

**When a mother's love is so powerful it can move mountains, amazing things happen for a seriously ill son and the team that might cure him.**

# The Power of Mother Love

BY ELEANOR FOA DIENSTAG



**I**t began on a July 2008 weekend when Lucas Goldbaum, now 13, complained of double vision to his mother, Kathleen O'Connell. The following day, Kathleen and Lucas received the devastating diagnosis of a brain stem tumor. Lucas said it best on his blog: "One day I didn't have a brain tumor [and] the next I discovered I did. Now I've got to battle this thing in my head and am very lucky to have an unbelievable family and friends fighting by my side."

He's also lucky to have Kathleen as his mother. She is a 20-year veteran of CBS News, now senior story editor of "48 Hours Mystery," and a get-it-done-now person. She's applied all of her skills as a producer in television news to organizing medical help for her son. As colleague Jennifer Simpson puts it, "She is a force of nature who moves mountains, walks through walls, and makes things happen."

At first, Lucas was very sick. "I don't think I left his side for three months," Kathleen recalls. But within hours of Lucas' diagnosis, Kathleen had recruited and organized friends and colleagues at CBS into support teams. Over the years, Kathleen has nurtured a huge network of people who, when they heard the news, launched a full-court press.

Some took care of Lucas' younger brother. Some did a year's worth of research in a week, assembling a huge global database on Lucas' illness, doctors to call, clinical trials to investigate, leaders in the field, and children with the same disease. No stone was left unturned.

Ultimately, it was decided that Lucas' best hope to beat his disease lay in pioneering research conducted at Cedars-Sinai, in the Maxine Dunitz Neurosurgical Institute. The research, led by John S. Yu, MD, director of Surgical Neuro-Oncology, and Keith L. Black, MD, chairman of the Department of Neurosurgery, focused on developing a unique vaccine to trigger a patient's

immune system to attack the tumor. Says Dr. Black, "We've treated close to 200 patients with the vaccine and what we've found is that if we are able to activate their immune system, their survival is double that of the patients whose immune system we cannot activate."

While physicians at Columbia and Duke universities were creating a unique chemo cocktail for Lucas to keep the tumor at bay, Kathleen decided to help accelerate the vaccine research at Cedars-Sinai by launching a grassroots fund-raising campaign. With the assistance provided by her army of friends, family, and CBS colleagues, she raised \$250,000 in about two and a half months. Dr. Yu calls the speed and reach of the campaign "amazing and highly unusual."

**T**he extraordinary battle waged by Lucas and his mom is awe-inspiring for many. "Kathleen is a wonderful, warm, caring mom who is a quiet storm," says Dr. Black. "Clearly, she is able to get some remarkable things done. Their story just reaffirms our belief in the human spirit and that nothing is impossible."

Lucas still has occasional headaches and double vision—and his balance and coordination at times are challenged—but the tumor has not grown. He is going to school four hours a day, making his seventh-grade honor roll, all the while maintaining an infectious sense of humor and the strength and courage of someone well beyond his years.

Above all, Lucas is surrounded by love: from friends, family, neighbors, and strangers (including the Tibetan Buddhist monks who pray for him and the 20,000 visitors to his CaringBridge Web site ([www.caringbridge.org](http://www.caringbridge.org))). Every night, Kathleen and her son hold hands, do guided imagery, and pray together. "I like the person he's become through this illness," says Kathleen. "He is my hero." ■