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One Child's Dream: "Driving for Donors"

by: **Stephanie Womble, Director of Government Relations & Special Events**

Patrick "Pat" Pedraja, the son of Miami-Dade Police Department Narcotics Detective William Pedraja and Claudine Andrews, is a boy with big dreams and the ambition to make those dreams come true. But his dreams are different than most 11-year-old's. His dream is to save lives and he is asking for some help.

Before he was diagnosed in 2006 with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, a cancer of the white blood cells, Pat was the fastest runner in his fourth grade class and he loved to play hockey. After a year of painful suffering, bone breaks, wheel chair confinement, numerous doctor visits, ER trips and specialist appointments in other cities, Pat was diagnosed with Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis. Still, his family suspected something else was wrong. Then, Pat developed new symptoms including fever, and backaches and the test results didn't make sense. Pat



became so sick he was admitted to Joe DiMaggio's Children's Hospital. After reviewing the results, the doctor broke the news - it was leukemia, a disease that is the number one killer for children ages 2-14.

"How do you tell a child that he has cancer?" said William Pedraja. "The only thing Pat knew about cancer was that he'd lost both his grandparents to cancer." Law enforcement officers face many scary situations. It's part of the job. But for Det. Pedraja, the scariest thing he'd ever have to do was look into his son's eyes as the doctor told Pat the diagnosis.

Pat digested the information and the next day turned to his father and said,

"I'm glad this happened to me. I'm glad I got leukemia. Having leukemia is going to teach me something, I don't know what it is yet, but I'm going to learn something from this, a lesson that I will need to know in my life, and this will make me stronger."

Pat underwent rigorous chemotherapy treatments and within

two months, he not only could walk but play hockey. "I think God gave me this because another little boy would not be strong enough as me to fight it," said Pat.

While in the hospital, Pat watched a show that changed his life. "20/20" aired a program about entrepreneur Farrah Gray, whose sister, Greek Gray, had leukemia and couldn't find a donor because of a shortage of minority donors on the National Registry. Several weeks later, Greek Gray had passed away. Patrick, who is half Hispanic and half Irish, took Greek Gray's death hard and worried that one day he might need a donor and there would be no match for him. Pat felt that he needed to do something to help raise awareness. He first thought about holding a bone marrow drive, but that wasn't big enough. "He said, 'Let's do a marrow drive,'" says Pat's mom,

But his new bald look became his inspiration. If he could get companies to advertise on his head, then he could use the money for a good cause - to go around the country and raise awareness. Suddenly TV and radio stations were calling for interviews. They wanted to know: who was this 11 year-old with the great advertising idea? Unfortunately, the eBay ad did not sell and Pat's spirits sank. Why, he asked, would someone pay \$10,000 for a ride on a float at a parade in Miami, but no one wanted to pay \$5,000 to advertise and actually help him save lives? He asked himself, 'What was wrong with these people?'

Pat reposted the auction and a company in San Diego, CA called All Road Communications, which specializes in satellite phone sales and service, bought the head ad for \$5,100. "I'm amazed that with everything he is going through, he's wanted to help others who aren't educated about marrow donation. He's a really special kid and we are so proud of him," said William Pedraja.

Now, Pat's determination to raise money and awareness has him headed to New York to tape a segment for Access Hollywood's 'Access to a Dream,' and, on April 7th, he will throw out the first pitch at the Marlin's Game as his photo and awareness information appear on the Jumbotron. Pat is even writing a children's book entitled, "Where is your hair?" with the hope that kids will better understand what it's like to have cancer and feel different than 'healthy' kids.

Pat's quest to increase awareness is off to a good start, but he knows it's going to be a challenge. That's why he still needs your help.

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Claudine Andrews. "But him being Pat, he said, 'No, let's do a national marrow drive.' He pulled out a map and mapped out 25 cities, which has now turned into a 31-city national tour called "Driving for Donors." Now that Pat had the idea, he needed to make it happen. Pat's first grand fundraising scheme came when he started to lose his hair from the chemotherapy. "It was a big thing," said Pat, "I loved my hair."

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