

# M SUNDAY Mirror

£1.40  
NOVEMBER 20, 2016



My story  
**The Bond girl born a boy**

EXCLUSIVE: PAGES 30&31

EXCLUSIVE  
**£200M MESSI**



Man City offer star £500k a week

SEE SPORT



**Susan Boyle**  
I have lost 35lb and I'm ready for love

PLUS Get her new album for just £7.50



Online redemption. Terms apply.

EXCLUSIVE: PAGES 12&13

## EXCLUSIVE: A DAD'S TORMENT

# TV CHEF: MY TEARS OVER BABY'S CANCER BATTLE

BY GERALDINE MCKELVIE

**CELEBRITY** chef Jean-Christophe Novelli today reveals his agony at seeing his baby son battle cancer.

The Hell's Kitchen star has been in tears at 10-week-old Valentino's plight. Jean-Christophe, 55, said: "Valentino is so tiny. You feel utterly helpless."

FULL STORY: PAGES 4&5



SO CLOSE  
Jean-Christophe kisses Valentino

Jean-Christophe Novelli tells of family's anguish for 10-week-old boy



# JEAN-CHRISTOPHE NOVELLI ON HIS SON'S CANCER BATTLE

## There've been nights when I have sat alone, crying, asking God why this has happened to my little boy and not to me

**EXCLUSIVE**  
BY GERALDINE MCKELVIE

**TELLY chef Jean-Christophe Novelli and his cancer-stricken baby son lock eyes on each other in a heartrending image that will touch every parent.**

Little Valentino is just 10 weeks old and is battling neuroblastoma – a rare cancer of the nervous system.

Hell's Kitchen star Jean-Christophe, 55, and his fiancée Michelle, 40, have been shaken to the core.

And today, in a highly emotional interview, they reveal the heartbreak, the tears and ultimately the strength that they pray will help pull Valentino through.

The couple discovered the mite was ill just weeks ago and shared their devastating news on the same day singer Michael Bublé announced his three-year-old son Noah had been diagnosed with liver cancer.

Jean-Christophe, known for his fiery passion in the kitchen, has been reduced to tears by his son's plight. He told the Sunday Mirror: "We found a lump in Valentino's neck and we both went to pieces."

"There have been nights when I have sat alone, crying, asking God why this has happened to my little boy and not to me. I wish I could change places with him."

"Valentino is so tiny. You feel utterly helpless. My heart goes out to the Bublés and any parent facing infant cancer."

Jean-Christophe and Michelle found the lump on Valentino's neck on October 23.

Within days, it had doubled in size. Michelle was left hysterical when her son almost stopped breathing during the MRI scan which revealed it was cancerous.

Days later, surgeons told her they were unable to remove the tumour completely because it was so close to Valentino's windpipe and twisted in and around vital nerves.

### HOPE

But late last week, the couple were given a ray of hope when doctors at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge told them they were confident they could treat Valentino successfully with chemotherapy.

Tearful Michelle said: "I used to be scared of my children being snatched. It never occurred to me that they could get cancer."

"I haven't asked what Valentino's chances of survival are... I don't want to consider that there is even a small chance he'll die."

"These last few weeks have changed me. Being on a children's cancer ward has made me realise we're actually lucky because we have some hope. Others aren't so fortunate. We count our blessings every day."

The couple, who also have sons Jean, eight, and Jacques, four, were on cloud nine when Michelle fell pregnant with Valentino. She told Jean-Christophe – also dad to Christina, 29, from a previous relationship – her pregnancy test was positive by leaving a pair of baby booties on his computer.

He said: "I was so excited my head almost hit the ceiling when I jumped up."

When Valentino arrived in September, everything appeared to be perfect. But terror and panic struck when Michelle noticed the bulge on Valentino's neck as she was feeding him at midnight at the family home on the outskirts of Luton, Beds.

She said: "Instantly, I had a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. It was rock hard. Jean touched it. We started panicking."

They went to A&E the next morning. The next few days passed in a haze of tests as the couple desperately tried to hold it together for their other children. Michelle said: "The MRI scan was awful. Valentino was

choking and his chest was rising and falling as if he was being repeatedly punched. Jean was with our older boys doing the school run so I was alone and I became hysterical. It seemed like an eternity before they got him under control again and I was on the phone to Jean-

Christophe in tears. But I think Valentino sensed something was wrong. Seeing me upset seemed to make him cry, too. That's when I knew I had to be strong. It's so hard but I've barely shed another tear since."

Doctors had to operate immediately as the tumour would obstruct Valentino's airway if it grew. The surgeons were trying

to get the entire tumour out but it proved impossible without risking serious harm.

Michelle collapsed in shock at the news. She went on: "Once in intensive care, I had a really surreal experience. I could feel someone behind me and hear someone calling my name but there was no one there."

"Several people close to me have died and part of me wonders if one of them was looking out for us that day."

The couple stayed with their son until test results came back days later.

Michelle said: "Being in the children's cancer ward was just so humbling. The whole team was absolutely amazing and I'm in awe of the work they do. At night, you'd hear children cry out in pain – no one should have to go through that – but they

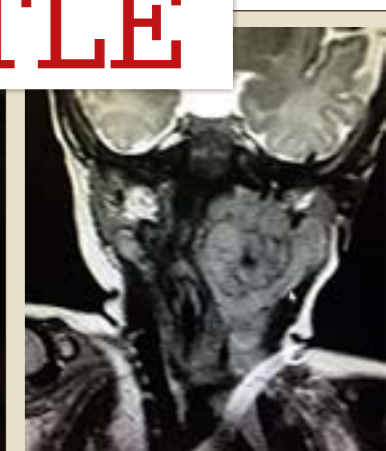
**BE SAFE, SON**  
Jean-Christophe gazes at Valentino and prays the little fella will recover



**BRUV LUV** Kiss from Jean, eight



**UNITED** Parents hug baby Valentino



**SHOCKER** Scan revealed tot's tumour  
**Valentino illness hits just one in 7,000 children**

BY GERALDINE MCKELVIE

NEUROBLASTOMA is a cancer that forms in certain types of nerve tissue.

It is the most common cancer in babies and the third most common in children – after leukaemia and brain cancer.

About one in every 7,000 children is affected at some point.

Some 90 per cent of cases occur in children less than five years old and it is rare in adults.

It most frequently starts from one of the adrenal glands but can also develop in the neck, chest, abdomen, or spine.

Symptoms include bone pain, a lump in the abdomen, chest or neck – like Valentino had – or a painless bluish lump under the skin.

Occasionally neuroblastoma may be due to a mutation inherited from parents.

Environmental factors have not been found to be involved.

Treatment and outcome depends on the risk group a person is in.

Likely treatments include observation, surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, or stem cell transplantation.

Low-risk disease in babies typically has a good outcome with surgery or simply observation.



**BATTLER** Valentino after tumour op

for four rounds of chemotherapy.

Michelle said: "Our other boys adore Valentino and just want to kiss and cuddle him. But I have to stop them in case they pass on any infections as he has no immune system because of the chemo."

The support from people across the UK has given them strength and they say they couldn't have got through without the care of staff at Luton & Dunstable and Addenbrooke's hospitals.

Jean-Christophe cancelled work commitments and the Novelli Academy

cooking school, attached to their home, will be closed until New Year as Valentino cannot be around lots of people.

But the chef will today return to work outside of the school for the first time. Michelle, meanwhile, looks to the future with hope. She said: "What's keeping me going is the thought of Valentino walking me down the aisle at our wedding, as a little page boy."

"That's a nice thought to keep in my head on the darker days."

geraldine.mckelvie@trinitymirror.com

## Quotes of the week

**I'm sure the Palace needs it, but so do schools and hospitals**

Fern Cotton on the Queen getting £369million public cash to refit Buckingham Palace

**I've pretty much stopped doing everything. The only thing I am addicted to now is eating**

Ex Sex Pistols guitarist Steve Jones looks back on a life of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll 40 years after Anarchy in the UK

**Obviously as a Blue Peter presenter I don't really know about sex so I had to rely on my imagination**

Children's TV presenter turned novelist Janet Ellis is shortlisted for the Bad Sex in Fiction Award



**You won't believe this, but I haven't ever had a takeaway**

Bake Off host Mary Berry says she's never brought home a curry, Chinese or pizza

**There's a dog on the pitch, they think it's called Rover**

BBC cricket commentator Henry Moeran describes the moment when a dog held up India's second Test against England

**We've Donald Trump, we've had Brexit and next it could be Ed Balls**

Rival contestant Judge Rinder tips the former shadow chancellor to win Strictly

**It's crazy but the fact is I am a direct descendant of royalty**

EastEnders' Danny Dyer discovers his 30 times great grandfather was William the Conqueror



**TV STAR** As fans know celeb chef Jean-Christophe

**“Every day more sick children appeared as yet more families faced the same hell as us...”**

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE TELLY CHEF ON GRIM WAIT IN HOSPITAL

Pictures: ROLAND LEON