

Media Release

For Immediate Release
February 23rd, 2009

Richmond Hill Woman Honours Her Sister's Brain Tumour Journey Through Supporting Others

(TORONTO, February 23rd, 2009) Lidia Kafieh has built her lifetime around the importance of supporting others and being available when needed by volunteering her time. After her sister was diagnosed with a brain tumour, Lidia began to form a connection and rally a system of support with a whole new community. Only a few years later, her ability to provide support to others had grown to include many other families in the Toronto area.

Lidia was the last born of seven in a large Italian family. Her sister, Lina, was the middle child and although they had both grown to adulthood, married with their own families and now lived in different parts of the city, they remained very close. In December of 2004, Lidia noticed signs of 'things happening' in her sister. The headaches, forgetfulness and 'gazing' (ocular seizures where Lina would stare off into space) combined with physical changes of weight gain and tired-looking bags under her eyes. At first, Lidia and Lina's husband Rick thought it might be due to stresses that were happening in her life and the family history of migraines, but the symptoms continued. These changes were very unusual for a woman like Lina who was so healthy and intelligent about diet and fitness – Lina was an author of four books, an active speaker, and in the middle of opening a holistic gym for women. Three times, Lina's husband Rick took her to the hospital and although Lina was vomiting and showing advanced symptoms, doctors were confused as to the cause. The protective younger sister continually advised Lina to have doctors perform a scan and Rick and Lina finally managed to convince the doctors. A CT scan confirmed the diagnosis of a brain tumour on May 19th, 2005.

The "huge mass" found on the CT scan necessitated Lina being hurried to Sunnybrook Hospital for surgery on May 21st. Doctors were only able to remove 15% of what was later determined to be a glioblastoma tumour. Lina was immediately started on a treatment plan that included radiology and chemotherapy, but the tumour continued to spread. The protocol was set for Lina to do another round of treatments of chemo for a period of six months to start but after only one round of chemo, the family with the agreement of doctors felt Lina was not handling the chemo well and treatment was suspended. Lina began complementary therapy of supplements and incredibly Lina's condition improved. For a period of a year and nine months, Lina was able to enjoy a more normal semblance of life including attending the wedding of her son in September 2005. Lina was also able to attend her daughter's wedding in October of 2006 and witness the birth of her first grandchild.

However, in July 2007, the tumour started to grow and by September it had increased to the size of an orange. There was little left that could be done except to continue with a natural holistic approach and provide support. A team of certain close family members and friends was created to support Lina emotionally and physically to constantly surround her with loved ones at all times. The team researched ways to help Lina fight her disease and to help keep her immune system strong. Lina's strength and courage to fight on was as important to other patients as it was to her family.

"It is fitting that I was able to speak up for Lina and ensure she received the support and care that she needed," states Lidia about this time in her sister's journey. "The importance of humour and support was vital to keeping positive and eliminating stress so Lina could concentrate on fighting her disease." Lidia adds that, "Lina was not in denial but she wanted to stay positive and encourage others to do the same, although it was a challenging both mentally and physically for her." It was at this time that Lina and Lidia especially made a strong connection with two other Toronto families who were also battling

brain tumours. The three families were able to share information, connect and provide each other with emotional support during a time when all of them were apprehensive about the success of the treatment. Unfortunately all three eventually succumbed to their disease. Lina passed away on February 14th, 2008.

Lidia remains close with the new friends she made during her sister's journey and together they continue to reach out and support others facing the same struggle. The families remain in constant communication and gather together several times during the year to share and comfort each other.

For the past two years, the families have formed a team to help fundraise for a cause and cure. As Lidia states: "We decided that we could help raise awareness by showing that we are all connected and to demonstrate our support for each other."

On Saturday, April 25th, 2009, the Kafieh and Visconti families, along with hundreds of other people in the GTA will join the thousands across Canada who will don their sneakers to participate in Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada's annual Spring Sprint. Last year, in 19 cities, Spring Sprints raised an unprecedented \$1.35 million for brain tumour research and to support to the estimated 55,000 Canadians currently living with a brain tumour. Each year, an additional 10,000 are newly diagnosed.

The Toronto Spring Sprint features 5km or 10km routes in beautiful Sunnybrook Park. People are invited to register online at www.springsprint.ca or by telephone at 1-800-265-5106. Participants raise pledges that are used to bring hope to people affected by brain tumours and to fund research. Each step is one closer to imagining a cure.

Although Lidia and her sister benefited from patient resource handbooks and other information they received, it was the mutual support within their family and from others experiencing the same thing that made a huge difference. "Others don't comprehend how this disease impacts the whole family," Lidia explains. "We learn a lot through supporting each other as no one should go through it alone. People need it. Sometimes it is important to have families advocate and speak up on the patient's behalf."

Event: Toronto Spring Sprint
Date: Saturday, April 25th, 2009
Location: Sunnybrook Park, Sports Pavilion
Time: 9:00 am Check-In

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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), and national support groups that meet monthly in 21 cities. Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada also supports brain tumour research through annual grants-in-aid program and to date has donated \$2.3 million directly to brain tumour research. Please visit Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada's website at www.braintumour.ca.

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

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