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shared his umbrella with me in a downpour

—Lisa, Oxford

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Roaring For a Cure: One Dad's Mission To Save His Son

BY KC BAKER | FRIDAY, AUGUST 20, 2010 5:30 AM ET

Come one come all to the second annual "Roar for a Cure" Carnival in East Hampton, N.Y., on August 21, to benefit the Max Cure Foundation, which David and Annemarie Plotkin started to help find a cure for rare cancers like the one that threatened their seven-year-old son Max's life.

Four years ago, David and Annemarie Plotkin's life revolved around taking their young sons to the playground, on play dates and to the beach, where they spent hours digging in the sand and scurrying from the waves as they crashed to shore.

All that changed on May 2, 2007 the day before their son Max's fourth birthday, when they learned that he had cancer. And not just any cancer. Max was diagnosed with a rare B-cell lymphoma that even the doctors at the renowned [Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center](#) (MSK) in New York City had never seen before.

"It was as if someone stuck their hand down my throat, ripped my soul out of my body and smashed it to the ground," says Plotkin, 37, managing director of equity trading at an investment bank, who lives in Manhattan with his wife Annemarie, and their children, Max, now seven, Alexander, five, and Ella, one (above right).



They were hopeful — until they learned that the cancer had spread and was now considered Stage IV. They also learned that like other rare diseases, little research was being done on Max's type of cancer because funding was almost non-existent.

Plotkin, a former all-state athlete who laughs easily but admits he can also be "hard core" when necessary, vowed to use his considerable energies and network of friends to make a difference. A big difference. "The only way you can fight cancer is to face it," he says. "As difficult as it was to accept the fact that Max was fighting a potentially life-threatening disease, we decided to take a stand against it."

With a roar.

The day before Max started his chemo, David took Dr. Paul Meyers, MSK's vice chairman of the pediatrics, aside and said, "Please save my son, and I promise you that I will dedicate the rest of my life to raising the funds and awareness that you and your team need to cure cancer in children."



Meyers had told Plotkin that the cancer center wanted to underwrite a \$5 million, one-of-a-kind cell therapy lab dedicated to alternative treatments and innovative research. But they lacked the funding to do it.

"This lab will save children and allow them to live a healthy life," says Plotkin. "Chemotherapy is poison they use to kill the cancer. The side effects are brutal. This lab will use targeted cell therapy and lessen the use of the intense chemotherapy, resulting in fewer side effects."

With the help of his father, Richard, and Annemarie, Plotkin (at left, with Max) got to work. Three weeks after Max began his chemotherapy treatments, they founded [The Max Cure Fund](#) to raise money for pediatric cancer research at MSKCC and shortly after, [The Max Cure Foundation](#) to help doctors support families dealing with pediatric cancer.

"Like any dad, I wanted to do whatever I could to help save my child's life," he says. But Plotkin is no ordinary dad. Since 2007, the foundation has raised nearly \$1 million. They

grossed \$350,000 at their first annual Roar for a Cure carnival in East Hampton last August, which drew a crowd of more than a thousand. "We appreciate the support of everyone who came to the carnival as well as those who donated to it," he says. We couldn't have done it without them."

The carnival — and the foundation — embrace a lion theme "because Max always took his stuffed lion with him to the hospital because he said it made him brave," says Plotkin.

On Saturday August 21, they are holding their second-annual Roar for a Cure carnival at East Hampton Indoor Tennis in East Hampton, N.Y., which will feature inflatable slides, miniature golf, a rock wall, a country-style picnic, auctions and [Radio Disney](#).

Among the celebrities expected to attend are [Christie Brinkley](#) (below right) and *Mad Men's* Bryan Batt. *Camp Rock* star Anna Maria Perez de Tagle and Stephen Jerzak, (whose single, "She Said," features *Gossip Girl* star Leighton Meester) will perform. Former New York Knicks star [John Starks](#) and other pro-athletes will be on hand for autographs and photos.

Like last year, a portion of the proceeds from the event will benefit [Katy's Courage Fund](#), which is helping 11-year-old Katy Stewart (at right) from Sag Harbor, N.Y., as she battles a rare form of liver cancer. "We want to do whatever we can to help her," says Plotkin. "That's the whole purpose of the foundation."

The event will also help fund [Dr. Oren Becher's Pediatric Brain Tumor Research Fund](#) in memory of Lily Taubin, who lost her battle at the age of five from a lethal brain tumor in 2009.

"We could never have gotten to this point without the help of some very special people," says Plotkin. "They know who they are, and I am forever grateful. "



The Journey

Raising money to help find a cure for pediatric cancers isn't the only thing Plotkin is doing to help kids and their families.

To help him cope with his son's cancer and to chronicle their arduous journey together, Plotkin began writing country songs about a father and son who give their all to overcome obstacles they face.

Plotkin says he was amazed at how well Max responded to the songs and their touching lyrics. "The doctors said Max's energy level was different than the other kids and wanted to know what we were doing differently," says Plotkin. "I said to Max, 'You are so brave. How do you do it?' He said, 'Daddy, I sing your songs to myself during the tough days.' So I kept writing."

Plotkin says he is no musician and has never played an instrument in his life. "These are just words from my heart," he says. "God gave me this gift at a time when I needed it and Max needed it."



Plotkin teamed up with Tom Nieman, an aspiring songwriter/musician who put his words to music and traveled to [Nashville](#) with him to try to get their record made. "We were an unlikely pair," says Plotkin. "Tom is gray-haired with a 70s-style, rock'n'roll mustache. He lives in a cabin-like house in [New Jersey](#), and drives a pick-up truck. I live in Manhattan, trade stocks and vacation in the Hamptons. But there we were, him in his cowboy hat and Wrangler jeans and me in black loafers and a pink polo shirt, knocking on doors in Nashville."

Award-winning producer Ian Eskelin, agreed to produce [The Journey](#), which is available on iTunes.com, with a portion of the proceeds going to the foundation. "I wanted to make the album because I thought there will be a day when I'm gone and Max won't remember much about our journey together. I wanted him to see just how special he was to me, and to know that I was with him all the way. If the songs can help others through their journey, all the better."

Plotkin faced yet another hurdle in 2008 when he suffered a heart attack — at 36. "The paramedics said they thought I was having a panic attack," he says. "Panic attack? I was a block away from the World Trade Center on 9/11 when the towers came down, and have dealt with my son's cancer for more than a year now. I said, 'I'm no Tony Soprano. Take me to the hospital, now.'"

Doctors told him that stress from dealing with Max's cancer contributed to the heart attack. Even that scare didn't slow him down. "Six weeks later, I ran the New York City Marathon again to show Max I could do it."

