

My Son, Jay

Written by

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Jay was only 22 years old when he first learned that he had melanoma. By then he had lost his father, completed high school, been on a world tour, graduated from college and was forging a career. He'd already spent nine months back-packing around the globe; he'd been to London, Germany, Italy and Greece; he'd spent a couple of days in the West Bank, floated in the Dead Sea and seen the Pyramids in Egypt. He had slept on beaches in Thailand, rode a horse while rounding up cattle on a ranch in Australia for six weeks and came back to Canada to canoe and portage along the [Trent-Severn Waterway](#) from Peterborough to Sparrow Lake, north of Orillia. Jay had hitchhiked across Canada in three days one summer and then drove out to BC with Bill on another where he finally settled down to work at Whistler for a while. It was while he was home on a four-week vacation, that just five days before he was set to go back to BC he casually mentioned the need to see the doctor about this "thing" on his leg. Dr. Vanderwater, our family physician obligingly saw him right away and within 5 days his life was changed.

Jay flew back to BC the day he was diagnosed to quit his job, pack his belongings and make the drive back across the country. Rick flew out to join him three days later and accompany him back. Together they drove through blinding snowstorms in the mountains and on the prairies and returned to Ontario in three days in order to have the tumour removed a week later. That was it; he didn't want to talk about it, didn't want his friends to know and aside from having regular CAT scans and x-rays every four months, later once a year, employing a healthier diet and daily applications of suntan lotion, his life resumed as normal.

Unfortunately, as with many cancers, [melanoma](#) demands diligence and once it settles into a person, it seldom leaves for good. When I first heard the word melanoma coming from the doctor's mouth and it being related to Jay, I was horrified. Gone were the days when I could gather him in my arms and kiss the "Owwee" away and I instinctively knew this was going to be a different kind of challenge for him and for me. I spent weeks on the Internet looking for help and understanding and I learned many things, which I passed on to Jay. Melanoma is one of three skin cancers; the rarest but also the deadliest and it is the fastest growing cancer per population today. The causes of it are still being learned however exposure to the sun (intensified by the Ozone layer depletion) is the leader, followed by the diminished nutritional value of today's foods. Jay's colouring (blonde, blue-eyed and fair skinned) also plays a role in it. So ultimately, prevention is the key.

More tomorrow...

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