

May 22, 2024

Dear FPS Supporter,

I am representing 3,000 families that have been served by For Pete's Sake Cancer Respite Foundation (FPS). Cancer is not just a diagnosis of one, but that of a family and its ripple effects on so many others. Their mission is to provide respite for a family facing an active cancer diagnosis. They have built a community of like-minded individuals that allowed my family to take a break from cancer. Now, they endeavor to construct the nation's first Cancer Respite Center at Woodloch. I hope my story will inspire you to join For Pete's Sake in this endeavor.

To paint a picture of what it would look like for someone to go to a beautiful cancer respite center, one must understand the population that FPS supports. As one of the many Respite Recipients, I must take the time to highlight how a respite can impact a family. With my husband John, we have three children, and they are my greatest accomplishment. I am a registered nurse and nursing professor, but I always tell my patients and students, "I better be doing something great while I'm gone because there are important people at home waiting for my return".

Two years ago, I finally took control of my health, lost 76 pounds, and was ready to check off a bucket list item of running the Philadelphia Broad Street Run. While training, little did I know that the excuses for my raspy voice and cough were not postnasal drip, reflux, too much talking, or allergies but a diagnosis of Lymphoma that would prevent the run.

I knew our life would change when we told the kids I had cancer. Instead of running Broad Street, I spent the day having a family photo shoot to capture what my family looked like before my children knew that the word cancer was now living in our home.

For six months, I was receiving some of the most toxic chemotherapies, one nicknamed the red devil. My husband, John, continued working full-time, caring for our family while I was in treatment. By his side, our community supported us, giving hugs to my kids on softball fields when they began to cry because I wasn't there. Instead of fun memories of us as a family, we were making memories of me being sick on the couch. We had to cancel all our family outings and adventures, and I celebrated my 40th birthday in the hospital receiving chemo.

As a mom and nurse, I often play the role of the caregiver, so I thought I could empathize with John's new role in my cancer journey as I took on the patient, and he took on the caregiver. I quickly learned how different it is to be the patient needing to be taken care of.

John is my caregiver in so many ways. So, when I think of a caregiver, I think of selfless, empathetic, nurturing, loving, caring, and humble. They are your advocate, become knowledgeable multitaskers, and stand by your side, focusing on the patient daily. How does it feel to be a caregiver? Tired, anxious, unsure of what words to say, stressed financially, overwhelmed by being the emotional support for the family, and answering questions like: is mommy going to be okay?

For Pete's Sake is the ultimate caregiver, embodying all these traits and more. Through a social worker at Jefferson, my family was nominated to receive the opportunity to go on a respite. At the time, I had no idea what this meant, but I was overcome with emotion the more I found out about FPS.

Because of Marci's story, I knew that FPS had great things to offer my family. While I never met Pete, his vision of creating positive memories was what our family needed. I imagined the change of scenery, no hospitals, doctor visits, school routines, or scheduled activities. John was excited about the break but also apprehensive because it can be paralyzing to venture out when everything is so scary. Reassured by my oncologist and followed by my chemo treatment, we headed to Woodloch, not knowing the profound impact respite would have on my family forever.

It was the first time in six months that we were all in the car together, excited for something. It was the first time we all sat down at a table to have a meal. John didn't have to worry about making meals, organizing a schedule, working, and even took time to rest in the hotel room- imagine the caregiver finally being taken care of.

We met other families who experienced cancer, and everyone had a different story, but we all could relate to not having to explain the little quirks of living with cancer. We had time to talk about our experiences, and I'm still in contact with many of the families we met during that time. We painted together as a family, we went on bumper cars, sped down the go-cart speedways everyday, did paintball, slept in a hotel room, stayed up and watched movies with popcorn, and worked with other families to build a boat and race it across the pool to see if it would float!

There were smores by the fire, archery, bingo, and shows on stage, and sometimes, we just watched the kids play in the pool. The For Pete's Sake and Woodloch teams treated us like family; everyone there just smiled. We laughed so hard that we cried. We took a new family picture. It captures us doing something fun amid something so heartbreaking.

FPS is more than respite; they checked in with me after respite, during my active treatment, and through the holidays, providing me with resources to support my family.

I want to share about another family who went on respite with us this past October. Her name was Ashleigh; she brought her caregiver and 15-year-old son on respite. Ashley also faced an active cancer diagnosis. In December, she lost her battle with cancer. FPS gave her caregiver and son memories and the gift of time.

Everyone's story is different. I am happy to report that as of 3 months ago, I have no active disease. My family is changed by cancer. We have learned a great deal of things going through this. One thing is for sure, though, that the memories we create last far beyond someone's life on earth. As a wife and mother of three kids, I wanted to have lasting memories for my family to carry with them regardless of my cancer outcome- FPS ensured this happened.

With your support, the dream of having a designated space to provide a safe environment can be fulfilled. This dedicated center will rejuvenate a family during the midst of the cancer battle - when so much fear, sadness, and missed opportunities are occurring. This is both uplifting and exciting, and I hope that you will join us in this endeavor, recognizing this initiative's profound impact. This pioneering project promises to be a beacon of hope for families navigating the challenges of cancer, embodying our shared commitment to making a significant, positive difference in their lives.

Best,

Mrs. Jennifer Coleman
Respite Recipient

