

David Plotkin '94 »

## INSPIRING A CURE

DAVID PLOTKIN DISCOVERED HIS LIFE'S PURPOSE ON May 2, 2007—the day his son, Max, was diagnosed with cancer. Just one day before Max's fourth birthday, Plotkin learned his son had an extremely rare form of B-cell lymphoma, one that even experts at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) in New York City had never seen before. "Being told Max had cancer literally knocked the wind out of me," Plotkin says.

More than 12,500 children are diagnosed every year with cancer, which kills more children than any other disease. After learning that pediatric cancer research is extremely underfunded, Plotkin decided to take action. With the support of his wife, Annemarie, and his father, Richard, Plotkin created the Max Cure Foundation for Pediatric Cancer Causes to raise \$5 million to underwrite a unique cell therapy laboratory at MSKCC's pediatrics department to research alternative treatments and cures for childhood and young adult cancers. In about three years, the nonprofit foundation has raised more than \$1 million, with nearly \$750,000 going directly to MSKCC to fund the lab. The foundation has also contributed more than \$150,000 to other causes, including Katy's Courage Fund (which financially supports a young girl from Long Island with liver cancer) and Dr. Oren Becher's Pediatric Brain Tumor Research Fund at MSKCC. "Major improvements to treatment and quality of life for children during and after treatment are not possible without private funding," Plotkin says. "We are determined to make a difference." In fact, Plotkin recently participated in the Congressional Childhood Cancer Summit in Washington, D.C., with some of the world's leading experts to discuss research, treatments, the impact of childhood cancer on families, and current funding legislation.

Several months after Max's diagnosis, Plotkin found himself struggling with his work as a Wall Street hedge fund trader and decided to walk away from it. He devoted himself to seeing Max through an intense chemotherapy protocol and, while spending time with Max and Annemarie in the hospital, dreamed up several fund-raising projects for the foundation. One project, the Roar for a Cure Carnival, held for the second straight summer in East Hampton, New York, has raised more than \$750,000. Plotkin also released an album, *The Journey*, which features 17 songs he wrote to inspire Max and keep him brave during his treatments. "The songs kept Max smiling, so I kept writing," says Plotkin, who earned a bachelor's degree in speech communications from the College of Visual and Performing Arts. "To this day, I am amazed by the e-mails I have received from people all around the world, inspired by Max and his strength. They like the songs. The words are real and from the heart."

Plotkin continues to mine his creativity and has several projects under way for the foundation, which includes several SU alumni on its board of directors and executive commit-



tee. "When Max was first diagnosed, our family and my closest friends from Syracuse took a stand. Days later, Max Cure was born," Plotkin says. "They, along with others, including my brother Matthew, have all played an integral role in the foundation's success." With help from his friend and foundation board member Adam Gittlin '94, G'98, author of *The Deal*, Plotkin is working on a memoir about Max's experience, *In a Blink: One Boy's Harrowing Diagnosis. One Family's Inspirational Journey*. Hoping to accomplish for pediatric cancer what Livestrong and the pink ribbon have done for their respective cancer causes, the foundation has developed a brand called "Be Brave" that it plans to launch this year along with Be Brave programs in New York City devoted to teaching children to overcome obstacles through athletics, play, and music while maintaining a sense of bravery. In the works are a reality television show, a children's book that tells Max's courageous story through the life of a lion, a documentary, an animation, and a Broadway musical. In addition, Plotkin occasionally gives speeches, including one at his former high school, Newark Academy in Livingston, New Jersey, and at local temples and churches, hoping to inspire people.

Today, Plotkin is back on Wall Street, working as managing director for proprietary equity trading for an investment bank. He and Annemarie live in Manhattan with Max, now 7; Alexander, 4; and Ella, 1. After two years of intense chemotherapy, Max remains in remission, but Plotkin will always remember how quickly life changed for him and his family. "We live day by day, and appreciate every blink," he says. —*Kelsey Bennett*