

Die Porsche

November 2013

Kassette



Kids Racing For Life

Newsletter of the Gold Coast Region - Porsche Club of America

Kids Racing For Life with PBOC at Sebring

by Chaplain Stephen Zoeller

You never know sometimes how your life will change, I was lying in a hospital for over two months in Gainesville Georgia with a broken back (7 crushed vertebrae) as a result of getting upside down and airborne in turn six at Road Atlanta in November 1979 and being told I may never walk again. I then spent the next six weeks in North Side Hospital in Atlanta Georgia where I was fitted with a metal frame that allowed me to sit up in a wheelchair.



Let's skip ahead 34 years to last night, when I was told that the Gold Coast region Porsche club wanted an article on the "Kids Racing For Life" program I offered to send tons of information that I had written over the last 15 years. Bobby Varela, told me that almost everyone knows the statistics of the program and what we do but one no one knows the background or what the program meant to me. I found this most intriguing as no one has ever asked me that before. The program has always been about the "Kids" first, last and always. Considering the audience of your publication I thought there were a few things that might be of interest to your readers.



Let's go back 29 years to where I went into Vanderbilt University Medical Research Center in Nashville Tennessee, for two weeks for neurological test and research, where I was told that the 80+%



use of my right leg and 40% use of my left leg and the 24 hour a day pain that I endured, I would have to live with for the rest of my life that nothing was going to help except drugs. Oh yes and by the way I still ran a limited schedule of SCCA club races in a formula car and some WK a races in an Enduro go kart. As they say when it's in your blood....

Now this move ahead to about 1992; where one night attempting to get ready to go out to dinner with friends, I laid across the foot of the bed in excruciating pain and called out to my fiancée (Stephanie) please come over here lay hands on me and pray for me and ask God to please "take my life" or take my pain away, I don't really care which one, I can't do this any longer. I fell asleep right there on the end of the bed and for the first time in 13 years I slept completely through the night. The next morning I got up and walked into the bathroom and grabbed the towel rack and the vanity in fear because I was no longer in pain and I was afraid to move that the pain would come back. Within the next 6 to 8 weeks I gradually regained full use of both legs and have remained pain-free for the past 21 years. I truly hope that none of my story bored you, for it is the foundation upon which the "Kids Racing For Life" program was founded...

A couple of years later after marrying the lady who prayed for me,



we started taking children with cancer to the Fort Myers Miracles Baseball Games. I was still going to a lot of races even though my track time was limited to being a “arrive and drive” coach for Mercedes-Benz and Porsche. It took two years to get the approvals necessary to take cancer children to the racetrack and set up a noon time track tour behind a pace car, but I got it done.

Halloween week 1999 saw the first, “Kids Racing For Life” event. We showed up with several SUVs; a card table, several ice chests, a roll of visqueen and for 48 family members and some really sick kids. One little boy had signed up at our sign-up party that we held in Fort Myers and was extremely excited about going. Shane was rushed to Miami Children’s Hospital for emergency surgery two



or three days before the event and had most of his liver removed. Friday night before the event the doctors called his parents and told them to come get him and take him to whatever this thing was that he wanted to go to, that in his advanced condition it would do him more harm to stay there than to go. His parents had a van camper drove to Miami from Southwest Florida and picked him up



about midnight, put him in the bed and drove him to Sebring where he was the first one with his little hand out pulling on my sleeve asking me where to go. He still had his medical armband on and



a tube in him because he was going straight back to the hospital after the event. His mother told me that the doctors said that he had between six weeks and six months to live. At that time he was nine years old. Not only did he enjoy himself, but many years later, I was privileged to be invited to his high school graduation and got to go to his house for cake and ice cream afterwards. He is still with us today.

Another little boy about the same age, Michael was at that time in remission from leukemia, and came with his mom and dad. His dad was a drag racer. He told his mom and dad that he liked this better because he got to be with his dad and the other kids at the races. Michael’s leukemia came back and he succumbs to the illness a few months after the race.



I am telling you some of these stories not as a downer, because they all are not. But to give you an insight as to what I do and the reasons that I do it.

Another year that marked a milestone in the “Kids Racing For Life” program we were privileged to have the McGruff organization from Sebring offer to do the Saturday night banquet that we were

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holding at the Quality Inn Convention Center. They had just lost a young firefighter to cancer that year and were anxious to help us after hearing about our event. They told us that they had a friend nicknamed “Rooter” that was a local DJ and could play music for the event. Both organizations are still with us to this day. That was the night that we had our first “Angel Dance” which occurred when Rooter played line dance music and five of the mothers that have lost their children that had been to previous KRFL events got up on the dance floor arm in arm and did the dance together. What made this so special besides the obvious, is that a great number of our volunteers that come back year after year after year are parents who have lost a child to cancer that had been to one of our events and have told us time after time that it was one of the best times; if not the best time that their child had ever had.

One of the things that we did not expect, which became a God thing, was that the parents who attended the event were able to sit at one of the tables and meet other parents from all over the Southeast USA and get to share stories about doctors, diagnosis, hospitals, treatments, how to survive going through the process of having a child with cancer, and even the mothers and fathers helping each other through the grief of losing a child. This is pure, peer to peer, information that no one who has not been there could ever know.

At that same event was a young teen, a young black boy that was suffering from leukemia and sickle cell. (As most of you know we have pediatric oncology nurses that volunteer their time to come and assist us also) at the banquet that night this young man’s temperature was going up and the nurse went to his mother and said that he was going critical and needed to go to the hospital. The young man looked to his mother, he looked at me, and he looked at the nurse, and said; “I am not leaving until the party is over, my brothers and sisters have suffered so much because of my illness that if I go to the hospital right now they will have to leave the party and I won’t do that.” About an hour later the banquet was over and he and his mom and the nurse went to the hospital from there he returned to the track on Sunday. Later was transported back to Southwest Florida where he passed away a few weeks later.

Over the 15 years we have held a total of 22 events, some of them such as the one at Homestead-Miami Speedway we had over 250 people in attendance, some of them we have only taken two families with only one other support staff family helping us. These have been just as memorable as any of the large events.

One of them was with a 19-year-old young man whose father called me the day before the event and said that Shands refused to do the brain surgery on Austin and could they come our KRFL event. He did, got to ride in over a half dozen cars because of the small event, one of which was a Dodge Viper. When they came off the track they drove to the far side of the



paddock area and stood next to the car talking. Just a driver and a young man. We started to walk over to them and his father put his hand on my shoulder, looked at me and said let’s give them a moment. Smart dad. They switch seats and Austin got to drive the viper over to the fuel farm to get fuel. He passed away six weeks later from a rapidly growing malignant brain tumor. His father took a picture of Austin standing next to the Dodge Viper and had the photo enlarged to about 3 foot wide sitting on a tripod next to the casket and told me and everyone else that it was the most fun his son had ever had.

There are so many more stories that I can share with you, like the bald headed eight-year-old little girl that looked like a stick figure who would sit in my wife’s lap and ask for prayer. Two years later came up and jumped in my wife’s lap and my wife did not recognize her. She had long flowing dark hair and pudgy little cheeks, she looked up into my wife’s face and said, thank you for praying for me for I am healed, and I am 100% cancer free thank you for everything.

Now I want to thank you for taking the time to allow an old man that has survived stage 4 tongue cancer also, to share his personal story with you. God bless RaceRev.

