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Bronze girls

Thanks Mom, for being there for me

By **MARC SGRIGNOLI**
Special to the IFP

This Mother's Day is going to be extra special for one Georgetown family.

On Sunday, 21-year-old Zach Pearson will be making his pitching debut with the Guelph Royals of the Intercounty Baseball League, at Schmidt & Shaw Stadium in Barrie.

For any mom, it's a proud moment; for Candace Pearson, more so.

Zach is a cancer survivor.

On a chilly April afternoon, Candace and her curly-haired son Zach, relax in the newly decorated living room of their Georgetown home. Zach is tall with an athletic build, and his mom says baseball has always been at the heart of his dreams and aspirations.

"He loves baseball. It has always been what he wanted to do since he was three years old," says Candace.

But at the tender age of 13, Zach's future wasn't nearly as certain. The family's ordeal began in September 2005.

"I started feeling unusually tired all the time. I thought it was a normal part of growing up," says Zach, recalling that difficult time in his life.

A few days after going to the hospital for what they hoped would be a routine visit, Zach's mother and father, Mike Pearson, found themselves sitting in the sterile environment of a small McMaster Hospital family room.

"The small room made me nervous, they only sit you there when they have bad news," says Candace.

Then the attending oncologist, accompanied by a volunteer from the Make-A-Wish Foundation broke the news — Zach had acute lymphocytic leukemia, a type of bone marrow cancer that destroys white and red blood cells.

They were told he would be starting chemotherapy that evening.



Zach Pearson gives his mom, Candace a hug for all her support to help survive cancer and realize his dream to be a baseball player.
Photo by Eamonn Maher

"They both left the room, the door swung open, and Zach walked in on Mike and I in a very emotional state. He knew right away," Candace remembers.

"Nobody said a word to me, they didn't have to, there was a silent understanding," Zach says of that moment.

On Oct. 8 — Thanksgiving — Zach's condition went from bad to worse.

He had contracted an infection around the tube used to deliver a powerful cocktail of anti-cancer drugs and painkillers, landing him in intensive care.

Zach went into septic shock, the medical term used to describe a severe infection of the blood, and for which the mortality rate can be as high as 70 per cent.

He was immediately placed in a medically-induced coma to help stave off the infection.

"It all happened so fast. I had a conversation with Zach, told him I loved him, and stepped out of the room for two minutes to get a coffee. When I came back he was unconscious, hooked up to life support, and fighting for his life," says Zach's mom.

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