



NOW WE CAN DARE TO HOPE

His tumour has shrunk and the cancer hasn't spread – all good news for baby Mark and his anxious parents Darren and Sarah-Kate Scott

By GLORIA EDWARDS Pictures: DINO CODEVILLA

H E'S TOO young to know his red curls are falling out and that he has become thin from throwing up. Playing with his teddy bears in his hospital bed, Mark Scott is all smiles – and today his worried parents are feeling upbeat too.

"It's a good day," his mom, Sarah-Kate, says with a smile. Sixteen-month-old Mark, who has cancer, is managing to eat a bit. "I haven't seen Mark this happy in months," his dad, Darren, adds.

After four agonising weeks of chemotherapy the tumour on the tot's right kidney has shrunk so much his doctors say they can now operate to remove it, along with his

kidney. When the shocking diagnosis was made that Mark has Wilms tumour, also called nephroblastoma, his afflicted kidney was seven times the size of his healthy one (YOU, 22 March 2012).

Besides the success of the chemotherapy there's more good news – the cancer hasn't spread to his other organs. Finally the Scotts can dare utter the words they've been hoping to say: "We've prayed for a miracle and it has come!"

The past month has been the worst time of their lives, they say – understandably, much worse than the controversy last year when Darren's use of the k-word during a team-building exercise nearly destroyed his

career as a TV and radio presenter.

During his chemo treatment Mark was constantly nauseous and couldn't keep food down. They all had sleepless nights. "Every time I gave him nausea pills he threw up," Sarah-Kate says.

"I could cope with all of that but it was when he started losing his precious red curls in the third week that I cracked."

It was traumatic for both parents. Sarah-Kate, a former model, loved washing and blow-drying Mark's bushy red hair every night. "That's when Darren would shake his head and say that's his little boy. I'd just carry on twirling my fingers through his hair!"

"I was twirling his hair as usual the other

night and a huge clump came off. That's when reality struck. I couldn't stop crying for hours."

Mark's hair still falls out and she finds herself picking up the strands and putting them back on her son's head. "I wish it were me rather than him. I just want my healthy boy back."

MARK had a scan on 5 April and when the results showed his tumour had shrunk from 7 x 7 cm to 5 x 5 cm, Sarah-Kate was beside herself. "I was overwhelmed with joy and gratitude and I thanked God over and over."

She believes countless prayers and messages of support from around the world have contributed to this.

Mark's surgeon, Dr Jerome Loveland, plans to perform a 45-minute operation to remove the kidney with the tumour.

"The doctors are positive the operation can be done now. But Dr Loveland still has the final say as to whether and when he operates," Darren explains.

The stage of the cancer can be determined only once it has been removed – but if it's in stage one the cure rate is 95 per cent.

"So the tsunami of prayer continues," Sarah-Kate says. Mark's not out of danger yet, although his parents now have good reason to hope he'll recover.

Mark has been in and out of hospital in the past month and his mother has been with him 24 hours a day. Darren has had to balance his visits to the hospital with the launch of his new online radio station, Ballz.

"Our lives have changed completely," he says. They've temporarily moved out of their home in Hartbeespoort, North West, and are staying in friends' cottage in Johannesburg to be nearer the hospital.

While Mark received chemo, his parents watched helplessly as he became sick.

"A port was installed under his collarbone for administering the chemo and Mark sailed through the first week of three chemo sessions," Sarah-Kate says. "He looked fine and I thought the treatment wasn't getting him down at all."

But soon the constant nausea, hair loss and weight loss associated with the treatment set in.

"He lost a kilogram in the second week and vomited for three days straight. One kilogram is a lot for a little body weighing only 11 kg," his worried mom says.

On two occasions they had to rush Mark to hospital at night, once with extreme abdominal pain and again when his fever spiked at 39,8 °C.

"It was terrifying. We just couldn't get his temperature down and he started having cold shivers. I've never been so scared," Sarah-Kate says.

Darren explains that the chemotherapy has an impact on the immune system which makes Mark highly susceptible to any illness. That night he'd been fighting an infection and it took until the following night for his system to normalise.

"We're so careful around him," he says.

"I've become obsessive about washing my hands and changing the clothes he throws up on. I now check everyone's hygiene," Sarah-Kate adds.

Mashed potatoes and scrambled eggs are some of the few foods Mark can keep down. Sarah-Kate also breastfeeds him.

"His sleep routine has been disrupted. Sometimes he's so tired he just pulls his blanket over his face and says 'dudu' and sleeps."

"Throughout it all he's been a normal boy for only half a day. For a few hours the throwing up stopped and he could play like he used to."

She says the ordeal has created stress in her relationship with Darren but they pray together each morning when they wake. "Our faith keeps us strong."

THE launch of Darren's online radio station attracted an audience of 50 000 listeners – a good indication that he could be back on his feet financially soon, and able to afford his son's medical bills. Their medical aid won't pay.

The Scotts believe their son's cancer battle has happened for a reason: to help other sick children. "I believe God chose us because of Darren's profile," Sarah-Kate says.

"We've been thankful for golf days that



FOLLOW-UP

raised thousands for our little boy. We're lucky to have support from family and thousands of Facebook friends who call Markie 'theirs'. So we have a responsibility to raise awareness of cancer and to help other sick and needy children who might not have the incredible support we do.

"Whatever's left over in Mark's trust fund will go to that cause and it will be his legacy. We'll keep a memory book to remind him of the positive things that come out of this."

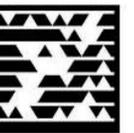
Their son may have suffered physically but the illness hasn't dampened his spirits, Darren says.

"He's our little soldier. He's so bright and he loves sharing," Sarah-Kate says.

When she looks at Mark her love is palpable.

"But we don't ask God why any more. We're just counting our blessings. We used to take it day by day – now we take it hour by hour." ■

● The Scotts have started a trust fund for Mark. The details are: Veneziano Incorporated Trust Account, Standard Bank, Castle Walk branch, branch code 014645, account number 411373749, Ref: Mark Scott Special Needs Trust Fund.



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INSTRUCTIONS AT YOU.CO.ZA



Mark has been in and out of hospital since YOU first reported on his illness on 22 March (TOP).