

# Media Release

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For Immediate Release

November 10, 2009

## Winnipeg Man Defies Odds to Beat Brain Tumour with Help of Support Group

(WINNIPEG, MB, November 10, 2009) In the fall of 1998, Brad Pennington was a 16-year-old basketball player, who was thrilled to have started his first season as a member of the Winnipeg Minor Basketball team. When he unexpectedly collapsed at home, he became faced with a grim diagnosis of a malignant brain tumour in a delicate position. Brad and his parents were given little hope for his future. Among the many tools the family pulled together to fight for Brad's life was a monthly Winnipeg support group meeting. The group offered Brad and his parents the support they needed to overcome the terrifying diagnosis.

Following finding the rare brain tumour on his pineal gland, the limited treatment options, a feeling of determination overcame Brad. "The first thing I said to the doctor was, 'get it out!'" Brad recalls. The Pennington's quickly learned however that because of the sensitive location of the tumour, surgery was very risky. Instead, Brad had a shunt put in to relieve the pressure on his brain. A few weeks later, he developed bleeding on his brain which led to a nine-hour emergency surgery where 95% of the tumour was successfully removed.

During this frightening time, Brad and his parents found hope and comfort through a monthly brain tumour support group offered by Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada. "Those first few months after diagnosis and during treatment are a complete blur, I don't remember much. What I do know is that I immediately felt comforted by meeting others going through similar experiences," attributes Brad. The following spring, Brad and his parents were devastated to learn the tumour had re-grown and spread down his spine. The doctors shared a grim prognosis with the Pennington's: that Brad would likely never reach the age of 18 and that if he did, he would be confined to a wheelchair and have limited mental capacity.

Terrifying statistics and low odds of recovery were just numbers on a page; the Penningtons were determined to overcome the prognosis. The next year and a half included 36 surgeries, steroids and gaining nearly 100 pounds while losing all memory. "I forgot everything there is to forget," Brad explains. Through all of this, Brad and his Mom continued to attend the Winnipeg Brain Tumour Support Group. Once he made it through this treatment phase, Brad began the long process of relearning to read, write, talk and walk.

Now, 11 years later, Brad continues to beat the odds, close to completing a degree in communications from the University of Winnipeg. He also hosts the Ultra Mega Sports Show on CKUW, the school's radio station. He is also thrilled to have just completed what he hopes to be his final MRI and he appears to be tumour-free. "My memories from when I was first diagnosed are very dark," Brad remembers, "but I could never have made it through without the help of the support group."

Because the brain is the centre of thought, intelligence, emotion and movement, brain tumours (both benign and malignant) can feel like an attack on an individual's very identity. As Brad learned, brain tumour support groups address all the associated features of this life-threatening illness, including problems with behavior, memory, personality, speech and of course, overall health.

Trishna Wedemire, Support Services Specialist at Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada explains: "Support groups offer a unique opportunity for people with a brain tumour and their loved ones to share experiences and gain emotional support in a safe and relaxed atmosphere."

For over 15 years, Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada has been providing a national network of support groups for those affected by this devastating disease. Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada offers 22 Support Groups across Canada and is affiliated with an additional eight groups. Individuals surviving with brain tumours and their families are welcome to attend any of these support groups free of charge, regardless of where they live.

Brad credits his parents with their dedication to finding ways to help him overcome the seemingly insurmountable odds that his medical diagnosis entailed. Now, as he is about to become the first person in his family to graduate university, Brad plans to continue attending the Winnipeg Support Group. He says, "I want to keep giving back to this group who helped me in some of my darkest days."

The next meeting of the Winnipeg Brain Tumour Support Group is Wednesday, November 18, 2009

### **Windsor Brain Tumour Support Group**

**When:** Third Wednesday of each month, 7:00 to 8:30 pm

**Where:** Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre, 820 Sherbrooke Street, Room GC303, Winnipeg, MB

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### **About Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada**

There are an estimated 55,000 people in this country living with a brain tumour and 10,000 new cases are diagnosed each year, many of those are children. Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada provides information through a free, comprehensive Patient Resource Handbook, live and web-based annual education events, and support through a Canada-wide, toll-free 1-800 line, website ([www.braintumour.ca](http://www.braintumour.ca)), and national support groups that meet monthly in 22 cities. Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada also supports brain tumour research through an annual grants-in-aid program and to date has donated \$2.5 million directly to research projects. Please visit Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada's website at [www.braintumour.ca](http://www.braintumour.ca).

For more information or to schedule an interview, please contact:

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