

Against All Odds

*A Story About Jaylynn Cannon & Ella Magle
as told by Grandma Ella*

I have been told by others that I am strong. Sometimes I too wonder how I do it, because fact is, I never sit still. Nothing seems to come to our family with any amount of ease. After nearly two years of constant chaos and worry, I admit I am tired and emotionally drained.

I am Ella. But, more importantly, I am the grandmother to a beautiful 10-year-old girl named Jaylynn. Jaylynn is a twin and one of five sisters. I feel fortunate to have legal custody of the girls, and my number one priority in life is to make sure that they are happy. I love them and treat them like they are my own.

My first clue that something was wrong was merely based on a feeling I had. Perhaps you can call it grandmother's intuition. Jaylynn's personality suddenly changed and she was emotional all the time. Then the pain set in, and nothing the doctors recommended seemed to help. When she became unable to keep up with school, it was clear to me that we were dealing with more than just a routine cavity, sinus infection, or cyst. During months of endless appointments and tests, the tiny lump we found on her jaw grew to the size of a baseball. Finally, a biopsy was done and I somehow felt oddly at peace that all would be well. The surgeon did not seem particularly concerned post op, and within a week the pathology results would free us from our hospital duties.

"It all started with a big hug, which opened the door to a loving and trusting relationship."

Just two days later, an unexpected phone call brought an abrupt halt to our lives. Urgency is a double edge sword in the medical world because now there was no doubt that Jaylynn's growth was malignant and that every day would make a difference in her prognosis. Full steam ahead, Jaylynn and I were asked to return to Lucile Packard Children's Hospital to discuss her diagnosis — undifferentiated sarcoma. I should not have been shaken to learn that Jaylynn's diagnosis did not fit neatly into one of the three most common types of childhood sarcomas, but it would have been a welcomed break. Because we were dealing with a very aggressive type of cancer, I was told Jaylynn would require harsh treatment every week for one year. It



Jaylynn and her twin sister Kira

would entail administering 4 or 5 different chemotherapy drugs in a sequence of 3-week escalating cycles, followed by countless rounds of radiation.

And as such began the weekly, sometimes daily, back and forth between our lives in Manteca and Palo Alto. On a good day it was just a 1.5 hour drive one way, but most days averaged 4 hours due to traffic. When I add the countless emergency trips to Palo Alto for complications of Jaylynn's treatment on top of the already scheduled visits, I feel like we were pulled away from family more than we were able to be together.

Seeing a loved one go through a medical crisis is complicated and requires flexibility on everyone's part. My daughter Christine, Jaylynn's aunt, quit her job to help care for the family. We literally joined forces, and between the two of us, we managed most of the day-to-day responsibilities for our 7 children. Getting our undivided attention was a challenge, but we always had enough hugs to go around.

As Jaylynn's treatment unfolded, I became increasingly apprehensive about our finances. Beyond the expected medical bills, our food expenses grew exponentially as I was barely ever home to prepare meals for the family. Christine was unable to take 6 kids to the grocery store to shop, and expensive cafeteria or take-out food became our fallback. My car was also not in any condition to make the endless trips back and forth to the hospital, and I had to resort to a rental car each time we had an appointment. Needless to say, the gas it took to travel became prohibitively expensive

(continued on page 5)

(continued from page 1)

and it did not take long before my entire savings account was wiped out. Our world was in pieces. The girls were clearly showing signs of anxiety and I felt empty, lonely and desperate for it to be over. I had received understanding and support throughout, but we really needed something more. At the recommendation of our social worker at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital, I was introduced to There With Care.

It was April 8, 2014 and I will never forget the day. Sheri, There With Care's Program Director, was my lifesaver in every sense of the word. And Katie, a veteran volunteer, became a lifeline while I navigated the daily ups and downs of our medical battle. These two ladies stood by my side unconditionally, always with open arms.

It all started with a big hug which opened the door to a loving and trusting relationship. Above and beyond the groceries, gas cards, clothing for 7 children, diapers, birthday celebrations for the kids, and even take-out Chinese food and smoothies for me and Jaylynn at the hospital, I received crucial emotional support to help me keep life afloat for our entire family. Whether it was a call to remind me to eat lunch or an unexpected visit to make me feel special, the volunteers and staff at There With Care went out of their way to make sure I was taking good care of myself and my family. They understood, very deeply, that I was the foundation to all that needed to happen. It was like family caring for family, and I am forever grateful.

Jaylynn proved to never use her diagnosis as an excuse, and she smiled her way through most of the treatment - as long as she was not in the hospital! I am beyond thrilled to have arrived at the end of Jaylynn's treatment. But I also remain a realist and am well aware that my work is never done. There are no ambiguities about my place and purpose. I have learned to accept life as it is. I manage obstacles not because I can rise above them, but simply because I gather the courage to face them. I am an optimist and see no choice other than to keep moving forward with determination. Defeat is never an option. I get up in the morning and get the job done before I go to bed at night. One day at a time. For Jaylynn and for our whole family — with the occasional visit to see my dear friends at There With Care.



Grandma Ella and Jaylynn



Sweet Andrea

andrea's story

as told by Mom

My husband and I are the proud parents of beautiful Andrea. Last year, Andrea became sick. I took her to several doctors and they all told me she was fine. But I knew she wasn't. Finally, I found a doctor that did a blood test, and the results weren't good. We were devastated when we learned that our little baby had leukemia.

The transition to Stanford wasn't easy. My husband and I quit our jobs to be bedside with our little girl. We couldn't bring ourselves to leave her alone. She was so scared. The medication she was put on caused her to gain weight. Without jobs, rent to pay, and lots of gas to go back and forth from our home to the hospital, we were stressed about our finances. There With Care became a blessing for us.

There With Care sent us homemade mac-and-cheese that helped Andrea at night when the hospital kitchen was closed. The clothes that volunteers brought allowed us to manage Andrea's weight gain. And the gas cards helped us go home to do laundry, pay bills, and change our clothes. If I think about the thing

I am most grateful for, it is the emotional support that was provided. I looked forward to my weekly calls with Karen, the Program Coordinator, knowing that someone else cared about my little girl. When I was in the ER with Andrea and feeling scared, I called Karen to talk to her and she consoled me. I knew I had a friend at There With Care.

We are now back home, and my husband has returned to work. We are adjusting to our life at home while maintaining Andrea's medical care. Thank you There With Care for being with me during this time. Thank you to the volunteers who brought me my deliveries — I wish I could give you a hug!