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Photo by Stacey Crescitelli

Keeping Hope Afloat

How The JAG Fund Plots a Course in Uncharted Waters

BY LORI MEHLER

“Just as the water rises to meet the sky, hope lifts us towards our dreams, bringing with it the promise of healing and renewal.”

~ Herman Melville

When uncertainty arises, pivoting with resilience and flexibility allows us to turn challenges into stepping stones toward a more fulfilling life. October, with its brisk air and vibrant foliage, serves as a poignant month of reflection for those remembering loved ones who have passed. It also provides a time to honor their memory and find solace in the changing seasons. For the Gingras family, October is even more profound because it is the month of Joel A. Gingras Jr.’s passing.

Since 2010, the American Brain Tumor Association has awarded its highest honor, the Joel A. Gingras Jr. Award, in recognition of an individual, organization or group that has made significant contributions to the Association’s mission through philanthropy, advocacy, discovery, or patient care.

This special award pays tribute to Joel A. Gingras Jr., who died in 1988 due to complications from treatment of a non-cancerous brain tumor. It is because Joel’s family wanted to both manage their grief and also share their good intentions, that they formed the Joel A. Gingras Jr. Memorial Foundation (JAG Fund) to raise money for and increase awareness of brain tumors.

Joel A. Gingras, Jr., was born in 1961. He was the oldest of six children and spent time in Key West, Florida, Long Beach, California and Indian Head, Maryland because his father was in the Navy. His sister, Lisa and brother, Johnathan were born at the last two of these stops, respectively, each of which were naval bases.

The Gingras family moved to Doylestown 1970 and Joel first attended Linden Elementary, then Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Elementary School. He graduated from Archbishop Wood in 1979. After two years at Bucks County Community College, he transferred to St. Bonaventure University in Western New York and graduated in 1985.

Joel’s first job was paper boy for the Daily Intelligencer in Doylestown. Eager to please, he worked diligently to make a name for himself and sought out larger routes. Eventually, he had eighty customers and his dedicated efforts earned him the honor of “Paperboy of the Year” in 1974.

Only fourteen years later, Joel began experiencing balance difficulties, headaches and vision changes. He was soon diagnosed with a brain tumor. In May of 1988, he underwent surgery and had the tumor removed, but experienced



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JOEL A. GINGRAS, JR.

complications afterward, including pneumonia and infection. Sadly, Joel passed away on October 5, 1988.

Even in the toughest of times, making the best of an unfortunate situation often reveals our inner strength and creativity. Joel's inner circle exemplified this truth. In the adventurous 80s, he

and his high school and college buddies enjoyed tubing down the Delaware River and occasionally jumping off the Lumberville Walking Bridge for fun. The year he was hospitalized, his same friends tubed down the river to raise money to pay his hospital bills.

After Joel's death, the money was sent to the American Brain Tumor Association (ABTA) in Chicago. The beloved tube float is now an annual fundraising event. "We do it every year. They go down river, raise pledges and celebrate Joel," says Board Member Kathryn Gingras, adding that there are upwards of one-hundred tubers who participate.

"We're a family-run charity," says Johnathan Gingras, President of the JAG Fund. "We love getting our mission out there," he adds, noting that there are now thirty-eight research fellowships in Joel's name. The Gingras family has made a tremendous impact within the brain tumor community by raising well-deserved funds to help the American Brain Tumor Association

provide patient services and invest in research opportunities. "The JAG Fund has donated over two-point eight million dollars to the ABTA over the past thirty-four years thanks to our generous donors and supporters," shares Johnathan. In 2023, the JAG Fund gave their biggest donation of \$225,000 to the ABTA.

The JAG Fund hosts Friday golf outings and a bi-annual black-tie event in Philadelphia in an effort to tap into different crowds to share their message. JAG Fund President, Johnathan Gingras, is one of many people who has watched the non-profit blossom over the years. "Everyone in the family does something with the cause," shares Christian, Vice President of the JAG Fund and beloved brother to Joel. The JAG Fund reminds us that with hope as our anchor, we can steer through life's stormy currents, hopeful that calmer waters lie ahead.

To learn more about the JAG Fund and provide support for their mission, please visit JAGFund.org.

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