

Mac's return a miracle on Stuart St.

Bobby Darin's 1960s classic Mack The Knife never sounded as good as it did Sunday morning on Stuart Street, Stouffville.

That was the tune played as 50-some odd neighbors came out to welcome 10-year-old Mac O'Farrell, who rode home with his family in a limousine after a three-month ordeal which seemed certain to take his life at one dark point. Mac's life and the lives of his family, were turned upside down for the first time five years ago when the youngster was diagnosed with leukemia.

He underwent three gruelling years of chemotherapy, then after a six-month remission period suffered a relapse. Doctors prescribed another three years of chemo.

He had just completed the first two years this March when he developed a fever. Within a week, the fever had worsened. Mac's breathing had become labored, he became jaundiced and his organs began to fail.

He was transferred to the Hospital for Sick Children, where he was put on oxygen and drugs to assist his breathing. A week later Mac had a seizure and doctors chose to induce a coma to help the situation. Mac's organs started to shut down and he was given a five-per-cent chance of survival.

After two-and-a-half weeks, he suddenly awakened. The doctors still don't know how. Over the next five-and-a-half weeks in the pediatric intensive care unit, Mac endured three seizures and a pair of cardiac arrests. He then began to come around, slowly at first, then gradually



From Where I Live

Bruce Stapley

picking up steam. Brain scans revealed that surprisingly, there had been no damage. Meanwhile, doctors don't know whether to attribute the three-month episode to the leukemia or to a weakening of the immune system brought on by chemotherapy.

But for Mac's family, the immediate crisis has been averted. His mother Cathy said the family has been awestruck by the unending support shown by friends and family.

For Cathy and her husband Rod, the 24-hour hospital vigils are a memory. Cathy told me she is taking delight in the simple things in life again, like doing laundry in mid-morning rather than at midnight after returning home drained from another 18-hour shift at the hospital.

As for what lies ahead for Mac, a Grade five student at Summitview Public School, Cathy said there is no way of knowing for sure. She has had to wrestle with the questions posed by all parents in her situation as to how a child could have to endure so much.

But for today at least, she is reveling in what she calls a miraculous recovery after what appeared to the end of the road for her courageous young son.

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