I Have ALS and I’m Not Giving Up Hope

By CHRISTINA DUGAN

In a moment of pure joy, Kenneth Mitchell crowd-surfed through a sea of fans on a Star Trek cruise in early March. “I felt different hands, lifting me up and supporting me,” the Star Trek: Discovery actor, 45, recalls. “It was a beautiful metaphor of everything that I’m going through.” Just a few days before, Mitchell publicly revealed he is living with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, a debilitating and often terminal neurological disease that slowly takes away a person’s ability to control his or her muscles. “I can’t hide it anymore,” says Mitchell, who was diagnosed with limb onset ALS (a form of the disease that attacks limbs first) in August 2018 and began using a wheelchair last October. “I have ALS and I’m not giving up hope. I feel like it’s time for me to be a voice.”

Married for almost 14 years, the Toronto native and his wife, Susan May Pratt, who has appeared in films such as Center Stage and 10 Things I Hate About You, have built a comfortable life together as successful, if not widely famous, actors. They live in Studio City, Calif., with their kids, 12-year-old daughter Lilah and 7-year-old son Kallum. Mitchell says it took a while to come to grips with the gravity of his diagnosis, but he was overwhelmed with gratitude as friends and family showed him with love and support. “Over time I think I began to accept this with grace,” he says. “I’m trying to see the beauty in it.” He’s also continuing to act, starring in the CW’s Nancy Drew and the upcoming FX on Hulu series The Old Man, in a role created specifically for him as an FBI agent who uses a wheelchair. His wife isn’t surprised by his positive outlook. “He’s always been able to roll with the punches,” says Pratt, 46.

Since childhood, Mitchell, the son of David, a contractor, and Diane, a nurse, has loved sports and being active. He

STAR TREK’S KENNETH MITCHELL

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AFTER A DEVASTATING DIAGNOSIS, THE ACTOR IS CHERISHING TIME WITH HIS FAMILY—AND FINDING WAYS TO CONTINUE HIS CAREER

By CHRISTINA DUGAN

Photographs by CHLOE AFTEL
played soccer for five years at his college, the University of Guelph, where he studied landscape architecture. “(Soccer) was a big part of my persona,” he says. But to his surprise, after getting involved as a camper turned counselor in a local camp, he quickly developed a passion for acting and dance. He began landing small parts—including in the 2002 TV movie Charms for the Easy Life, where he met his wife. He booked his first major role in Disney’s 2004 hockey film Miracle. “It was one of my favorite jobs to date,” says Mitchell. “It was special to me to marry my athletic past with current storytelling passions.” Memorable roles on TV dramas such as Jericho, Ghost Whisperer and The Astronaut Wives Club followed.

Shortly after filming a small role in the movie Captain Marvel, Mitchell began to feel lethargic and was experiencing fascinations, or twitching, in his left arm, but didn’t think much of it. “I thought it was from coffee or dehydration or something,” he says. But to his surprise, after getting involved as a camper turned counselor in a local camp, he quickly developed a passion for acting and dance. He began landing small parts—including in the 2002 TV movie Charms for the Easy Life, where he met his wife. He booked his first major role in Disney’s 2004 hockey film Miracle. “It was one of my favorite jobs to date,” says Mitchell. “It was special to me to marry my athletic past with current storytelling passions.” Memorable roles on TV dramas such as Jericho, Ghost Whisperer and The Astronaut Wives Club followed.

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