

Section B

CS group aids parents of cancer patients

By Carolyn Veiga
Reporter

More than 7,000 American children will develop cancer this year. For every child that suffers the pain of treatment and effects of the disease, a parent suffers too.

Donna Penson of College Station has organized a parent support group with the help of a social worker from St. Joseph Hospital. The support group provides a rap session format for parents to discuss their child's illness.

Penson's 15-year-old son, Johnny, was diagnosed as having a brain tumor two years ago.

"At the beginning, I had a rough time," she says. "One day, Johnny was quarterback for his eighth grade football team, and the next day, he had cancer."

"It's been hard. Sometimes Johnny says, 'Mommy, am I going to die?' But I've got to tell him that we're (his family) fighting for his life as much as he is. And we're going to do everything possible to keep him going."

Penson first became aware of a parent support group in Galveston, where Johnny was being treated in a hospital. She realized the importance of starting a program here.

"I'm interested in helping parents

build an awareness up and make them realize that other people are inflicted with the same problem," Penson says. "I want parents to realize that they're not alone. There are other people out there who have kids with cancer, and they know what each other's going through."

"I find that Johnny's doctors are very supportive of this organization, and Johnny's physician feels that talking to others about the illness is an ideal release mechanism for parents."

Johnny's physician, Dr. George McIlhane, is a family practitioner in College Station. He says the group benefits the parents, who often have a tendency to isolate themselves from the rest of society.

"The family members (of children with cancer) feel that they're the only ones with a problem," McIlhane says. "I think when you get to talk with other people, you don't only get support from them, but you also help them in a situation or crisis."

"That's always beneficial for the way we feel about ourselves. It gives us all a sense of accomplishment and well-being."

McIlhane says the most difficult thing a parent must deal with is accepting the fact that their child has a fatal disease.

"I hate to see a child in pain," he says. "I know doctors are supposed to be tough, but it bothers me."

McIlhane says parents are the most important priority to consider when he detects cancer in children. Depending on the age of the child, McIlhane says, the parents should be told first.

Gayla Cronauer's son Jave, 5, was diagnosed as having leukemia by McIlhane six months ago.

"When I first found out Jave (Cronauer's son) had cancer, I thought to myself, 'How long does my child have to live?'" Cronauer says. "But Dr. McIlhane has been so supportive and positive. He tells you what a long way leukemia has come nowadays, and there is a good chance for a cure."

The society reports that leukemia is the most common form of cancer in children.

"I'm just hoping Jave stays in remission," Cronauer says.

McIlhane says he highly recommends the program to his patient's parents but thinks they must make the final decision to attend.

Cronauer says, "It really doesn't bother me to open up with others because if there is some way I can help someone else understand, and somehow relate to what they're feeling, then I want to do it."

But Penson says some parents feel uncomfortable talking about their child.

McIlhane says, "It's the unknown which frightens us the most. When parents don't share their problems with others, they'll never reach that initial step of finally coming to terms with the situation."

"It's good having someone there that says, 'I've been through that, and this is what I did.'"

Cronauer says seeing her son go for treatments is the most painful experience she encounters.

"Jave hates going to the doctor," she says. "Though he's too young to really understand what cancer is, he knows what's going to happen to him when he goes for treatment."

"The spinal taps are very painful for him, and he screams uncontrollably. You can't do anything to calm him down. Even though he's screaming his head off, I know the treatment has to be done."

"I'm split right down the middle. Jave says to me, 'Mommy, please don't let them hurt me.'"

"But I know it's going to cure him. I just know it," Cronauer says in a trembling voice.

Cronauer says that meetings are composed of parents now, but anyone who wants to contribute to the group may attend. She says she expects that once more people begin attending the meetings, the parents will invite guest speakers such as doctors, psychologists and cancer researchers to speak.

Meetings are held every second Thursday at 7 p.m. at Peace Lutheran Church on 1100 FM Rd. 2818 in College Station. The next meeting is scheduled for April 24.



Photo by Anthony Casper

Gayla and Jave Cronauer.



Photo by Anthony Casper

Cancer victim Jave Cronauer at play.

'87 AGGIELAND

Staff applications available in Room 230 of Reed McDonald.

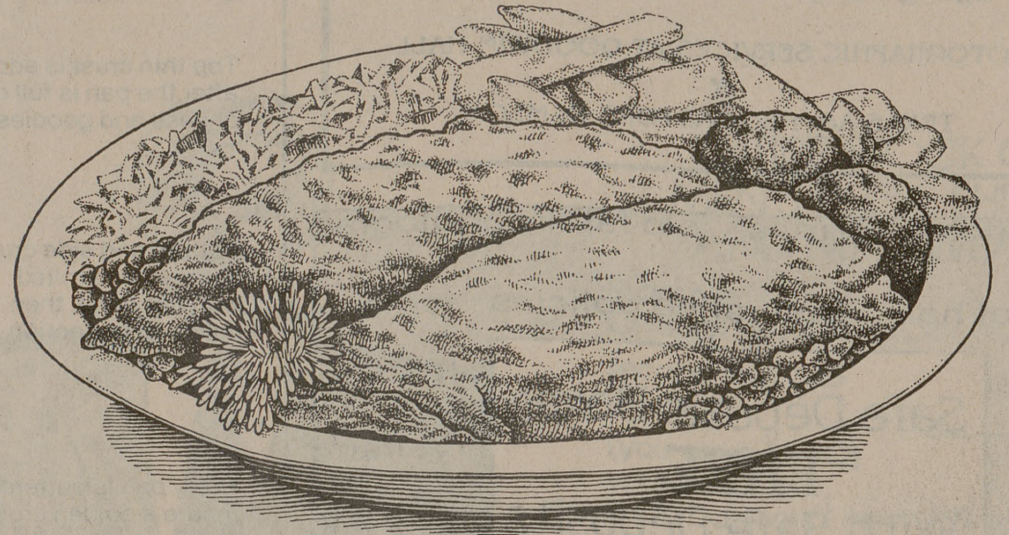
General Meeting for applicants

Monday, April 14
at 7 p.m. in Room 011
Reed McDonald.

Applications due April 15

Two Can Dine for \$4.99

Bring a friend to Long John Silver's where two can dine for one low price. Choose either two Fish & More® Dinners — two battered-fried fish fillets, golden fries, fresh cole slaw and 2 hushpuppies . . .



. . . or two 2-Piece Kitchen-Breaded® Fish Dinners — made with two fish fillets in our specially seasoned breading. Or have one of each. Our Two Can Dine Special is a delicious treat for two — at one low price.



LONG JOHN
SILVER'S

SEAFOOD SHOPPES

Sounds good to me!

Good at: 1808 Texas Ave., College Station
Now serving Miller Lite, 90¢ plus tax.

Offer valid for a limited time only. Special does not include drinks.