely essential  
that you stand by  
your child through  
his or her recovery."

Patrick







# Brain tumor

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# Christine

26 years old

Lanaudière

Medulloblastoma-type brain tumor

Diagnosed at 17 years old. Surgery to remove the brain tumor. A year of chemotherapy, including two months of radiotherapy.

At 17 years old, Christine has moved away from home. She's studying Arts and Media Technology at CEGEP de Jonquière. She began feeling quite ill after a night out with her friends. Vomiting, painful headaches and double vision put doctors on the right path: Christine has a brain tumor. She was rushed to Montreal for the operation that will save her sight – and her life! The tumor kept the cerebrospinal fluid from circulating and put pressure on her optical nerve. "I could have been blinded," she says.

At first, Christine didn't fully grasp the gravity of her illness. It started to dawn on her when the doctor explained the treatment protocol. She had to quit school and leave her apartment in Jonquière. Even though she was discouraged, Christine never doubted for a moment she would pull through. "I never thought that I might die. In fact, no, I did think about it once. But the doctor was so confident I would be cured that I tagged right along," she says. She remembers the hospital fondly. Playful and cheerful, she acted like a little girl and had a lot of fun with her doctor. "I felt better in the hospital because something funny was always happening," she recalls. Christine really appreciated the massage therapist provided by Leucan. "It was a blessed moment when she walked into my room." Christine says those massages allowed young patients like her to let go and "forget the illness eating them inside."

At home, her parents gave her an affectionate kitten, which helped keep her spirits up. But most of all, her parents and her brother stayed at her side at all times and helped prop her up. When she was in the hospital, her mother stayed with her all day long and her father visited on weekends. Christine is very close to her family. They are more important to her now than before her illness. "My sense of family is immense. Before, I would have travelled to the end of the world to do what I had to do. I didn't care. But today, my family comes first. They will always be there, no matter what."

Passionate about music of all kinds, Christine describes herself as a giving, loyal and structured person. She says she's become even more generous. This difficult time also allowed her to sort through her friends, to discover those who were true to her. And Christine has remained very loyal to those she loves: "You discover that some people have stronger values than others." Friendship is one of her core values. She says a friend is someone loyal who'll always be there for you: "At 17, you have many, many friends. But now, at 26, I have three real friends in my life."

*"Allow your child to take flight,  
all the while reassuring him or her  
that you'll be there for him or her."*

*Christine*

Now a human resources technician, Christine says that Leucan was immensely useful to her mother during her illness. Leucan provided her mother with a space where she could talk with others and meet with a social worker, be listened to and encouraged. In other words, "that was her own way of seeing to her own well-being and to not forget herself." Now, as a messenger of hope, Christine wants to give back what she has received. She wants to help as she was helped.

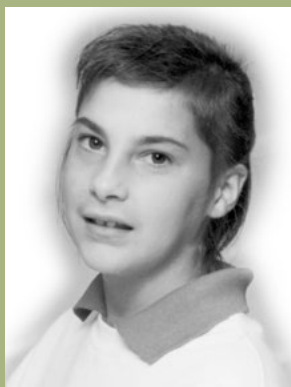
Christine's message to those young teenagers struck by cancer is simple: "Listen to yourself, take care of yourself and reach your goals!"





# Hodgkin lymphoma





# Annie

29 years old

Victoriaville, Bois-Francs

Hodgkins disease, stage 4, type 3

Diagnosed at 13 years old. Over the course of one year, nine cycles of chemotherapy consisting of two intravenous treatments per month, combined with chemotherapy taken orally over nine months. In remission for eight months, relapse at age 15. Chemotherapy and radiotherapy, exploratory surgery, spleen removed and ovaries lowered.

At 13 years old, Annie weighed 75 pounds and stood 5'5" tall. Nothing abnormal for a teenager, you say? It took a year before a pediatrician finally recognized this weight loss and persistent cough as being a whole different problem. A lung X-ray revealed some bad news: at 13, Annie was suffering from stage 4b Hodgkins' disease, the last stage possible. "At first I didn't quite understand what was happening to me," Annie says. Even though her parents were clearly overwhelmed, she didn't quite grasp just how sick she was. She also didn't know how low the rate of survival was (between 17 and 20%).

Annie's deepest fear was being different from other children. She was at risk of missing her prom and not graduating from high school with everyone else. So, for almost four years, she forced herself to live a normal life. Today, she understands that her stubbornness was probably responsible for several episodes of tremendous fatigue. She went from treatment to class, from class to treatment, refusing to rest. She wanted to be cured as rapidly as possible. "I think that in the end, always demanding more of myself proved to be a good thing," she says. "It kept me from giving up, from feeling sorry for myself." While she understands she set the bar impossibly high for herself, sometimes even too high, "it was worth it."

She used to talk about her illness, but as though it was someone else's. She would tell a story, not her story. She would hide her emotions. "It's hard to say if that way of doing things helped me. But it helped me keep a certain distance from the illness." She admits that at that age, she refused to believe cancer could be real. All these new things in her life (the dreams she still cherished, the harsh reality she had to face, her family's sadness) caused her a lot of anxiety. "Unfortunately, I wasn't able to detect and handle all those emotions," she says.

Her main source of happiness during those trying times was undoubtedly her family. Her mother, who stayed at her bedside at Sainte-Justine Hospital, provided a comfort she sorely needed. "Seeing her walk into my room every morning was a moment I truly cherished," she recalls. "It allowed me to relax, to let go." Her father would take over at Hôtel-Dieu Hospital, in Arthabaska. Not to mention her little sister Katia, with whom she always got along. "They did so much... so much!" Her emotions overflowing, Annie adds: "My family was always very strong."

Today, as she approaches her 30th birthday, she has learned to slow down. Annie will always bear the scars of that difficult period, but over the past two years she has discovered who she truly is.

She also understands, more than ever, how precious life is. Keenly aware of her relationships with others, empathetic and always willing to listen – she fully understands these traits originate, at least partially, from her past. Slowly, she's learning to think about herself. Annie says that contrary to what many believe, "as a child, you want to be cured for those around you, for your family. You have to remain aware of the help that's available, because even though you may not want it now, you'll know that it's there."

"I'm sort of like a small miracle... and that's also what my parents believe".

"It's pointless  
to hide your  
emotions.  
Emotions make  
human beings  
beautiful, so  
there's no point  
in hiding them,  
you must listen  
to them."

Annie







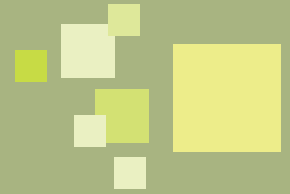
# Marie-Ève

22 years old

Bas Saint-Laurent

Hodgkins' Disease

Diagnosed at 15 years old. Chemotherapy twice a month for six months. One month of intensive radiotherapy



As a teenager, Marie-Ève suffered from severe headaches, chronic fatigue and her lymph nodes were swollen. "Mononucleosis," the doctors suspected. But when the swelling of her lymph nodes didn't go down, they decided to operate. The biopsy led to an entirely different diagnosis. She was suffering from Hodgkins' Disease. "When I heard the word "cancer" I was afraid I might die. In my mind, having cancer meant that you would die," she remembers.

The doctors gave Marie-Ève a lot of support. Even though further tests determined that the illness had spread to her neck and lungs, the specialists remained optimistic. Marie-Ève had a 75% chance of recovery. "That's when I decided to put up a fight."

Her treatment proved to be a very difficult period for her. Since she was from Rivière-du-Loup, Marie-Ève had to travel to Québec City to be treated. The loss of her hair, which was very long at the time, really hit home. "I never shaved it off. I simply let it fall out," she says. The kids at her school were cold and distant, which she found hard to accept, but luckily Marie-Ève could count on her parents and her boyfriend, Danny. He stayed with her through everything and Marie-Ève could always rely on him, even through the roughest times.

Despite Marie-Ève's mood swings, her parents remained present and helpful through her treatment. She knows that this experience has brought her closer to her mother, father and little sister. This played a crucial role in her recovery. "When you feel that you're not alone, it becomes easier," she says.

Now a young adult, Marie-Ève lives in her new house with her boyfriend Danny. She stays active and works hard to make sure that her house and yard are the way she likes them. She keeps in shape every week. "It's incredible to see that I can be in shape and be active even after the illness I went through." Generous, caring toward others and understanding, Marie-Ève knows that she owes those qualities to those difficult years. "Before, I would think of myself first, but now I'm more aware of others."

Leucan helped Marie-Ève's family manage the financial challenges of her illness as well as other hurdles. She remembers a fantastic Christmas party that she spent with other sick kids, surrounded by clowns and gifts. She even went skydiving a few years ago, an extreme sport that shares a few characteristics with the illness, since it

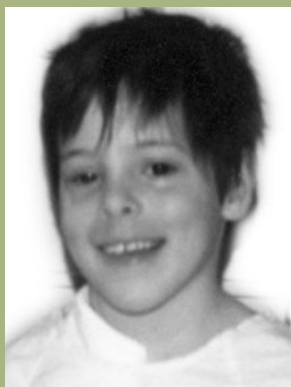


also requires a lot of courage. Marie-Ève thinks it's important to help sick kids, to encourage them and to allow them to meet people who truly understand what they're going through. "Hope is very important for recovery. You have to hang on, don't be discouraged, plan ahead and let those around you take care of you," she says.

"You must keep hope and never stop encouraging your child. Remain enthusiastic. Be strong and courageous."

Marie-Ève





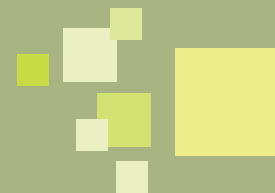
# Philippe

19 years old

Mauricie

Hodgkins' Lymphoma in the neck, relapse in the lungs

Diagnosed at seven years old. Chemotherapy over nine months. After 18 months of remission, relapse in the lungs. Nine months of chemotherapy, surgery to reduce the need for radiotherapy and four months of radiotherapy.



It all began on a typical afternoon, as Philippe and his father were returning from school. Father and son were horsing around, having fun as they often do. But that day, Philippe's father discovered a small lump on his son's neck. Thinking that something may have been dislocated, Philippe was taken to a doctor. He returned home with some antibiotics after undergoing an X-ray. A second appointment one week later at Sainte-Justine Hospital led to a completely different outcome. The test results were more difficult to digest: Philippe's right lymph node is cancerous.

"The world stops spinning. "Cancer" is a hard word. It's a scary word." Philippe stopped playing soccer and began his long treatments. He emerged stronger, however, proud to have fought through. "I even remember doing a presentation in the third grade. My topic was 'personal triumph.' "

But during that period, his doctors kept an eye on a gray area in his lungs. Since he was so young, the cancer grew very rapidly and he was faced with a relapse in his lungs.

"You have to start all over. It's doubly scary. It's a catastrophe," his mother says. For his part, Philippe remembers laughing – probably sarcastically. But today he has a hard time remembering everything. He was more interested in racing through the hospital's hallways in his wheelchair. "Maybe I didn't quite understand what was happening to me. In my head, it was like I had a huge cold," he explains. Soccer became his source of hope. Following his operation, he calculated how many days it would be before he could resume playing. Fever or not, he'd have given anything not to miss one more game.

"When you see all that your child is doing, you have no choice but to go along. It's through him that you find the strength to carry on. I always believed in him," his mother says.

Being surrounded by children really helped Philippe fight his illness. Leucan also allowed him to develop a new side of his personality. Known as a shy and discrete boy, Philippe learned how to make friends at Leucan's camps. Despite feeling the pain of losing some of his young friends, Philippe hasn't turned his back on friendship. "They're still here even though they're gone. I have my own way of looking at the stars."

The organization also had a positive impact on other sides of his personality. He learned to listen to others. His stays at the hospital also allowed him to share the most difficult times. "My personality didn't change directly. But I'm sure the people I met changed me." His father had a similar experience. "Talking about the illness



*"You always want to show how strong you are, but you also have to show that you're sad. We are not superhuman. You have to give yourself the right to cry."*

*Philippe*

with other parents who've also lived through it is a different dynamic altogether," his father said. "You can cry without feeling judged."

Philippe now realizes how fragile life is. He says you have to learn to appreciate your daily experiences. "Don't worry about tomorrow, it's in the future. Don't worry about yesterday, it's in the past. Live for the moment."

He hopes to study health sciences after high school. He'd like to work as a licensed practical nurse at Sainte-Justine Hospital. "Because Sainte-Justine is my second family, my second home." Meanwhile, he remains actively involved in the summer and winter camps and with Leucan's Heart-filled Hope support group.

Philippe concludes by saying: "There's no miracle to getting better. It all happens in your mind." Who knows? He may even be right. Today, Philippe has such a ready smile.







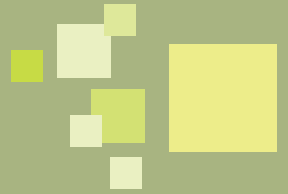
# Yanick

31 years old

Montreal

Hodgkins' Disease (Stage 4)

Diagnosed at 17 years old. Eleven months of chemotherapy. Remission after six months, but relapse requiring additional chemotherapy and radiotherapy.



A prolonged cold and an unusual weight loss prompted Yanick to seek help. The doctors thought the 17-year-old was suffering from pneumonia and bronchitis, two illnesses that hid something much worse. After six weeks of tests and a biopsy, the doctors confirmed Yanick's diagnosis: Stage 4 Hodgkins' Disease.

Yanick didn't really know anything about the illness or how serious it was. It took four months before he finally grasped the full magnitude of what was happening. He faced the situation with courage and was determined to get through it. Dying wasn't an option for him. "(Recovery) will take however long it takes," he said.

When asked about the memories he has of his treatments and the hospital, Yanick swears he only remembers the good times and has forgotten about the bad ones. He remembers the days when his friends would visit to cheer him up. He smiles from ear to ear when he tells one particular story. "One day, all my friends had come to see me after surgery. They came with me to radiotherapy and they asked the doctor if they could all take a picture with me, with their hands on my chest." Obviously this experience had a positive impact on Yanick's relationships with his friends, of whom "only the best remain."

Yanick had a lot to say about his illness. He talked about it to release the frustrations and incomprehensions that tormented him. "It's important that you don't keep it bottled up inside. Don't pile everything up inside until you're ready to explode." His family was very present and offered the young man a lot of support. The members of his family, who are very close to one another, supported Yanick through his recovery, but sometimes they had difficulty hiding their worries. "Our family was already very close before the illness, and this difficult period only confirmed it so we could move forward," he says.

Yanick describes himself as someone who always has a lot to say, but rarely about himself. He is very patient and perseveres when life places challenges in his path. "All those qualities I owe a bit to my illness." Life also took on a different meaning for him. He's more laid back than before and he sees life in a completely different manner. "Before, I lived in the past or in the future, I was analyzing the consequences or incidences of my decisions, without enjoying the moment. After my illness, I learned to enjoy today." Frankness and honesty are two values he holds dear, since, he says, "it's essential to be true to yourself."



He plans on being happy by accomplishing a lot of small things. Now one of Leucan's messengers of hope, he has this advice for kids who have cancer: "Don't give up and you'll come out alive!"

*"Don't give up! It's difficult,  
but you can make it!"*

*Yanick*







# Non-Hodgkin lymphoma

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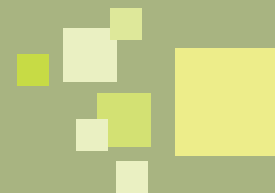
# Guillaume

21 years old

Montreal

Lymphoblastic lymphoma (Non-Hodgkin)

Diagnosed at 11 years old. Experimental treatment imported from the United States. A year of chemotherapy, once a week.



Guillaume, then 11, was on a ski trip when he noticed a bump on his shoulder. Even though it wasn't painful, he still decided to show it to his father, a doctor, when they got home. Guillaume thought he may have fractured his clavicle, but his parents were much more pessimistic: "That bump set off all sorts of alarm bells." Transferred to Sainte-Justine Hospital, Guillaume underwent a whole series of tests that came to the following diagnostic: Lymphoblastic non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

"Mom, will you still think I'm handsome after I've lost all my hair?" Even though he didn't have all the details concerning what he was about to go through, Guillaume understood what was happening to him. His strong will and positive attitude gave him the necessary strength to keep his spirits up. Hospitalized five days out of seven during the first months, he was able to at least enjoy his weekends at home. Exceptional people surrounded him and his recovery looked promising. According to his protocol, his treatments ended on December 19, 1994. A year to the day after his first treatment, the doctors stopped the chemotherapy. Guillaume was on the path to recovery.

The more his treatments progressed, the more Guillaume believed he would pull through. It must be noted that, at the time, he had a great role model: hockey player Mario Lemieux. They were both suffering roughly from the same illness, and the 11-year-old boy believed he would get through it, just like his hero. "I saw that I wasn't alone. I knew I could do it." Guillaume had an autographed jersey from the hockey superstar and he was ready to brave a year of painful treatments.

Doctors, nurses, massage therapists, volunteers and specialists played a role in his recovery. "They keep us from losing hope, they help us think about something else, they even help us have fun," he says. Without that care, Guillaume is convinced he would have different memories from his time in the hospital. Leucan accompanied him during that year, making his life and the life of many kids more enjoyable and less painful. "Thanks to all those who accompany us, we think about our illness a bit less. They help heal the wound," he adds. Guillaume still visits Sainte-Justine Hospital once a year and makes sure to visit his former caregivers. It's another sort of healing for him.



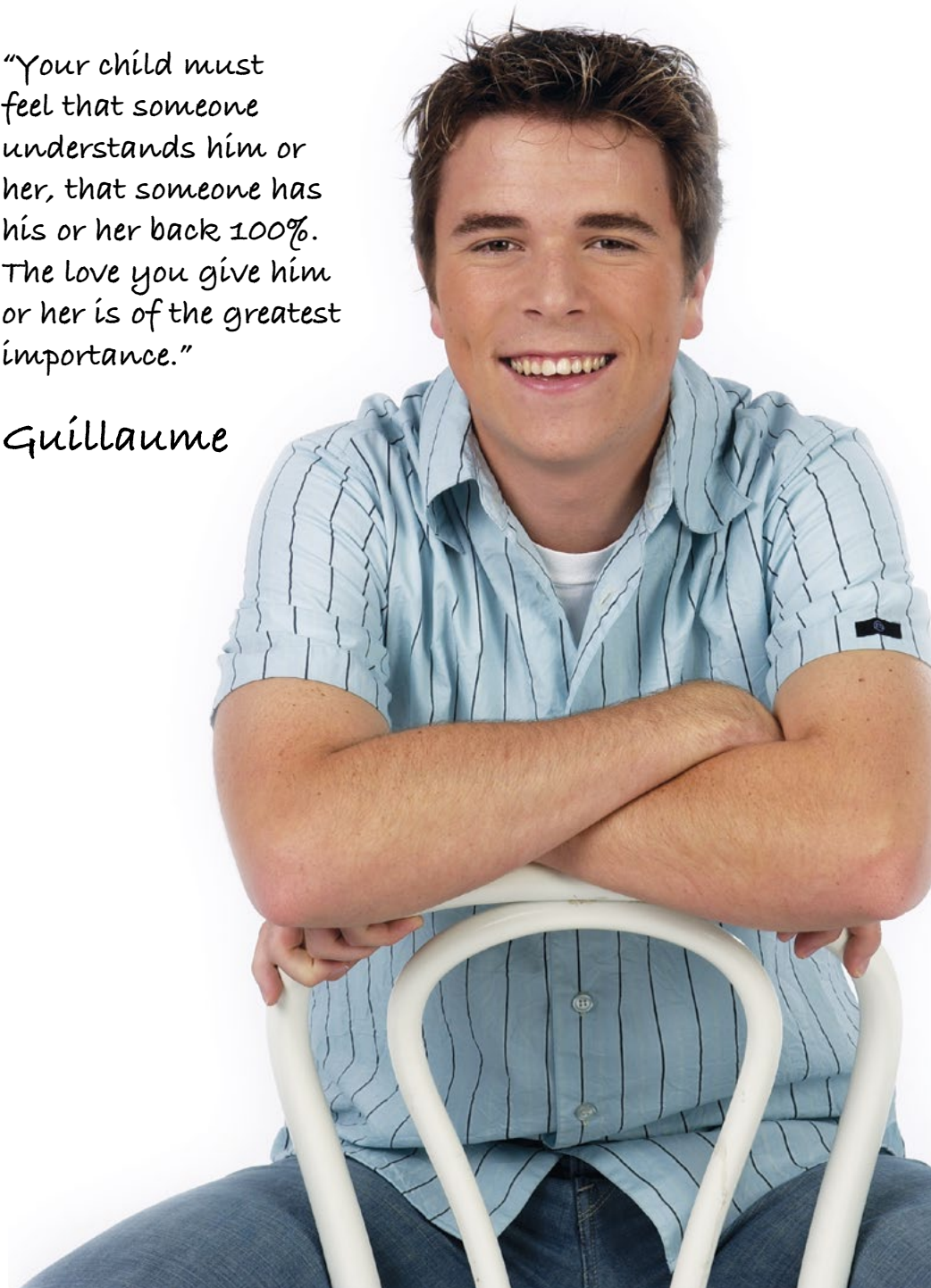
Guillaume admits that his illness changed him. He was already exceptionally mature at 11. After all, “an illness teaches us about life.” He remains as positive today as he was at 11. His dentistry studies are going well and he’s finishing up his third year. Since he “always had a tendency to see the good side of things,” it seems obvious that his overflowing optimism will take him far.

Just like everyone else, Guillaume now wants to enjoy life. Just like everyone else, he wishes for a life both full and harmonious. “When I was a child, I wanted a castle,” he remembers. But today Guillaume understands he only needs to be surrounded by loved ones to be happy. Life’s simple things are now much more important in his eyes.

Hope is his greatest value and Guillaume has faith in life more than ever. “Nothing is ever really over, you must never give up.”

*“Your child must feel that someone understands him or her, that someone has his or her back 100%. The love you give him or her is of the greatest importance.”*

*Guillaume*

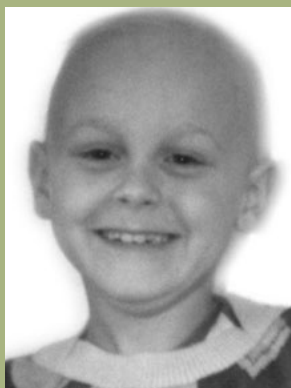




# Osteosarcoma

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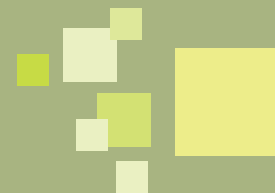
# Marc

17 years old

Montreal

Bone tumor (osteosarcoma)

Diagnosed at seven years old. Chemotherapy for 18 months. After only two treatments, his right leg was amputated at the lower end of the femur.



Like all kids who are seven, Marc was overflowing with energy. However, a pain in his right knee slowed him down. Noticing his knee was swelling and slowly losing some of its mobility, the Thivierge family sought out a doctor's advice. An X-ray led to the discovery of a tumor that, after a biopsy, was determined to be cancerous. Marc's carefree and happy childhood had taken a turn for the worse.

But Marc wasn't one to feel sorry for himself. When he's told that his right leg will have to be amputated, he says, "Really? Then I'll get a plastic one." And to think that his parents had gone through so much trouble to prepare him psychologically for a possible surgery. The news was much harder on his mother. "We immediately thought that he might die," she says. "When you don't understand what's going on, your first fear is that you'll lose him." With time, this fear yielded to an unending quest to learn more about the illness. Some even wondered where his parents found the strength to accept that their only son would soon be losing a leg. His mother says that the answer is very simple. "It's unconditional love. Where I found the strength? It was always there. I always had it. For our children, I believe that we all have it. It's there, in all of us."

Never losing his sense of humor or his joy of living, Marc meets his illness head-on, without any nostalgia. He even took great pleasure in making his surgery sound much worse than it actually was. The boy was, for many, an inexhaustible source of energy. There was even a waiting list for his roommates. "I tried to put everybody in a good mood," he remembers. As soon as Marc was in his room, his friends would join him. And his illness? Who cares! He would simply hand the video-game controller to his friend if he was about to vomit... He was really, without a shadow of a doubt, a ray of sunshine for all. Ten years later, Marc is still aware of the positive influence he had on other children. "Do I think I helped others get over their illness? Clearly!" he says self-assuredly.

The experience was much more painful for his parents, even though they decided to hide their sadness. When their sorrow became too great, they would share it with other loved ones. They learned to control their emotions better, to coexist more peacefully with their grief. Also, since "an illness takes you to a different world," their vision of the world has changed dramatically. Mrs. Thivierge says the experience has helped her better understand what's really important. "You become stronger, more real," she says.





*"Help your kids think about something else. While they're doing that, you won't be asking yourself as many questions."*

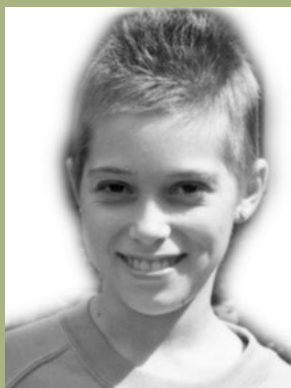
*Marc*

One thing's for certain: Marc hasn't lost one ounce of his energy. Diving, swimming, skateboarding, cycling – there's nothing that stops him. From ninja to private detective, Marc has imagined all kinds of careers. He now lives day to day, his philosophy being "tomorrow is tomorrow."

The metastases are still there and they continue to haunt the family. Some advice to get through it? "You have to keep busy, remain active, stay awake. You have to take your mind off things," he suggests. He fully understands that his joy of living and his motivation saved his life.

As for the parents of sick children, nothing beats a good briefing. "You have to be involved, to ask questions, seek out new information. Everything becomes less scary when you know what's going on. The same goes for everything," Marc's mother says.





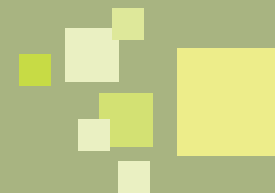
# Marie-Ève

27 years old

Lanaudière

Osteosarcoma on her right arm

Diagnosed at 11 years old. Six months of chemotherapy. Two surgeries. Five years of physical therapy.



Marie-Ève first felt a pain in her right arm while swimming. The pain didn't go away with the use of a topical analgesic. Her mother took her to the clinic, where an X-ray detected an anomaly in Marie-Ève's arm. The results were quite worrisome, since they showed her bone to be full of small holes. The doctors tell her that she has a tumor, either benign or malignant. "At 11, I didn't know that a malignant tumor meant cancer. It's when they used the word "cancer" that I realized just how sick I was," she remembers.

The first question she asked was: "Will I lose my hair?" It's only today that Marie-Ève realizes children don't understand how ill they are. She eventually got used to the idea, and like many others, she always believed she would pull through. The doctors never imagined how stubborn this preteen could be.

"When they told me that my chances of recovery were slim or when they explained what an amputation was, I told them, "No, no, you don't get it! I'm going to keep my arm!" " Imagine her reaction when they began teaching her how to write left-handed. She wouldn't hear about it. Her pride, her strength of character, her stubbornness were all lining up to help her recover.

But the pain was there. "I felt pain like I'd never felt pain before," she says. Marie-Ève has many memories of her time in the hospital. Obviously, she remembers going through some terrible moments, but also that she'd stop at nothing to get better. She also recalls that her parents' presence tempered the aggressiveness that had taken hold of her. She knows that she was at times insufferable, but their support meant the world to her. Her sister, her best friend and confidant, also remained at her side and played a big role in her recovery.

Even today Marie-Ève knows how strong-willed she is. But she says the illness didn't change her. "Your personality is there. When you go through something difficult, some traits of your character rise to the surface." The illness helped Marie-Ève discover her strengths: "During my illness, it was like I had made a decision to charge through it, and once I'd made up my mind, I poured all of my energy into it."

Leucan allowed her parents to become better informed. Marie-Ève, however, was too ill to take part in the activities that were offered. Once her treatment was over, she needed a break. She needed to get away from sick people. "We all need some time to come to terms with what's happening. The wound is physical, but it's also psychological. I had to take a step back to allow that wound to heal," she explains. Today, she's ready to talk about



*"Have faith in your child. He or she is much stronger than you think."*

*Marie-Ève*

what she went through: "I understand how alone kids can feel. Your family is there, but you always feel a little bit lonely."

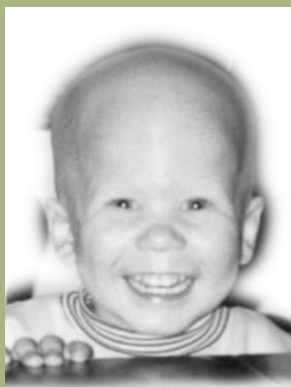
She says everyone should set goals for themselves and then stick to them: "Don't spend too much time thinking about what might happen. You'll take care of it when the time comes."





# Germ cell tumor





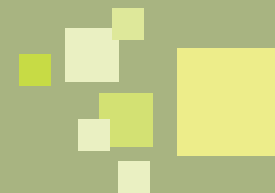
# Matthieu

15 years old

Outaouais

Germ cell tumor

Diagnosed at two years old. Chemotherapy (three different treatments) every three weeks, for six months.



58

Still in his crib, little Matthieu was faced with one of life's worst events: cancer. More precisely, he was suffering from a very rare type of cancer called Yolk Salk Tumor. Metastases are found in his lungs. This cancer, with the accompanying metastases, is seen less than 10 times a year around the world and its rate of recovery stands at less than 50%. Since he was only a baby at the time, Matthieu has essentially no memories from that difficult period. The shock was obviously much greater for his parents, Gisèle and Daniel, who were just starting their family.

Like all good families struck by tragedy, the Paquin family armed itself with a ton of courage. "We rolled up our sleeves, swallowed our fears and fed our hopes. We helped him with all our energy and all our love," Matthieu's parents say. They poured everything they had into this fight for their son's life.

Today, Matthieu rarely thinks about his illness. In fact, pictures as well as a diary kept by his mother are his only memories from that time. The diary is very precious to him. Written before, during and after his illness, it helps Matthieu better understand what his family was going through at the time: "It's very touching," he says.

Friendship and family are two values that he holds very dear. Even though he'd rather be alone sometimes, he knows that his friends, his brothers and his sister are always there for him, ready to play and laugh with him. And since he's the oldest of five kids, he's slowly developing his protective instinct. Matthieu loves doling out advice, but what he cherishes the most is his family's support.

A fan of action video games, basketball and cycling, Matthieu remains quite active. Surrounded by his schoolmates, and mostly by his best friend, his days are filled to the brim, like only teenagers know how to fill them. There's no time to rest!

A wide smile on his lips, Matthieu knows how to seduce. Of a very quiet nature, he's very attentive to others' needs. Known as a reserved but friendly kid, he says shyly, "People tell me I'm nice." His charm is hard to resist.





Even though he's so young, Matthieu has understood something very important for a long time: "Life is important, but also very fragile." This doesn't keep him from dreaming. Travelling around the world, piloting an airplane, becoming a video-game tester, there's nothing that can stop him. He's only in Grade 7, but he can already see far into the future.

*"You have to surround yourself with people who've gone through the same thing."*

*To Matthieu, it seems clear that such relationships can help better understand the illness.*

*Matthieu*





# Thyroid cancer

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# Hélène

29 years old

Estrie

Thyroid cancer with pulmonary metastases

Diagnosed at eight years old. Radiotherapy until age 13, between once and four times a year.

Hélène, who was a young athlete, suffered frequent earaches that kept her from participating in the sports she loved. She saw a doctor and a lung X-ray found metastases. She had thyroid cancer, a type of cancer that's more frequent in the elderly. Hélène always knew she was special, but she never thought she was that special. A case like Hélène's usually only comes around once every ten years – and that's around the world. Her chances of recovery were so slim they were almost non-existent.

She immediately became her doctors' "guinea pig" in a manner of speaking. After several meetings, the medical teams decided that radiotherapy was Hélène's best chance. This meant she would spend a lot of time by herself in an isolated room: for four to six days, four times a year. "The doctors would bring me my drug in a metal box. They wore huge masks and huge suits to protect themselves... but me, I had to swallow that drug! They nicknamed me "the little bomb," " she remembers.

But her cancer was painless, which is probably why Hélène never fully grasped that she was even ill. "I was only sick when I went to the hospital," she says. Despite strict safety measures both at home and at school, Hélène never felt excluded by her friends. She was even somewhat popular. Aside from sports, she could do whatever the other kids were doing. The doctors quickly realized how determined their little patient was. Despite all their warnings, she won a "sports excellence" medal at age 10.

She admits her illness was hard on her. As soon as she swallowed that "famous pill," she'd start crying. There was no physical pain, but she dreaded the six long days spent alone. Her parents knew that they might lose her at any moment. They eventually defied the doctors and entered their daughter's room. "That was a great way of showing me their love," Hélène says.

"It's hard for me to say how my parents lived through that. I sensed that my mother was very tense and my father had to work a lot to provide for us," she says. Her family turned to religion, where it found peace.

Her recovery was an enormous relief for her parents. It was as though "that rope around their necks for the past five years had been removed."



"Hard to say if my recovery was miraculous, but one thing's for certain... You must never give up hope!"

Hélène

Life goes on today, faster than ever. Hélène is married and the mother of two children. "They told me I'd never have kids. I proved them wrong. My doctor even visited me after I gave birth because he couldn't believe it."

Her illness has made her calmer and wiser. She has broadened her horizons. Her husband comes from a different culture and her new outlook on life has changed her.

Hélène has a full and successful life. Her story goes to show that it's sometimes a good idea not to stop at what others tell us.







# Wilms tumor

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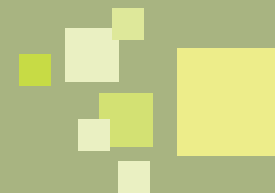




# Émilie

19 years old  
Saguenay  
Wilms Tumor

Diagnosed at five years old. Left kidney entirely removed. Radiotherapy and chemotherapy over the course of one year.



Always an outgoing child, Émilie's family noticed a gradual loss in her cheerfulness and she became much quieter. She was taken to a doctor after her family noticed she had lost her appetite. After several tests and a diagnosis, Émilie's parents were shocked. They landed on their feet and helped fight the illness alongside their daughter. For them, home was in the Saguenay region, which is very far from Montreal's Sainte-Justine Hospital. So, Émilie's mother stayed with her, while her father looked after their eldest daughter. Émilie developed a tight relationship with her mother, but she also felt very close to her father, despite their forced separation. Today, family remains very important to Émilie. "I'll always be able to count on [my family]. And [my family] will always be able to count on me."

Leucan gave Émilie the chance to talk about what she was going through, more easily than she could with her friends and family. "We were all ill. After talking about our symptoms and our illnesses, we'd talk about something else," she explains. The moral support she got (messages and the attention she received) and the financial support (transportation) Leucan provided were of a great help to her.

Losing her hair was one of the biggest challenges for Émilie. She tried to hide it by wearing a wig, but she gave up when that proved to be terribly uncomfortable. Like all courageous children, she finally came to terms with the idea. She also found it very difficult to be stuck indoors while the sun was shining outside. "In my mind, I had a big "boo-boo", so I wanted to be cured as quickly as possible so I could go play."

Her life returned to normal as soon as her treatments ended. She went back to school, hung out with her friends and resumed her favourite activities.

She's already left the illness far behind her. "I never really thought that my life had been changed by my illness." Now 19, she says the experience has given her some maturity, without «transforming» her completely. She's now studying nursing, wants to work in health care and eventually hopes to teach.

It goes without saying that Émilie enjoys an advantage at work, due to her personal experience. During her internship she had to deal with families devastated by sorrow and pain. She is more at ease than others in discussing such things and she better understands where the parents and the child are coming from: "I know the



child will pull through it. As far as the parents are concerned, I ask a lot of questions to better understand them.” This tremendous empathy will certainly benefit not only Émilie, but also her future patients.

Even though she tries not to think about it too much, Émilie knows that some scars will never fade away. But her joie de vivre is stronger than ever and she smiles when she thinks about what is to come: “I have small [physical] deformities, but they’re trophies to my victory!”

*“There are no magical words that you can utter at those times. You must take the time to understand, the time to accept.”*

*Émilie*

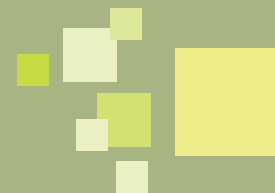




# Philippe

20 years old  
Lanaudière  
Wilms Tumor

Diagnosed at seven years old. Overall, 66 weeks of chemotherapy; double dose on week 5.



The memory is still painful, even though 13 years have elapsed since they found a small bump on their child's stomach. But Mrs. Beaupré still remembers, with great clarity and emotion, the image that the doctor drew for them to explain the surgery they were planning for Philippe, their eldest son. While the experience was very painful, she says, "I know that it's had a positive impact on our life."

For her, the diagnosis was quite a shock, since Philippe didn't display any symptoms. Philippe only has vague memories of that period because he was young at the time. And since he felt no pain, he had a hard time understanding what was happening to him. It was therefore with a child's naive confidence that he showed up for his treatments and fought through chemotherapy sessions that were sometimes quite aggressive. Like most children his age, Philippe simply did what his parents asked of him. "What's fantastic with them is that they don't look to the future. They have no anxiety. They show up for their treatments and then they're off to play again," Mrs. Beaupré explains. Philippe's parents, on the other hand, found that period much more difficult. With time, they learned to hide their emotions because they wanted their child to feel safe.

"Children are little champions. Sometimes, Philippe himself would say, 'Mom, I'll feel better tomorrow.' He was the one encouraging me," his mother says. That period of worry and discouragement obviously brought the family closer together. Even Philippe's two-year-old brother got involved in his recovery. Since they were frequently away from home, they decided to bring him to the hospital more often. "At first he was worried, so we explained everything," Mrs. Beaupré says. The family's foundations are now even stronger than before.

Philippe's parents have learned how fragile life is. They have learned to live day to day and to set aside their material worries. The human contact is now much more powerful. Leucan's network helped the family to meet "some wonderful people." Furthermore, meeting other families who had lived through the same thing really gave them hope. "We had a concrete point of reference." Leucan provided both the child and Philippe's parents with tremendous moral support.

Philippe attended Leucan's summer camps, where he loved the massages that were offered. "I know that at that age, I never would have thought about making a career of it. It's only last year that it became a passion for me," he says.



Philippe now lives his life at 100 kilometres per hour. His mother is convinced that “on some level, his illness probably left him with something.” Very people-oriented, he’s a young man who loves to help. It’s also very difficult for him to measure the gravity of his illness. “It’s in the past. I don’t really think about it anymore,” he assures. Today, Philippe has a second-degree black belt in taekwondo, a diploma in massage therapy and plans to study physiotherapy. He is looking toward the future. Eventually, he’d like to open his own orthotherapy clinic. But before then, he’s determined to volunteer as a massage therapist during Leucan’s summer camps, so that he can give back what he himself has received.

The members of his family, for their part, have gotten over their fear of discussing the illness. They are now counsellors at Leucan’s camps and they want to give hope to those who desperately need it. “We came to Leucan looking for something. Now it’s our turn to give back,” they say.

*“You have to  
remain positive.  
Your attitude will  
play a huge role  
in your recovery.”*

**Philippe**

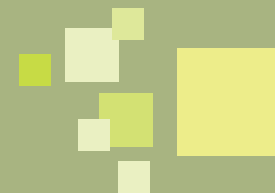




# Véronique

21 years old  
Mauricie  
Wilms Tumor

Diagnosed at four years old. Kidney surgery two days after receiving her diagnosis. Fifty-two weeks of chemotherapy and radiotherapy.



As unbelievable as it may seem, at only four years old, little Véronique seemed depressed. Tired, devoid of both interest and energy, the little girl's behaviour was quite strange for a child her age. One day, she fell off her bike and the appearance of a lump on her stomach worried her mother. After an extensive exam, the doctors come up with a completely unexpected diagnosis: kidney cancer.

Even though she was so young at the time, Véronique remembers her stay at the hospital. But she only recalls the good times. "I know I had a puncture, but that's very vague. I remember much better the nurses, the kids and the doctors, all the good times." Losing her hair was a big deal, but nothing catastrophic. She would laugh as she pulled out big clumps of hair, to her mother's complete despair. But as Véronique likes to say, kids are naive. "I never understood that my life was at stake."

Going back to school proved more difficult. At first, she wouldn't go out without her wig. She eventually had to give it up in the first grade when her schoolmates, without being mean, noticed that she was different. Returning to class therefore meant feeling isolated. "A child changes when he's thrown into the world of adults." Véronique got to know herself much better and at a much earlier age than other kids. She realizes now that this experience brought her something positive. More realistic, authentic and very empathetic, she knows that her illness forced her to take a different path. By constantly having to reflect about her situation, she discovered her strengths. She developed qualities that otherwise may not have emerged.

Her family was always there for her. Véronique enjoyed tremendous support thanks to her mother, who was always at her bedside, her father and her other loved ones.

She still thinks about those years today. Not because they were difficult, but because of the impact they had on her life. For a long time, she refused to believe that her decision to become a doctor flowed from her illness. At 21, she finally saw it that way. "I had incredible doctors. They were a bit like my role models." She's passionate about medicine, but she also wants to help others. "I was always like that. I love helping others," she says. Calm and supremely self-confident, Véronique will certainly become a successful doctor. Exceptionally empathetic, she'll do everything she can to be happy. "I don't have big dreams. I want to be happy. In fact, every choice I've made in my life brings me closer to that goal," she adds.





"The illness can't be taboo. Learn to discuss it with your child. You have to be involved in the illness, in the recovery."

Véronique

This future doctor says that in order to help a child get through his or her illness, parents have to put themselves in their shoes, use their language. Sentences like, "Wake up your little soldiers to fight off the bad virus" will always give the child the strength he or she needs. In other words, "you have to strengthen their joy of living."

After all, Véronique never doubted herself. She never thought that her life was in danger – since, for her, it was all a game.



# Acknowledgments and credits

Leucan wishes to thank all participants, their families, and the volunteers for their collaboration in this project. This book was originally published in french in 2004, and then reprinted in 2013.

## **Coordination**

Direction des programmes de Leucan (2004)  
Family Services, Research and Partnerships (2013 and 2019)

## **Interviews, writing and layout**

Préambule communication:  
Judith Fournier  
Anouk Beauvais  
Richard R. Villeneuve

## **Design conception and production**

Jacques Jobin (2004)  
Le Groupe Flexidée (2013 and 2019)

## **Make-up**

Marc Mayrand

## **Photography**

Guy Schiele

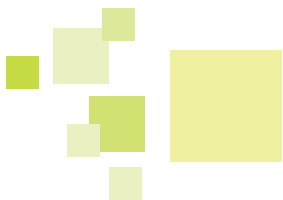
## **Copy editing**

Véronique Perron (2004)  
Patrick Cossette (2013 and 2019)  
Julie Veilleux (2019)

## **Translation**

Jean-Benoit Legault





During its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, Leucan asked 25 patients diagnosed with a pediatric cancer during their childhood or teenage years to share the path that led them to full recovery. When this document was first published in french in 2004, their treatments were over and their respective doctors considered these 25 messengers of hope to be completely cured. Since then, their message of hope has helped almost two thousand families. By reprinting these works, Leucan seeks to prolong the echo of these voices that bear those values that are at the very heart of its existence.

Through these twenty-five portraits, we see how each patient perceived their journey and how they made sense of this trial that left them transformed. Earnestness, mobilization of the family, belief in a better future, inner strength, Leucan's help... everything had been put in place to help them believe that they would one day be cured. Through joy and sorrow, their experiences, while seemingly diverse, all represent a triumphant celebration of life.

Now active in a multitude of fields, sometimes parents of their own children, not a single one of them claims to be a hero, but all are rightfully proud.

Leucan hopes that for you, these twenty-five testimonials can serve, on those dark days when everything seems hopeless, as a message of *hope...*

