

# Cooks make the Children's cozier

By Dan Delmar  
The Suburban

It would be easy for Sarah Cook and her mother Lorena to get as far away as possible from radiation therapy machines, operating tables, fluorescent lights and all the other symbols that marked the TMR family's most challenging year to date.

Instead, the Cooks have been giving back for the last seven years, making sure that children undergoing cancer treatments are in as much comfort as possible. The Sarah Cook Fund has raised \$3.6 million for the Cedars Cancer Institute and the Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation, and Lorena told *The Suburban* it's something the family had to do after receiving first-rate care from an attentive, compassionate staff.

"I wouldn't wish illness on anybody," she said, "but if the journey of your life is such that your child needs to be in a hospital, the Children's is unbelievable. I find it therapeutic to be there. By continuing to help the Children's be the best in oncology, in a way I believe it's helping to keep Sarah's illness away."

During a family vacation in California in 2000, Sarah, then eight years old, complained of a sore leg. American doctors initially thought it was a hairline fracture, but the diagnosis was a lot more troubling once the Cooks returned to Montreal. After undergoing more exhaustive tests, they were told it was Ewing sarcoma, a rare form of cancer where the malignant cells are found in bone or tissue.

"I remember bits and pieces," said Sarah, who has been in remission for the last seven years and is now about to graduate from Miss Edgar's and Miss Cramp's High School. "I remember the first time I went into the hospital for surgery. I was holding a stuffed animal they had cleaned to make it safe. I was terrified, nervous and didn't really know what was happening and why it was happening to me."

She went through chemotherapy and radiation

treatments successfully, then other surgeries to repair her foot and ankle. She still has trouble running, but is otherwise a normal, healthy teenager. The day of her last treatment, when Sarah was free to go home, lifting a gigantic weight off the family's shoulders, was September 11, 2001.

"The day most of the world was mourning, we were celebrating," Lorena recalled. "We were elated. It was a very interesting day."

"It was an amazing feeling to know I was done and I could go home," Sarah said, adding that the odd timing probably contributed to her becoming a young fundraising machine. "It made me appreciate life that much more."

The fund helps replace beds at the Children's, add bathrooms and TVs, and smaller touches too; Sarah and her father, Norman, would stay up nights discussing what improvements could be made, and they began with the lumpy pillows.

"Sarah's Floor," in the Hematology/Oncology department, recently welcomed a classmate of hers at ECS who, against the odds, was also diagnosed with cancer.

"I was terrified for her," Sarah said. "It gave me comfort that she was more comfortable because of what we've done."

"It's important that all young children learn the value of philanthropy," Lorena said. "It's important to teach them to give back because later on when they can, they will."

Lorena said her daughter had turned the page and tries not to be seen as "the girl with cancer," but rather the girl who helps others in need.

"It drove me crazy that people would be too nice to me because I was sick," Sarah said, trying to focus on future plans. "I'm so fortunate to still be here. I don't know what my career will be but I know that I will always be giving back."

*Donations to the Sarah Cook Fund can be made by calling (514) 843-1606 or visiting [www.cedars.ca](http://www.cedars.ca).* ■



Sarah (centre) and Lorena Cook, helping to raise money for cancer treatment with cyclist Lance Armstrong.