

THE UNEXPECTED STOP

By: Peyton Vasquez, Rhabdomyosarcoma Survivor

It was a warm, sunny, beautiful morning. The kind that kids on summer vacation use to ride bicycles and swim, but not me.

Mom woke me up using her urgent voice saying, "Come on Peyt. You don't have to wake up completely. Just wake up enough to get in the car." I reluctantly dragged my blanket, pillow, and games out of bed and plunked into the car because, when I should have been sleeping in past noon like other kids on summer break, I was on my way to the hospital.

I buckled in and grumbled at Mom when she asked if I wanted breakfast on the way to chemotherapy. Because it was irinotecan week, I made some kind of grunting noise that let Mom know I would not be eating for days because my insides felt like they were coming outside my body. She replied, "Okay, I'm getting on the HOV. Lay back until I tell you to smile at the cameras." As usual, I pulled the blanket over my completely bald head and ignored Mom and the gorgeous day that I would be missing.

Mom squawked at me when we were approaching the booth where an attendant checked our car to make sure we had two or more people. In order to take the HOV, more than one person has to be viewed by the person or the camera. I ignored Mom's requests to remove my Indianapolis Colts blanket and let the nice lady or the camera see me because I knew those warnings were ridiculous. "Great! We missed it," she said sarcastically. The second booth with cameras was near. Mom is really starting to get annoyed when she is telling me to smile and show my face and I ignore her. She proceeds to the third and final booth of our 20 mile HOV journey when a police officer waves her over.

"License and proof of insurance ma'am," demanded the traffic cop. "Do you know why I stopped you?"

Mom explains that I am in the back seat covered so I can sleep. She uncovers me so the officer can see that I am in the back seat.

"Ma'am, do you know you cannot be a single rider in the HOV lane?" The officer says questioningly. As Mom explains that I am really there, the yellow vested officer explains, "You cannot dress up a doll and pretend that it is a child in order to take the HOV."

"Ma'am that is my son. He's eight. I know he's a doll, but not that kind of doll," Mom's feeble attempt to convince the cop that I am real is failing. Mom starts repeatedly telling me to move and show the officer that I am a real child. I sit there as still as a statue. She is shaking my knee begging me to move. I don't budge. She gives up when the officer says, "Nice try. I'll be right back."



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CANDLELIGHTERS CCFA

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UPCOMING EVENTS

**Adopt-A-Family
Program**

November - December 2017

10th Annual Margarita Taste Off

March 24, 2018

Lights of Courage Luncheon

April 24, 2018

Support Group Meeting at MD Anderson:

Every Wednesday 11:30 am – 1:00 pm
 MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital
 Pediatric In-Patient Unit
 Ronald McDonald House Room
 For more information call (713) 792-4891

**Support Group Meeting at
Texas Children's Hospital:**

Every Wednesday 1:00 – 2:00 pm
 Texas Children's Hospital - West Tower
 Ronald McDonald's Kitchen – 9th Floor
 For more information call (832) 822-1415

To stay up to date on Candlelighters events, please check our website at www.candle.org and follow us on Facebook at Candlelighters Houston

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Cont. from Cover



At that point, I reach down, grab my blanket, and pull it over my head. I wish I had the words to describe exactly what the officer looked like when I moved. She ripped off her sunglasses in complete disbelief and shook her head like people do in the movies when they can't believe their eyes. It was as if she had seen a ghost or witnessed some kind of phenomenon at a magic show.

She began apologizing. Really apologizing.

She must have realized that Mom wasn't kidding and that I was a cancer patient. I was bald. Really bald. No eyebrows or anything. I was pale. The kind of pale that comes with having cancer. I was skinny. The kind of skinny that comes from days of avoiding any food for fear of it exiting the body in such a way that words cannot adequately describe.

She continues, "I'm sorry ma'am. I am really sorry." I could see it in her eyes. She knew what I

had. She was awakened to the fact that the eight year old in front of her had cancer. No one wants to see a kid with cancer because it is just too sad. Kids aren't supposed to get cancer. The kid she just pulled over had every parent's nightmare. I had cancer.



Mom says, "We're on our way to chemo. We might be a little late. If we're too late, the hospital cancels his appointment. If I could have my things back, we'll get out of the way."

The officer hands Mom her license and insurance card. The look on her face said it all. It was that look. The look everyone gave me when they felt helpless. I could tell she wanted to say something. People usually said, "You'll be alright." Instead, she looked into the car at me and said, "Boy, you do what you need to do today to get better."

I said something like, "Grumble, hrmmmm, grumble, hrmmmm."

When we arrived at Texas Children's Cancer Center, I could not wait to tell everyone about my adventure that morning. I told my favorite nurses, my doctor, my friends, everyone. We all had a great laugh. Who knew that getting stopped by the police would let me enjoy the warm, sunny, beautiful day? I think I needed that little break to know that I was a real boy, not the kind who got to ride bikes and swim, but the kind who was able to fool a motorcycle cop.



CANDLELIGHTERS NIGHT AT MINUTE MAID

In honor of Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, the Houston Astros graciously hosted Candlelighters families for a night of baseball on Wednesday, September 20th, 2017. Candlelighters kids were invited to participate in some on-field action, and had an amazing time! Morgan Carnish, participated in the pre-game ceremony, Trey Thomas threw out the first pitch, Alex Goodman kicked off the game by announcing "Play Ball", and Holt Griffith stole the base.



All of our families had a fantastic night! For some, it was the first outing since Hurricane Harvey, so a huge thank you goes out to the Houston Astros for treating our Candlelighters families, and being such wonderful partners to Candlelighters. Go Astros!



THE SUGAR LAND SKEETERS "STRIKE OUT KIDS CANCER"



The Sugar Land Skeeters hosted its sixth annual Strike Out Kids Cancer event benefiting Candlelighters on Sunday, May 21st at Constellation Field. Families enjoyed an on-field pre-game parade led by 7-year-old Diego Aponte. Diego threw out the first pitch to kick off the game.



The families received game tickets and a complimentary buffet provided by Constellation Energy and the Sugar Land Skeeters. The Skeeters raised over \$2,500 for Candlelighters through a silent auction, where fans bid on the Candlelighters jerseys worn by the players.



Candlelighters is grateful for the partnership with Constellation and The Sugar Land Skeeters. Our families can't wait to Strike Out Kids Cancer again next year!

HURRICANE HARVEY

Even though the storm has passed, thousands continue to suffer consequences of Hurricane Harvey; our Candlelighters families are no exception.

As we began to assess the damage Hurricane Harvey had caused so many of our Candlelighters families, we knew we could not help them alone and quickly put out a call to action.

Thanks to a few very generous donors, we were able to step up quickly to help our families. Over the past month, we have been providing buckets full of cleaning supplies and gift cards for our Candlelighters families, and have been able to help more than 65 families with their immediate needs. We picked up additional donations of supplies and diapers around town, and Heritage Texas Properties delivered toiletries, water, and even dog food to our office to have on hand for families.



The entire process of delivering buckets and having them picked up has been so bittersweet.

Although many families have lost everything, we've gotten the chance to get to know so many amazing, strong, and wonderful families, bringing us closer. They are the epitome of strength and we are grateful to have been able to help in their time of need. Which is what our Candlelighters mission is all about.

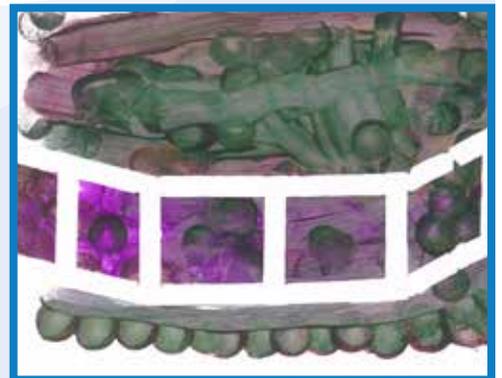
CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR INAGURAL ART CONTEST WINNERS!



Drawn by:
Ella Moore, Age 6
Candlelighters Sibling



Drawn by:
Quinn Moore, Age 4,
Wilms Tumor



Drawn by:
Serena Burely-Spedding, Age 4
Candlelighters Sibling

SUMMER SURPRISES

Every year, the highlight of July is Summer Surprises. With the help of wonderful volunteers and partners, Candlelighters is able to provide a little holiday cheer to childhood cancer patients and their siblings at the hospitals.

On July 19, 2017, Candlelighters and volunteers from **Adam's Angels** spread cheer throughout The University of Texas MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital! We had a great party in the Pedi Dome which included crafts, music, and lunch provided by Adam's Angels. Aside from the huge smiles on the children's faces, the sweetest part had to be dessert. Gorgeous and delicious cupcakes provided by Gigi's Cupcakes!

One week later on July 26, 2017, Candlelighters and the **Pin Oak Charity Horse Show** brought the party to Texas Children's Cancer Center. Since 2012, Pin Oak has sponsored Candlelighters Summer Surprises at Texas Children's. Pin Oak brought its famous horse show hospitality to the party by hosting lunch for the children, families, and medical staff – complete with Pin Oak ponies and recycled ribbons for all! At the event, Pin Oak presented Candlelighters with a donation from funds raised at the annual Pin Oak Charity Horse Show. This year's donation for \$7,500 will go a long way in providing parking to our Candlelighters families.

HUGE thanks to **Houston Relocation Professionals** for holding your toy drive every holiday season! This toy drive supplies the majority of the gifts given out at Summer Surprises. Summer Surprises would not be possible without your generosity! Another special thank you to the volunteers from the **Ole Group at Constellation Energy** for wrapping hundreds of toys, and handing them out at the hospitals, **Gigi's Cupcakes** for providing delicious cupcakes, **Sally and Michael Bosse** for coming up with crafts, and **Brittney Berube Photography** for capturing both days. THANK YOU!





SCHOOL INITIATIVE



CALLING ALL SCHOOLS! It's never too late for a Childhood Cancer Awareness Campaign! We know many school awareness and fundraising campaigns have been postponed, pushed back and cancelled due to recent events, but we all know that Childhood Cancer is something to talk about all year long, not just during September for Childhood Cancer Awareness Month.

We'd like to give a huge shout out and thank you to EA Lawhon Elementary School in Pearland and teacher and childhood cancer survivor, Stephanie Pruitt for holding "**ONE DAY FOR ONE DOLLAR**" for Candlelighters! Students and staff each donated \$1 to turn their school GOLD for one day in honor of children with cancer, and childhood cancer survivors. Their original plan was to hold a week-long campaign, but in a community where 90% of homes were devastated by Hurricane Harvey, they chose to still honor their commitment and held a day to pay it forward. They raised \$540, which covers hospital parking fees for 45 families!

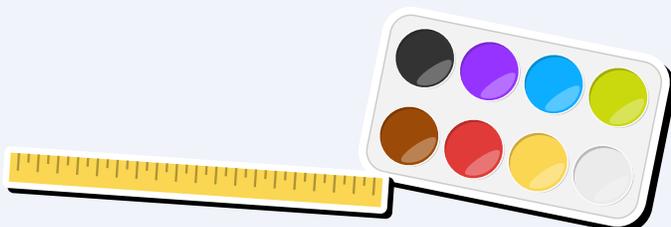
The first thing you see when you walk into their school, is a mural that says "Be Awesome Today." Well, Candlelighters thinks you all are AWESOME! Thank you to all of the staff, students, and parents of children at EA Lawhon Elementary for giving back to families in your community.

Thanks to those schools who have already signed up to teach Kids to Help Kids!

1. Dickinson High School
2. Mark Twain Elementary School (Alvin ISD)
3. Willis High School
4. Sam Jamison Middle School (Pearland ISD)
5. West University Elementary School
6. EA Lawhon Elementary School (Pearland ISD)
7. Leon H. Sablatura Middle School (Pearland ISD)
8. Mitchell Intermediate School (Conroe ISD)



We are so inspired by these groups of kids around Houston! In honor of the 20 most common types of Childhood Cancer, we've set a goal to engage 20 schools around Houston in an awareness and fundraising campaign for Candlelighters – WE NEED YOUR HELP! To learn more about signing up your school for our challenge, please contact our Development Director, Kelsey Tarpinian at kelsey@ Candle.org. Help us get to 20!



2017 CANDLELIGHTERS FUN WALK

Although the 2017 Candlelighters ROYAL FUN WALK was cancelled due to Hurricane Harvey, there are many people we need to thank for sponsoring, fundraising, and donating online to help us STILL raise more than \$100,000 to provide emotional, educational and practical support for children with cancer and their families right here in Houston.

We want to thank the many Candlelighters Family Walk Teams who fundraised in honor or in memory of their children, and our Community and Corporate Walk Teams who relentlessly partner with Candlelighters to give back to families of children with cancer.

Our Top Candlelighters Family Teams are:

1. Ellen O’Neal Fun Walk Team - \$8,213
2. Pirates of the Cure a Being - \$3,550
3. Pirouettes for Peyton - \$2,970
4. Team Blake - \$1,710
5. Team Dina - \$1,500

Our Top Community Teams are:

1. Wheeler’s Walkers - \$6,400
2. Children vs. Cancer - \$1,750
3. Captain Po’s Crew - \$1,700
4. Team Mally - \$1,620
5. Team Tarpinian - \$580

Our Top Corporate Walk Teams are:

1. Constellation Energy - \$40,000
2. Team Weichert - \$6,203
3. Team Woodmac - \$4,150
4. Coldwell Banker United Realtors - \$1,493
5. Central Bank - \$1,240

You can still support the Fun Walk with your donations at www.candle.org.

We can't wait to celebrate next year and make up for lost time, please look for more information on the 2018 Fun Walk coming soon!

With questions regarding the Fun Walk, please contact our Associate Director, Lynn Wheeler at lwheeler@candle.org or our Development Director Kelsey Tarpinian at kelsey@candle.org or the office at (713) 270-4700.



We also need to thank our 2017 Royal Fun Walk Sponsors!

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS



House of Coffee Beans

Jeanine Anderson & The Spa Team

KC Relocation

Primm’s Posse

St. John’s School

713 Juice Bar

A Charmed Affair

Adam’s Angels

Brittany Maddox Photography

Comfy for Chemo

The Greater Houston Astronomical Coalition

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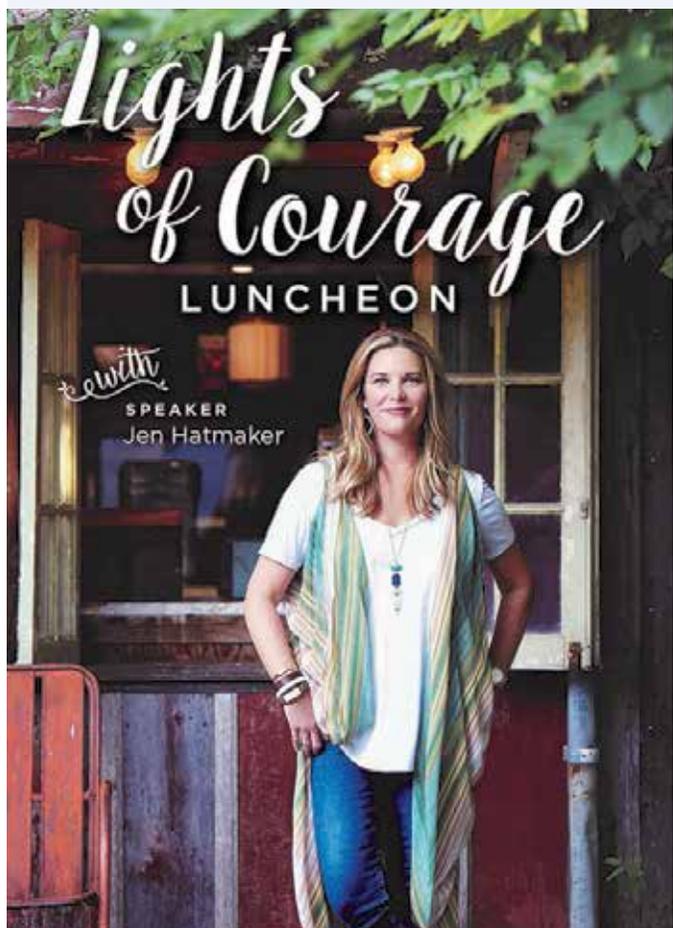
Heritage Texas Properties has been a longtime supporter of Candlelighters. Thank you Heritage for all the support you've given throughout the years! Below are a few words from Janice Ireland, Sales Manager for Heritage Texas Properties.



HERITAGE
TEXAS • PROPERTIES

All of the people (angels) who work with the Candlelighters organization are amazing! They all have such a positive attitude and bring such hope and help to those families who have been devastated by the news of a child with cancer! I am a cancer survivor and know first-hand what it is like to go through cancer treatment and the feelings of helplessness that go along with it! Candlelighters provide emotional support as well as financial support for these families; filling in the gaps where the medical teams cannot. I know it helps these families touched by cancer to know they have people they can turn to for questions, help, and just to know that they are not alone in their battle. Being involved with Candlelighters and having seen the children and parents gave me determination and strength to get up every day and fight my own battle with cancer. Every morning I would say to myself "I am not a child with cancer and I don't have a child with cancer. I will not feel sorry for myself!" The Candlelighters children and their families inspired me through my journey with cancer!

Heritage Texas Properties was first introduced to Candlelighters through Houston Relocation Professionals in 2006. Heritage Texas Properties has participated in the fundraiser walk by providing water at the Fun Walk. My husband Dave and I were able to attend the camp a few years ago for lunch and see for ourselves the fun, beauty, and relaxation provided to the children with cancer, siblings, and parents! It was awesome!! For a few days the kids and families can escape to a beautiful place and just have some fun and be normal! Heritage Texas Properties has also had the privilege to participate in the Adopt a Family at Christmas for many years as well. Anyone who has ever volunteered to help Candlelighters always comes away very blessed!



Save THE Date

APRIL 24, 2018

River Oaks Country Club
1600 River Oaks Boulevard

SPEAKER
Jen Hatmaker

**SHOPPING AND MIMOSAS
LUNCHEON**

RAFFLE DRAWING

LUNCHEON CHAIRS
Meg Earle and Andrea Montgomery Stewart

For sponsorship opportunities and to purchase tickets,
contact Lynn Wheeler at lwheeler@candle.org.



Candlelighters.
CHILDHOOD CANCER FAMILY ALLIANCE

The mission of Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Family Alliance is to provide emotional, educational, and practical support to families of children with cancer.

For more information, please visit www.candle.org or phone 713.270.4700.





save the date!

CANDLELIGHTERS 10TH ANNUAL

Margarita Taste Off

SATURDAY, MARCH 24, 2018

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IN THE
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Kayne Anderson

Energy Funds

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OF ENERGY PRIVATE EQUITY
SINCE 1998

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9TH ANNUAL
Margarita
TASTE OFF

Special thanks to our 2017 Platinum Sponsors

Belmont Village Senior Living
CultureMap
Kayne Anderson Energy Funds
Matthew Whitlock
Alex and Aron Will

For more information regarding the 10th Annual Event—
restaurant participation, sponsorship opportunities and ticket
sales—please contact Kelsey Tarpinian at kelsey@ Candle.org
or (713) 270-4700



Childhood Cancer Family Alliance, Inc.
12919 Southwest Freeway, Suite 100
Stafford, Texas 77477

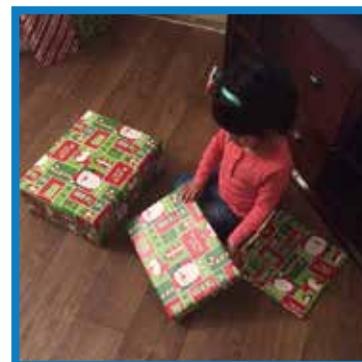
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ADOPT-A-FAMILY

In the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, we at Candlelighters recognize the needs of our families are greater than ever before. There's no better time than now to join forces with us to bring hope and joy to Candlelighters families through our annual Adopt-A-Family for the Holidays program.

Our Adopt-A-Family program recognizes that the diagnosis of childhood cancer affects the entire family and offers help and hope in the holiday season. If you are interested in sponsoring a Candlelighters family, please contact Roxy Gomez at rgomez@candle.org or (713) 270-4700.



Follow us on Facebook at [Candlelighters Houston](#)

Candlelighters' mission is to provide emotional, educational and practical support to children with cancer and their families.



A Special Thank You To
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Candlelighters began in 1989 with two parent support groups from the Texas Medical Center: one at Texas Children's Hospital and one at The University of Texas MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital. The Texas Children's Hospital group sought formal incorporation, and in 1992 Candlelighters was legally formed. In the fall of 1992 they invited the MD Anderson Parent Group to join them and the two organizations merged into one. The Parent Consultant Program was developed to directly meet the needs of families at the treatment centers and to inform them of potential resources. Our programs and services extend beyond the hospital walls with our Family Camp, Adopt-A-Family, Fall Festival, Candlelighters Newsletter and other special events. Over the years, we have learned how critically valuable it is for our Parent Consultants to be able to personally hand parents of children with cancer practical assistance such as a meal pass, parking assistance or gas cards. It is our greatest honor and privilege to bring this type of comfort and hope to childhood cancer families.