

# **Your Stories, Our Inspiration**



*A special gift from  
Careforce Chronicle*

Encourage. Support. Motivate. Heal. These are just a handful words that describe what you do every day at Children's. You might say you're just doing your job, but, by providing that special kind of care that only you can deliver, you're an inspiration to others.

This Hospital Week, we want to present you with a special gift as a small token of our appreciation: a collection of 16 Inspiration stories from past issues of *Careforce Chronicle*. Take a few moments this week to read through these amazing stories—as told by you, our employees, as well as past patients and volunteers. I hope they inspire you as much as you inspire me.

Thank you for making a difference in the lives of our patients, their families and each other. Happy Hospital Week!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Donna". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D'.

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## Care Unlike Any Other

*By Toni Petrillo, M.D.*

*Physician, PICU, Children's at Egleston*

Originally hailing from Connecticut, I can't help but laugh a little when the Atlanta weather reports predict a "snowstorm" will hit. Residents flock to the grocery stores to stock up on bread and eggs. Roads are deserted. Schools shut down.

Don't get me wrong—I don't blame anyone for reacting that way. Atlanta isn't equipped to handle severe winter weather the few times a decade it occurs. And, even though I'd heard that the snowstorm heading our way in mid-January was supposed to be bad, I thought, like usual, it was a lot of hubbub over nothing.

I was wrong. Snow started falling Sunday night, and it didn't stop. By Monday morning, the city was paralyzed.

Well, not the whole city. At our hospitals, it was business as usual. In the fourth-floor PICU at Children's at Egleston, where I work, we were running at full capacity. When you're taking care of the most critically ill patients, it's so important you have the staff to accommodate them—and we did. Not just for the first day of the Code White...or the second. We were fully staffed the entire four days. Everything was covered. The children received the same exceptional care they always do.

I have worked at Children's since starting my pediatric residency here in 1993. I stayed on to do my pediatrics critical care fellowship because the Children's staff

and faculty had become my extended family. I saw the care and dedication they had, and I wanted to be a part of it.

What I witnessed during the Code White is the reason I decided those many years ago that Children's was where I wanted to be. Nurses who lived near the hospital opened up their homes to other employees. Staff walked to and from work. Nurses left their own kids with baby-sitters so they could come in. Doctors slept in their offices. Several employees who could have gone home after the first or second day even offered to stay, or switch with those who couldn't get in.

It was incredible to see the teamwork and selflessness each employee in our unit displayed. And, what touched me the most was that, even after some had been trapped in the hospital for several days without seeing their families or sleeping in their own beds, I didn't hear complaints. There was an overwhelming feeling of camaraderie: We were all there for the kids.

In all my years as a physician, I have never seen a group of people pull together in this way. I knew when I started at Children's that the staff here was special. What I didn't know was just how amazing they'd prove to be. To everyone who worked during the Code White (and to the leadership who played supporting roles): Thank you. You did an unbelievable job. I'm proud to work with you.

## Nursing Without Borders

*By Jeannette Chadwick, Staff Nurse, Children's at Egleston*

Just a few short weeks after a catastrophic 7.0 magnitude earthquake devastated Haiti, I traveled with Project HOPE, an organization that works to provide health education and humanitarian assistance internationally, to Haiti with a team of medical relief workers to help. I knew that offering care and comfort to the children injured and displaced by the earthquake was important, but I could not have imagined the impact my work in Haiti would have on me.

The working conditions and resources were alarming. I was one of just three Pediatric Intensive Care Unit registered nurses on the trip, and our experience with pediatric patients, particularly preemies, was in high demand. We were immediately put to work, but with limited resources, we struggled.

We had a makeshift PICU and NICU, operating on a U.S. Naval ship, but these units were like nothing I had ever seen or experienced before. Nearly every child had an amputation of some sort, most were infected, and the ship had run out of antibiotics. We saw patients with tuberculosis, typhoid and tetanus. We made our own feeding bags.

Sanitation was a challenge. We quickly ran out of gloves and masks, and we had no bath supplies except for tiny towelettes and small amounts of antibacterial spray. We had to reuse suction catheters, with only soap and water to clean them

between patients. We worked 12- to 14-hour shifts, seven days a week.

Despite the mountain of challenges we faced, I know we made a difference. Even if all we could do was comfort children, it was important for us to be there. I'll never forget caring for an 8-year-old boy that had been critically injured when a house fell on him. He had lost his left arm and right leg; his face was crushed. I didn't know what to do, so I found some bubbles and began blowing them around him. He started to smile and then laugh. Seeing the smile on his face reminded me that, in spite of all of their hardships, these were still children that needed the special kind of care we give to kids.

Knowing how to offer special care to children is something Children's taught me. My training at Children's also gave me the confidence and skills to improvise solutions in a really rough environment, and the support of my co-workers back home inspired me and sustained me during the trip. I never thought I'd be able to do what I did in Haiti, but I'm so glad I did. And I'm so grateful Children's gave me the training and support I needed to make it possible.



## A Place Like Children's

By Marybeth Fazio-Norwood  
Staff Nurse, Children's at Egleston

I tell my children, "There are too many victims in the world. We need to be victors." And I try to apply this attitude to the way I live my life, making the best of what life throws my way. I arrived at this philosophy after life threw me a number of curve balls, one of which was pancreatic cancer.

When I received the diagnosis last summer, I was upset and frightened, but I quickly realized I could either kick and scream or I could move forward.

This is the stuff of life, I thought, I'm going to get through this.

I have worked at Children's for 22 years, and I have always been glad to be here. But lately, I have been especially grateful for the support of Children's and my co-workers.

These days, more than ever before, I have been focusing on living my life well—whether I'm with my children or at work. And Children's has created an environment that helps make that possible.

Children's understands that we have to maintain ourselves to care for others. And they think "outside of the box" to offer us unique benefits that will help us do this. As I focus on staying healthy, for example, the StairGym is one of my favorite places to get some exercise. And EAP has been source of comfort and guidance for my children and me.



The greatest benefit of being here, though, is my co-workers. Children's attracts a special kind of people. My co-workers—from the child life specialists to the food service attendants—are compassionate, selfless, thoughtful people.

I am lucky that my cancer was found early; I've never had chemotherapy. But I did have to have a Whipple procedure as part of my treatment. I was very reluctant to have the surgery, and on the day I found out it would have to be done, I was walking back from my doctor's appointment at Emory to Children's at Egleston in tears. As I neared the front entrance, a Children's employee I had never met before ran out to meet me, a tissue in his hand. This is just one example of the overwhelming demonstrations of comfort and kindness I have experienced at Children's.

I have heard the expression "It takes a village to raise a child," but I think it takes a village to care for anyone. It has taken the support of my friends, my children and my co-workers to help me be healthy. And, for me, it takes a place like Children's too. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

## Paying It Forward

By Oscar Silva

Staff Nurse, Children's at Scottish Rite

When my father was a child, he suffered a serious fall. He fractured his skull, which required surgery to repair. His family was humble and the hospital far away, so he stayed many weeks in the hospital alone. On discharge day, he and his grandfather had to cross a busy street in front of the hospital to catch their bus. As they did, a bus hit my father, crushing his leg and severing his foot.

Doctors said he'd never walk again. But they were able to reattach his foot and, many surgeries later, repair his leg. Due to the severity of the injuries and risk for infection, my father stayed in the hospital for the next four years. Because the hospital was so far away and they had a large family to care for, his parents couldn't visit.

When I was a boy in Colombia, my father told that story often. And his memories were always about the nurses. They'd not only treated his injuries and helped him walk again, but they dispelled the loneliness, giving him love, kindness and comfort. They celebrated holidays, gave gifts, even taught him to read. To this day, he remembers their names.

By the age of 10, I knew my life's purpose was to serve others as a thank you for God's blessings and the caregivers who helped my father. During high school in the U.S., a speaker described the close relationship between nurses and patients, which is when I knew I wanted to be a nurse. Then, on a college trip to a Mexican hospital, I saw a young boy with a broken leg. It was as if I were looking down at my father. In that emotional moment, I chose pediatric nursing.

Today, my father walks with only a slight limp. He has earned a college degree, traveled the world and raised a family. And I've become a pediatric nurse at Children's. I feel like I've won the lottery, because I actually get paid to do what I love.

Although I never met my father's childhood nurses, they were certainly my inspiration. And I hope that when some of my patients grow up, they'll tell their own children about a kind, funny nurse named Oscar. I hope they'll remember me as someone who made them laugh, helped them through a rough time and reminded them always to reach for their dreams.

## Making the Leap to a Healthier Me

*By Pamela Conrad, Staff Nurse,  
Inpatient Support Services  
Children's at Scottish Rite*

For as long as I can remember I have struggled with my weight and have tried every weight loss program imaginable. Sometimes I saw results, but every single time the weight came back and then some. As a nurse, I spend long days on my feet, and the pain my weight inflicted on my body was steadily increasing. Finally, when I reached 425 pounds, I knew something had to be done. Not only had I developed Type 2 diabetes, but I could not even walk from Children's at Scottish Rite to the parking garage without stopping for a break. The final straw came when I flew home to North Carolina in 2000 and needed a seat belt extender. The flight attendant made a big to-do, and I felt like breaking down in tears. Words cannot describe the embarrassment and pain I felt—and still feel—when I recall that memory.

I made the decision to change my life. Thankfully, Children's was there with lots of resources, including Weight Watchers at Work, which has helped teach me moderation and healthy food choices. Before I began attending meetings, I fried any food I could, ate huge breakfasts and indulged my sweet tooth every day. Now I stick to fruits, vegetables and baked or broiled meats, although I occasionally give into my sweet cravings. I also joined a gym and do at least three 30-minute workouts a week. One of the best resources I have found is my co-workers.



The support I received from them has pushed me to keep up my efforts, even when I felt like giving in. It's amazing how their simple encouragement can help me hold my head a little higher.

To date, I have lost 153 pounds and am nearly unrecognizable, in appearance, health and attitude. I finally dared the flight back home a few months ago (only one seat belt for me, thank you!) and while I was there, people who have known me for years walked right past me. I no longer require any of the Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure or pain medications I was taking. I am also much happier, which has made a huge difference in the quality of patient care I give, as well as my personal life. Most importantly, I am able to do things I never dreamed possible, like chasing my granddaughter through the park. To others in my shoes—don't give up. You can succeed by making simple changes to your lifestyle. Now that Children's has launched Strong4Life, reaching your wellness goals is easier than ever. And if you ever need a cheerleader to make the healthy lifestyle leap, just give me a call.



## A Gift Given Freely

By Diana Bennett

Volunteer, Children's at Egleston

Every Saturday, I volunteer at Children's at Egleston. It's a "job" I love, because being with the children enriches my life in ways difficult to describe.

For example, several weeks ago, when I checked in at the nursing station, there was a darling 3-year-old, Quentin, eagerly waiting for me. No shyness in that boy. His bright smile started my day on a high note, but the day got even better when we learned what was planned.

Disney was holding a sneak preview of "Toy Story 3" for the patients. At first, Quentin vetoed the movie and wanted me all to himself in his room. But he good naturedly agreed to see the movie—and what fun we had! In the hallway outside the screening room, Quentin and I walked down a red carpet decorated with balloons and banners, feeling like real movie stars. And experiencing a movie through Quentin's eyes was so special. He noticed everything with such awe—the film feeding through the projector, the dimming of the lights, the speaker next to us coming to life with sound, and finally the images on the screen.

Quentin was riveted by the story and asked such sweet, intelligent questions as the movie unfolded. Being a bit afraid of the dark, he didn't hesitate to climb on my lap and snuggle right in. And it was pure pleasure to watch as Quentin erupted with laughter during the funny parts of the film. Afterward, Quentin stayed to people-watch and dance to the music as it played through credits. He even rammed his way through the crowd to see the screen up close. And Quentin was thrilled to score some wonderful treasures: Toy Story stickers, balloons and a little kaleidoscope. As we returned to his room, his imagination in high gear, Quentin moved down the hallways like a hunter through a jungle, peering at everything through that magical new kaleidoscope.

Quentin's innate enjoyment of life and desire to learn about everything around him, without even thinking about being sick, touched me to the core. When it was time for me to leave, Quentin was sad and so was I. Saturdays have become my day to be inspired by all the joys children bring: laughter, love, intelligence, curiosity, humor—all things they give so freely that make me feel so good.

## A Tender Touch

*By Melissa Shoemake, Staff Nurse*

*Children's Immediate Care Center at Northpoint*

We were just getting under way one Saturday in the Children's Immediate Care Center at Northpoint when a patient with an unusual case walked in. The receptionist quickly sought me out, saying there was a very anxious boy and his father who needed to see me.

It was Matthew, a 9-year-old boy with autism and a patient of the Children's Immediate Care Center at Northpoint. In one hand, Matthew held his favorite toy, Woody, from the "Toy Story" movies. In his other hand was Woody's detached arm, obviously the victim of a terrible accident. Matthew handed me the toy and said, "You always fix me at this hospital. Please, fix Woody."

In the past, Matthew had brought in other injured toys to show us where he was actually hurting. But this time, it was just Woody who was sick. Matthew was fine. Dad said Matthew wouldn't rest until they brought Woody to us for care.

With no superglue to be found—and the center getting busier by the minute—I told Dad I needed time to work on Woody and they agreed to come back later. Meanwhile, I fashioned a gauze sling for Woody and he waited for Matthew to return.

When Matthew returned, he was delighted that Woody was all better. I told Matthew that Woody's arm needed special care and the sling needed to stay on for a few days (giving Dad a chance to carry out post-discharge gluing). Matthew was so excited, repeatedly saying thank you. It was honestly the tenderest moment of my nursing career.

To think that Matthew felt connected and comfortable with us, that he saw his experiences here as positive, and that his confidence in us was unwavering just grabbed a hold of my heart. It was amazing to me that his experiences with Children's (which were not always fun) had influenced him to come to us for something so serious to him. The look of gratitude on Matthew's face will stay with me for a long time.

So many times we don't stop to think about the greater impact we have because we treat "in the moment." Our patients leave, and we often never see them again. Matthew helped me remember why I'm inspired to work with children: because we truly do make a lasting difference in every life we touch. And that Saturday, I knew it for certain.

## A Path Less Ordinary

By Gavin Cloy, former Children's patient

Sometimes, meeting the right person at the right time can shape the course of your life. For me, that person was Physical Therapist Colleen Coulter-O'Berry, and the time was just after my twenty-first birthday.

Two weeks earlier, while on vacation in Colorado, I was horsing around with friends when we decided to jump on a train and ride it into town. It was snowy that day, and when I attempted to jump on the train, I slipped on ice and the train ran over my legs.

After a hospitalization in Colorado, I flew home. In fact, I had only been in Atlanta one day when Colleen called from the Children's Limb Deficiency Center to ask if I was ready to get up and start walking. That blew my mind, and set me on a forward-moving path I continue following today, 14 years later.

When something as catastrophic as losing a limb occurs, you can go two directions, and only one of them is positive. Colleen and the entire Children's team pushed me toward the right path; helping me find my own strength and never letting me feel sorry for myself. It took three years and numerous setbacks before I could walk comfortably on my prosthetics without exhaustion, but somewhere along the way I found the confidence to press ahead and, ultimately, excel.

In those difficult months immediately following the loss of my legs, I never



imagined the doors that would open to me as a consequence of the accident. But during the course of my recovery, I began playing wheelchair basketball, an activity that has become an integral part of who I am. It led to an athletic scholarship at the University of Illinois, where I trained intensively. After graduating in 2004, I made the Paralympics basketball team, traveling to Athens, Greece, to compete. In 2006, I was part of our national team that won a silver medal at the World Championships in Amsterdam. It was an extraordinary experience.

These days, I teach physical education at an elementary school and continue competing both locally and nationally. I am so grateful to Colleen for the inspiration she gave me when I needed it most. In an effort to give back, I visit Children's often, encouraging patients as well as their parents to look for the positive path in their own lives.

My goal is to show them that life is definitely not over and to remind them that there are many opportunities for people who are amputees or paraplegic or have any kind of disability. My hope is that I can be their right person at the right time, as Colleen was for me.

## Why I Truly Love My Job

By Josie Reiter

*Advice Line Nurse, Children's at Scottish Rite*

It happened nine years ago, but I still vividly remember the first time I dialed the 404-250-KIDS number (the Children's Call Center). My daughter had sustained a head injury and, even though I'd been a pediatric nurse elsewhere for years, I was all Mommy that day—upset and unsure. The voice of the Children's nurse was a tonic to my raw nerves. Her knowledge and confidence instantly reassured me my child would be fine.

Today, I'm privileged to work as one of those Call Center nurses, giving advice to parents dealing with everything from fevers and falls to swallowed marbles.

Without a doubt, this is the best job I've ever had. I genuinely love it. Here's why: I know the advice I give is based on sound research and science. The protocol software we use is updated constantly, giving us the most current medical information available. This sophisticated program also takes into account the many gray areas in medicine, allowing rationale for questions that don't have a simple "yes" or "no" answer.

Additionally, Joseph Simon, M.D., Medical Director, is 100 percent supportive and respectful of our work and us as nurses. He responds quickly to our questions, attends monthly staff

meetings to foster information sharing and education, takes our input seriously and adjusts protocols accordingly.

I also find inspiration and satisfaction from helping parents in crisis. Even over the phone, I can feel their entire demeanor change from frantic to relaxed as we talk through the problem. Some situations are truly life-threatening, but most callers just need reassurance and guidance about how to treat their child at home.

Some callers, particularly new parents, are so relieved to talk about their concerns that they call regularly. Those facing a new diagnosis are deeply grateful to find out that we can research the condition for them to help broaden their understanding of it. We don't consider any question or concern to be too small and they're pleasantly surprised when we call back to check on their child.

I'm proud to work for Children's, an organization that values my skills, abilities and professionalism, and one that supports me to provide excellent care to the area's children, families and pediatric practices. I know firsthand that when your child is sick or injured, the nurse on the other end of the phone is a lifeline.

## Story Telling

By Meg Flynn

*Coordinator, Public Relations, The Park*

I'm in the "happily ever after" business; I spend much of my work day telling cheerful stories about patients who defy the odds. Our clinicians make so many miracles happen every day, and I'm just lucky enough to share their stories with the community. Knowing that I work with people who are passionately devoted to every child that comes through our doors is inspiring all by itself, but getting to work with patients who have successfully completed treatment at Children's for a variety of ailments makes my job one of the most rewarding out there.

I understand that "happily ever after," unfortunately, isn't the way that every patient's story goes. And for a while, I shied away from stories of grief or loss.

But all of that changed with this year's holiday cards. Each year, the Public Relations team promotes the Children's Holiday Card program, which raises money for the Children's Aflac Cancer Center and Blood Disorder Service. And for the first time in the history of the Children's Holiday Card program, one of the holiday card artists and a patient at the Children's Aflac Cancer Center, 7-year-old Isaiah, passed away just as we were preparing to send out this year's Holiday Card catalogue.

When we got the news, I reached out to Isaiah's family to ask—in light of their loss—how they felt about his card being included in the catalogue. His mother's response overwhelmed me. She talked about Isaiah's love of swimming, art and cartoons and told me that he loved people. She said he always wanted to donate change when he saw charity boxes at a restaurant or convenience store. In the spirit of Isaiah's love for art and passion for charity, she wanted the card to be included in the program, and she wanted his story to be told.

Isaiah's mom told me that, even though they are still mourning his loss, December will be a hopeful time for her family, because she is pregnant with Isaiah's little sister. One of her last memories with Isaiah was going to an ultrasound appointment with him and finding out that she is due Dec. 15, three days after Isaiah's birthday. His mom invited Isaiah to name his sister, and before he passed away, he told her his favorite name was Nevaeh, heaven spelled backwards.

This year, I'm sending Isaiah's holiday card to all of my friends and family. I can't wait to send well wishes for the holidays and the New Year. But more than anything else, I'm looking forward to telling them Isaiah's story.

## Inspiration By Design

*By Sarah White, Staff Nurse  
Children's at Egleston*

I've been an OR nurse for most of my career, but have always had a passion for interior design. Last year, as part of the Children's Career Advancement for Nurses program, I discovered a part of me that draws inspiration from creating playful surroundings for our patients.

When a co-worker asked if I wanted to decorate our rather antiseptic-looking OR holding room, I jumped at the chance. When children arrived in the holding area, they were often agitated or nervous, as were their parents. My goal was to provide a pleasant decorative distraction to the families waiting for surgery, to make their experience a bit more pleasant.

My first attempt at improving the ambiance of the holding room was in 2005, during the holiday season. I started by bringing in a few teddy bears and Santa hats. After the holidays, I took down the display, but I had this nagging feeling that I had to put up something else in its place. Nothing looks worse than a bare room that was once pretty.

The project was so well received by the families of the children, and by my co-workers, that I decided to take it further—a lot further. Rather than simply adding a few decorative touches, I now transform the holding area into an interactive production of sorts, based on a new theme each month.

Last June, our tropical theme included stuffed birds hanging from the ceiling. Patients were delighted to discover they could reach up, squeeze the birds, and make them sing. Across the room, toy birds in cages could be “awakened” with a clap. August was back-to-school month. Our “Alphabet Zoo” was filled with familiar TV and movie animal characters that could also sing and talk to the children.

Word about the holding room is now out, so some of our repeat patients actually look forward to seeing what the holding room looks like each time. New patients catch a glimpse of the room as they're being wheeled in and almost immediately are distracted from their worries.

Envisioning the monthly themes and finding just the right props are wonderful creative outlets for me. Observing how this happy environment puts entire families at ease during a difficult situation inspires me to improve my contribution each month. It's just one way that Children's goes beyond providing outstanding clinical care to touch our families with genuine comfort and caring.



## The Photograph

*By Roni Mintz, Child Life Specialist  
Children's at Scottish Rite*

From the time Joe Ehlers was young, his family knew he wouldn't live a long or healthy life. Joe had cystic fibrosis, an incurable genetic disease that carries an average life expectancy of just 35 years. Joe's condition meant regular visits to Children's. And, as a child life specialist here, I got to know him well.

For me, and for many of our young patients, Joe was a wonderful role model because he never let the prospect of death get in the way of living. He managed his illness well, attended school, held jobs and had meaningful relationships. As the years went by, Joe grew up and eventually we lost touch. Other names and faces took Joe's place, each child with an amazing capacity for life, each as uniquely inspiring. My personal passion for these patients has always been to make their hospitalization as normal as possible, to bring some positivity to their situation. So when patients leave here and return with tales of going to college or getting married or having a baby, I find it extremely gratifying. I've been at Children's long enough (23 years) to see very sick children grow to live happy, fulfilled lives, thanks in large part to their own outlook and resolve. I cherish

their stories, and they are often a source of inspiration.

I recently got a call from Pam Black, Director of Facilities Clinical Projects at Children's at Scottish Rite, to call a Lisa Ehlers—Joe must have gotten married. He had, in fact, gotten married, but sadly had just died at the age of 33. Lisa said Joe had never stopped living life to the fullest and had fathered their son, now 5. She asked me about a photograph Joe remembered from his teenage years at Children's—one that pictured me, him and several other patients. Joe wanted his son to have the picture because Children's had played such an important and inspirational role in Joe's own life. Lisa wondered if I happened to know where that picture was.

My eyes filled with tears because I was looking directly into Joe's smiling eyes. That photo had hung on my office wall for years, a reminder of the meaning of the relationships we build with our patients. The photo is with Joe's family now, but all I have to do to feel that same sense of inspiration—and capacity for living—is to look into the eyes of a child.

## The Journey from Student to Teacher

*By Lilly Pulko, Staff Nurse  
Children's at Egleston*

My career at Children's started through volunteering. I was a "Baby Buddy," spending time with patients in the NICU when their parents weren't available. The babies stole my heart, as did the NICU staff, and before long, I had enrolled in nursing school. I became a nurse extern in the Children's NICU during my junior year of school.

As an extern, nursing preceptors taught me the basics of time management, teamwork, nursing assessment as well as NICU-specific skills. And once I officially became a nurse at Children's a few years later, my preceptors were my salvation. Having people available to me whose sole job was to teach, help and be a resource made all the difference to me as a young nurse. They helped me transition from student to professional nurse—teaching me advanced skills, how to effectively communicate with other healthcare team members, and how to set appropriate goals for myself in my first year. They really helped me ease into my new role and gave me the confidence I needed to perform at my best.

My preceptors were there to guide me shift to shift, but I wanted more guidance. Through the Children's mentor program,

I was assigned a mentor according to my personality type. I wasn't entirely sure what to expect, but I began meeting with my mentor, Natalie, once a month. We discussed predetermined topics as well as any areas where I wanted more guidance.

The knowledge she shared with me was invaluable, and the support she provided really helped. One day, I went to Natalie, because I was having a very difficult time coping with the loss of one of my patients. She was there to help me deal with my emotions and handle the professional interactions with the parents and other staff. I believe that was the day I stopped calling Natalie my mentor and started calling her my friend.

As I develop my skills and continue to learn more advanced competencies on our unit, it helps to know who I can turn to for support. I am fortunate that all of these wonderful people have made me a better nurse and a better person. Children's has provided me with so many opportunities to grow professionally and personally, and someday I hope to be a preceptor or mentor to others. I can't think of a better way to show my gratitude for all of the gifts I've received.



## Everyday Heroes

By Delicia Lee, Staff Nurse

*Emergency Department, Children's at Egleston*

I recently found myself in the spotlight, being praised as a hero, simply for doing what I'm trained to do. The experience made me think about how each one of us at Children's—regardless of our job—is truly a hero every day. Just because we're not thrust into the spotlight for our work doesn't diminish the profound impact of what we do.

Although I'm a regular at the gym, I just didn't feel like working out that day in May. But my husband pestered me until I relented. Soon after we arrived, a man collapsed on the elliptical machine behind me. At first, I thought he'd tripped. As I got closer, I could see the situation was more serious. The man was on the ground, shaking.

Okay, I thought. Maybe he's having a seizure.

Then, he stopped breathing. I checked for a pulse. Nothing. I could literally see the life leaving his body and knew he was having a massive heart attack.

The gym didn't have a mask, but I began breathing for him anyway. Another gym member, a police officer with CPR training, offered to help. Together we used

the gym's defibrillator to shock the man's heart—without success. We resumed CPR until the paramedics arrived and transported him. Sadly, I assumed the man wouldn't make it.

I'd actually forgotten about the incident when, two weeks later, a woman called to tell me her brother, the man at the gym, David Birge, 47, had come through surgery to bypass six blockages. Doctors credited the CPR I helped give with saving his life, and David wanted to meet me. When I arrived at the hospital, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and three TV crews were there, covering the "hero at the gym" story.

The outpouring of family gratitude and the media spotlight were unexpected and a bit overwhelming. All I did for David was what I would have done for my patients, what each of us at Children's does daily: Give patients the best chance possible. No big deal, right?

Turns out it is a big deal—an enormous deal—to the people we help. Now when I'm at work, I'm inspired to know I'm surrounded by heroes—all the people who work here—because that's how our patients and families see us.

## The Power of the Collective

By Elyse Heidelberg and Karen McCarthy  
*Child Life Specialists, Children's at Scottish Rite*

For us, no two days are alike. One thing never changes, though; we're always looking for the best way to improve the quality of our patients' lives. In Child Life, that can mean a lot of things, from helping our patients and their families cope with chronic and terminal illnesses to facilitating developmentally appropriate play and activities.

Recently, we decided to plan an event for patients of the Children's Aflac Cancer Center and Blood Disorder Services. We wanted to give some of our adolescent patients an opportunity to meet other kids their age in a stress-free environment, outside of the hospitals. Our goal was to help our teen patients meet others who were working through similar medical diagnoses and treatments.

Once we put the word out that we were hoping to organize an off-campus event, help came from all over almost instantly. The Foundation stepped up to help, and donors came forward to offer a box at a Braves game and catering. It took just a few days for our co-workers and peers to help us pull together the perfect event.

Getting a group of teenagers excited about going to a "support group" meeting would have been impossible, but because of the venue and the nature of the event, we were able to offer these patients a fun environment to meet each other. Some of them wanted to talk about their illnesses, some of them just wanted to



make new friends. It was great to see them connecting, because they can offer each other support in ways we can't.

The game was memorable for many of our patients. One patient had never been to a baseball game before, and it was great to see the look on her face as the Braves took the field and the crowd began to cheer. Another patient hadn't been out socially since receiving a tough diagnosis; it was amazing to see him interact with his peers. For us, it was another powerful example of how our co-workers and Children's support us.

Children's is great place to be a child life specialist. Our leaders and our peers believe in the work that we do, and it shows in the things we do for children. When word gets around that people are doing something special for a patient—a prom, a night out with the Braves, whatever it is—people want to pitch in. They want to be a part of improving these patients' lives in every way.

It sounds like a cliché, but the sign in our employee corridor says it all, "Today, you will make a difference in the life of a child." All of our employees are making a difference, and when we all work together for our patients, the impact is unmatched.

# I Only Want to Be With You

By Kevin Skelly

*Former Scottish Rite Medical Center patient*

My wife Kelly and I are just like any other couple with their first child. We marvel at each new sound, movement or expression our precious son makes. We worry about feeding him properly, or if we're using the right ointment on his diaper rash.

But we aren't just any couple. We are both childhood cancer survivors.

What's more, Kelly's doctors told her she'd never be able to have children.

I was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia on my father's birthday in November 1983. I was five years old. Two years into my treatment—which included 18 months of chemotherapy and three years of living with a catheter in my chest—one of my nurses at Scottish Rite Medical Center told my family about Camp Sunshine's Summer Camp, a week-long retreat for children with cancer. While still on treatment, I started attending the camp each summer.

At the age of 12, my Scottish Rite doctors declared me in full remission. Even though I was better, I continued to attend camp each summer so I could see my friends.

I had been cancer-free for three years by the time Kelly was diagnosed in 1995. After discovering a series of bumps on her neck after band practice one September evening her sophomore year

of high school, a trip to the doctor's office revealed that she had non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. By November, Kelly had a port inserted in her upper chest and chemotherapy had begun. She underwent roughly six months of aggressive treatment at Egleston Children's Health Care System and, as a result, her doctors told her she would not be able to have children.

Even though she was in remission by the time school ended for the year, Kelly's Egleston nurses and doctors urged her to go to Camp Sunshine that summer. The last thing she wanted to do was focus on the cancer she'd spent the last half of the year battling, but, reluctantly, she agreed.

I caught my first glimpse of Kelly outside the camp's arts and crafts building. That's all it took. I did everything I could that week to win her attention, even dedicating an acoustic performance of the song "I Only Want to Be With You" to her during the camp's talent show.

Luckily, my efforts paid off, and we began dating. Fourteen years later, we are married, and, miraculously, we welcomed a healthy baby boy to the world in August.

Today, when my wife and I look back at our time spent at Scottish Rite and Egleston, we are overwhelmed with gratitude toward each and every employee. You make miracles—like both of our lives—happen. Thank you for all that you do.



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