

MUNICIPAL UPDATE

The Family Behind May 3 "Be Like Zach Day"



Rule #8

Give back to others as much as you can. Help. Share. Volunteer.



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Town of Sudbury Municipal Update is a quarterly publication of the Sudbury Select Board.



Zach's Bridge

By Lisa Kouchakdjian



Sudbury Select Board members. Pictured left to right: *Dan Carty, Lisa Kouchakdjian, Janie Dretler (Chair), Radha Gargeya (Vice-Chair) and Charlie Russo (above - in prior year's photograph).*

ZACH'S BRIDGE

*Kindness and Support
When People Need It the Most*

By Lisa Kouchakdjian
Sudbury Select Board



*Jonathan and Jennifer Wall
with their late son, Zach.*

As a Select Board member, I often meet incredible people doing incredible things in our community. I recently had the opportunity to sit down with two such incredible people, Jennifer and Jonathan Wall. We talked about the wonderful work they are doing in honor of their late son, Zach Wall. In March, the Walls came before the Select Board with a Proclamation for the Board's consideration making May 3rd "Be Like Zach Day" in Sudbury. Not only did the Board agree that this May 3rd would be "Be Like Zach Day" in Sudbury, but every May 3rd moving forward will be "Be Like Zach Day" in Sudbury.

Zach suffered from a type of cancer known as osteosarcoma. Approximately 1,000 people are diagnosed annually with this type of rare bone cancer. It accounts for about 2-3% of childhood cancers. Upon receiving the diagnosis, Zach and his parents fought the disease as hard as they could. The horror of childhood cancer is an experience that no one should have to go through. Zach passed away in November of 2021 at the age of 16.

Prior to his diagnosis, Zach was like every other young person, working hard at school, trying to make friends, and navigating his teenage years. He was very fond of Super Cars, loved to ride horses, did taekwondo, loved animals, especially dogs, and video games.

As a “neuro-spicy kid” as Jenn called him, school was sometimes a challenge and making friends was a challenge too. Social/emotional issues made life hard for Zach. But as Jenn said, he was a fighter from the day he was born. His resiliency helped him to get back up every time he was knocked down. Jennifer and Jonathan said Zach was quite the negotiator as well. Upon learning of his diagnosis, he asked “Do I still have limits on screen time?” He also asked tough questions like “Is the cancer ever going to be out of my body?” No young person or parent should ever have to ask or answer these types of questions. Zach’s strength was his superpower and his resilience helped him cope with his cancer diagnosis.



After his passing, Jenn and Jon created a list of lessons learned from Zach and their cancer journey called "Zach's Rules for Life." These Rules are intended to help people improve their lives by turning pain and sadness into something positive and hopeful. Now more than ever, we need Zach's wisdom and insight. In a world that has become ever more materialistic and far too divisive, we need Zach's vision of how we should be, and how we should act towards one another. Every day should be "Be Like Zach Day."

Zach's courage and strength have inspired Jennifer and Jonathan to make the world a better place for families like theirs who face childhood cancer. During the late stages of their journey with Zach, Jenn and Jon found very limited peer support. They tried to find people who had similar experiences to theirs, but they could not find what they needed. They weren't giving up hope, just trying to better understand the path ahead.

They longed to speak with other parents who had walked in their shoes. They had questions like: How do you make sense of losing your child? How do you think about palliative care and hospice? How do you think about a funeral?

Jenn and Jon could not find the peer support they needed. For this reason, after Zach's passing, they started Zach's Bridge, a peer support program for families facing late-stage pediatric cancer through bereavement. Peer mentors with lived experience are trained in providing peer support. Support seekers interact with peer mentors at their own pace and in whatever manner they need. Although Zach's Bridge cannot take away the pain of losing a child, peer mentors provide an important level of comfort and empathy to make things a little easier.

Zach's Bridge has support seekers and mentors in 27 states. Zach's Bridge is also starting to have an impact internationally by offering support to native Spanish speakers and is providing support in Japan, France, and Canada. Jennifer and Jonathan hope to grow the compassionate care its peer mentorship program provides to support as many families as possible.

Jennifer and Jonathan also spread the message of Zach's Rules for Life, and Zach's Bridge and their work through public engagement and public speaking events. To learn more about Zach's Bridge and the services it provides, visit www.ZachsBridge.org



13. If you get angry, and you will from time to time, put it behind you and get back to life. It should take about 20 minutes or so. Apologize if needed.
12. When someone has cancer...Run toward them. Check on them. Don't stop. Stay with them.
11. Smile, a lot. Tell jokes, good ones, bad ones, stupid ones. Laugh a lot.
10. Love and surround yourself with animals.
9. Give back to others as much as you can. Share. Volunteer.
8. Say please.
7. Sing if you want to sing.
6. Stay busy doing lots of things. Find your passions and go deep. Learn everything you can about them and then learn more.
5. Be like Zach and keep moving forward.
4. Be compassionate & have empathy.
3. Move with urgency.
2. Grief gives you choices. Don't let grief suffocate you. You can still be sad, but turn that grief into action.
1. Tell those you love, that you love them. Hug them.

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