

## **Is Canada a Mickey Mouse Nation? It Will be if Tom Hanks, Disney, and the James Fund Have Their Way**

**September 14, TORONTO:** On September 27, in New York, the world will learn if “Space Mouse,” one of the seventy-five 6 foot tall, 700 pound Mickey Mouse statues to be auctioned by Sotheby’s and the Walt Disney Company as the culmination of celebrations commemorating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the world’s most famous mouse, will find a home in Canada. The sale of “Space Mouse,” designed by actor Tom Hanks, will benefit The James Fund which was established in memory of James Birrell to fight neuroblastoma, a highly deadly form of childhood cancer. The James Fund is both the only Canadian charity and the only family fund selected to benefit from the sale of one of the Mickey figures. Tom Hanks is the James Fund’s Honourary Patron.

Hanks and James Birrell befriended each other over the course of several phone conversations and letters before James died 3 ½ years ago at the age of 8. They shared a fascination about space and Hanks starred in James’ favourite movie, “Apollo 13,” the true story of three astronauts who battled incredible odds to make it back home when all seemed lost. “Space Mouse” was designed with James in mind. The Birrell family will be in New York for both the auction at Sotheby’s New York on the 27<sup>th</sup> and also for the exclusive preview party in New York on Tuesday September 20<sup>th</sup>.

“We’re very grateful for the ongoing support of our Honourary Patron Tom Hanks and now Disney as we look for a cure for this terrible disease,” said Syd Birrell, father of James and James’ siblings Rebecca (13) and Ben (9). “In a perfect world, it would be a Canadian company or person that would purchase ‘Space Mouse’ and display it somewhere for future generations of Canadian children to enjoy,” Birrell continued, “but wherever ‘Space Mouse’ ends up, it will endure as a legacy to James’ love of fun, adventure and his commitment to fighting neuroblastoma.”

“When I have to make the choice, it will always be to keep battling cancer,” James once said. “I am not giving up!” Of the Fund that bears his name, he said, “With all this experimenting, they’ll get it figured out and then all the kids with neuroblastoma will be able to survive.” Those words have galvanized the team of James Fund scientists as they work towards a day when no child will suffer the horrors of this disease, which claims a child somewhere in North America every sixteen hours.

James’ remarkable and spirited fight against neuroblastoma is the subject of an uplifting and inspiring book by his father Syd called “Ya Can’t Let Cancer Ruin Your Day.” With a foreword by Tom Hanks, the book is the collection of journals Syd wrote and shared via email throughout James’ five-year illness, chronicling not only James’ fight against cancer, but also the extraordinary adventures they shared as a family as they tried to pack as much living into the very short time they had left with James.

The book, which was released just a few weeks ago with the generous support of the pharmaceutical company MDS Nordion, has sold briskly despite the fact that it had been available only over the internet ([www.greentrainbooks.com](http://www.greentrainbooks.com)). As of today, however, the book is now additionally available at select Chapters and Indigo stores and also available for order on [Indigo.ca](http://Indigo.ca) (\$19.93, the year of James' birth). A portion of the proceeds from each book benefits The James Fund.

“Space Mouse,” as do each of the 75 statues, stands about 6 feet tall and weighs about 700 pounds. Combined, they are expected to raise in excess of \$1million US for approximately 50 worthy causes. For more information on the charity auction, visit [www.sothebys.com/mickey](http://www.sothebys.com/mickey). For a complete list of statues, artists and charities associated with this auction, or to download high-resolution images of the statues, visit [www.disneyconsumerproducts.com](http://www.disneyconsumerproducts.com).

The James Fund (JF) was established at SickKids Foundation by the family of James Birrell to generate knowledge leading to new therapies for the treatment of patients with neuroblastoma. It has rapidly grown to be Canada's leading neuroblastoma research initiative and actor Tom Hanks is its Honorary Patron. To date, nine research projects have been funded, six papers published, a drug-testing unit has been established and several international collaborations are underway bringing new hope to the parents of children suffering from this terrible childhood cancer.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: BOOK AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW. HEADSHOTS AND ART AVAILABLE, INCLUDING OF SPACE MOUSE AND JAMES BIRREL (SEPARATELY). SYD BIRRELL AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW.

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