

CITY LIVING

- Our City
- Across the City
- Pets-in-Waiting

Columns

- Cooking for Seasons
- Thought For Food
- People Worth Knowing
- It Strikes Me Funny
- Pet Behaviour
- What's On At Western

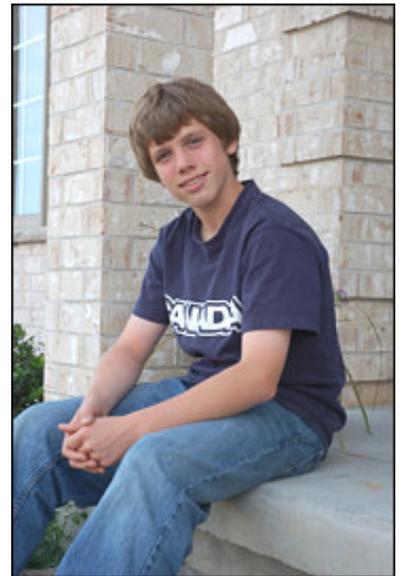


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Brandon preps for a million dollar climb

By MARDY BACIGALUPO, The Londoner

Age 13, Brandon Schupp of London is getting ready for a 10-day ascent of Good Hope Mountain in B.C. He hopes to raise \$1 million in support of the Childhood Cancer Foundation.



MARDY BACIGALUPO PHOTO

On June 28, when most kids will be celebrating the last day of school, Brandon Schupp of London will be on his way to Mount Baker in Washington State.

When he gets there, the 13-year-old will begin six days of intense training in preparation for a 10-day ascent of Good Hope Mountain, in British Columbia.

While some may think he's climbing for pure adrenalin, he's actually doing it for 10,000 Canadian children. All of them are living with cancer. His 10,000-foot ascent will begin on July 24. He hopes to raise \$1 million in support of the Childhood Cancer Foundation – \$100 for every foot climbed.

"We need help from every Canadian to raise the \$1 million," Brandon explains. "Every dollar makes a difference to these kids to help with cancer research."

And awareness is as important as the funds raised, explains Brandon's mother, Ann Freeman.

This is the first time the foundation has approached a young person and presented such a challenge. Climbing a mountain is no small feat. But Brandon comes highly recommended – both as a climber and a fundraiser.

"It's not common for them to ask kids (to do this kind of thing)," he says. "I said yes right away. I was very excited. They asked me if I'd climb my next mountain for them, and help all kids who are living with cancer (in Canada)."

He didn't even pause to ask his mom if it would be okay with her.

Last summer Brandon climbed Mount Baker as well but he did it for fun that time. Prior to going – and in order to get there – his parents said he had to raise some of the funds himself. So he started seeking sponsorships.

"I wanted Brandon to come back hating climbing and he didn't," Mrs. Freeman explains. "When he got down off the mountain he called me and I could hear the sense of accomplishment. It was like he went away a boy and came back a man."

Since he was a young child, Brandon says he would seek out things to climb. Last year, his Grade 7 teacher introduced him to a book called *Within Reach*, by Mark Pfetzer, a young mountain climber. Brandon says he was inspired. He told his parents he, too, wanted to be a climber.

Getting to the top – or anywhere near it – would have costs. He found out there were training courses offered by Mountain Madness, a Seattle-based climbing company. His mother said if he wanted to go, he'd have to raise some of the funds himself. He sold raffle tickets for prizes he'd recruited himself, and did several odd jobs – lawn mowing, snow shovelling, babysitting. He raised more than \$3,000. His parents kicked in some, and loaned him the rest.

Brandon's neighbour – a doctor from Austria who had done some climbing himself – had agreed to go with him. Brandon raised funds to pay his way as well. This put his mom's mind at ease, a little.

"I don't mind raising money to climb," he says. "If other kids had to raise money to play video games (or to do whatever it is they enjoy), they probably would."

His efforts stretched far and wide. He approached Nova Scotia-based CanJet Airlines for sponsorships. While they weren't able to provide anything, they wouldn't forget about Brandon.

After he returned from Mount Baker, he found out a young boy his mother had previously babysat had been diagnosed with cancer. Brandon says he remembers standing in the kitchen when his mom told him the news. His first reaction was to wonder what he could do to help the four year old.

"I used to hang out with Cole when he was here; he's a really cute little guy," he says. "He was diagnosed with neurlblastoma (cancer of the stomach), which is the worst cancer for a kid to get and when he was diagnosed, they gave him a 35 per cent chance to live three years."

Brandon's brainstorming for Cole, who will be five in July, began with bake sales and dances at his school, Jack Chambers Elementary. When those didn't work out, he again got in touch with Cynthia Bragg of CanJet. This time he was seeking her fundraising advice. After all, the coordinator of sales and marketing is a useful mentor.

She suggested a garage sale and silent auction. She sent a \$100 gift certificate for the airline, a travel bag, jacket and toy – the first items for the auction.

But the garage sale came first. Many emails were sent out to neighbours, friends and family. Word of mouth travelled fast. Soon, the Freeman's would hold a garage sale of gigantic proportions. He raised \$20,000.

When the people at CanJet heard of his success, they contacted the Childhood Cancer Foundation and told them about Brandon. They came up with the idea for the Mountain of Hope campaign and asked the young Londoner for his help. Since then, he's been doing physical training with one of the guides from Mountain Madness - and on his own, to prepare for his upcoming climb.

David Stones is the president and CEO of the foundation. He says it's amazing how kids can inspire one another to want to help.

"We are all very proud of Brandon, he's a remarkable young man. There's tremendous power in kids

helping kids," Mr. Stones explains. "We learned Brandon had developed a passionate interest in childhood cancer because of Cole. We were so moved by his maturity, passion and compassion - he was only 12 years old at the time. We knew he was quite an extraordinary child."

While many others have approached the foundation with different ways they wanted to raise money, never has anyone climbed a mountain. And Mr. Stones says sometimes people who have ideas, don't actually have their act together the way Brandon did.

"From a little boy, he's had such a determination about him," Mrs. Freeman says. "When he was in Grade 1, they said he needed to learn to be more assertive. They said he was too sweet and shy. He has no problem with those now. I hope it's that determination that will keep him alive on the mountain."

So the nation-wide fundraiser – the foundation's largest single fundraising initiative – has been calling on Canadians for support. And the response has been good. Individuals and communities everywhere are doing their part to help the Mountain of Hope campaign.

It is the hope that those willing to donate to the cause, will do so one foot at a time. But as Mrs. Freeman says, it isn't necessary. Every penny or dollar helps.

"His dream is to raise \$1 million and that is a wonderful vision, but certainly a challenge," Mr. Stones says. "Whether we hit \$1 million, \$100,000 or \$200,000, we know that Brandon is a hero and we want to work with him again. Mountain of Hope is not going to be a one-off. We are currently at about \$50,000-\$60,000 and that's through various events across the country."

IF YOU WANT TO HELP

- There are several ways you can get involved in Brandon Schupp's campaign. Check out the Mountain of Hope websites www.brandonsdream.com, www.childhoodcancer.ca or www.caringbridge.org/visit/colepetrie.