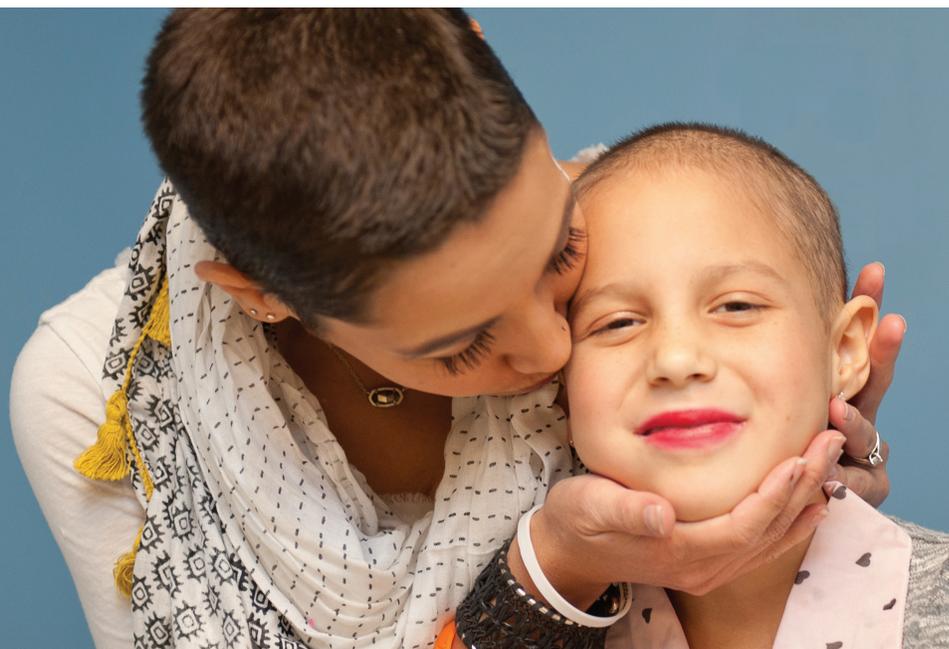


# The Balancing Act

*As told by mom Jennifer*



**G**abriella is six years old. Recently, I had started seeing some bruising on her and she was having a lot of pain. Her back was hurting and I was thinking something didn't feel right inside of me. Everyone was saying, "She's a normal kid and normal kids have bruises." But something in my gut told me it was different.

We moved on July 25th and were all exhausted and on July 26th Gabriella had an appointment. It turned out to be five-minutes long. The doctor said, "What are you being seen for?" and I said, "She has some random bruising and has pain. Today her wrist hurts and I Googled it and I just want to make sure everything is okay." He literally just looked at my daughter and he touched her glands on her throat and he looked at me and said, "Whatever you have been Googling is probably what's going on." My heart just sank. He said, "She looks pale and anemic, so I'm going to prick her finger and if it comes back anemic I'm going to have you go straight to the hospital." Her results came back within two minutes and he said, "You need to go to the hospital, they are waiting for you."

I called my dad and my husband John. It was surreal; they were waiting for us when we arrived at the hospital. They put us in a waiting room at 4:30; by 8:30 she was diagnosed with leukemia; and by 10:30 we were in a patient room upstairs with five oncology doctors standing over us and telling us that Gabriella was going to have chemotherapy for three years. It rocked our entire world.

There is never a good time for anything like this to happen, but truly it could not have come at a worse time. There was a lot of transition already underway for our family, as at that time John and I had recently decided to separate, and then with Gabriella's diagnosis, it was the worst day of our lives.

In the emergency room I was an emotional wreck and I was trying to be strong for Gabriella because she was scared. She asked why we were there and I said, "They are going to see if everything is okay." Gabriella's situation has really brought our family back together. We stopped our divorce, so we can focus on her.

We are now in the third month of treatment. Two weeks ago we were at the hospital Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. This week she is getting two chemo treatments and then she will be admitted for three days; then a break; and the next week three days on again – for a full month. I don't know yet what the next month holds.

John works full-time. I also work and am in my Masters program. That's why we're all over the place and are doing a balancing act right now.

When she was diagnosed, they told us that she would be bald in 2-3 weeks. That was the one thing that made her cry. Over the weeks she just lost some strands of hair and then it stopped falling out. On the way home from chemo she told her dad she wanted to shave her head. She said, "I don't want to shave it for me, I want to shave it for other kids. I want the other girls to know that they are beautiful." We told her, "We'll do it with you."

To see her courage gives all of us courage. She is really wise. Gabriella is an old soul. She is hilarious. She is very spiritual. She's a good sister.

I heard about There With Care when I was in the hospital. After the first delivery from them, I was in tears. We are constantly shuffling kids from here to there. I had stopped making dinners and they delivered some meals to us. That night, I called them and said, "Thank you. My family is sitting around the table right now and they are loving your Crock-Pot meal." That's how it's been with There With Care. I can just make a Crock-Pot dinner and it brings us all back together.

We have so much on our plates right now and There With Care takes a little bit of pressure off of us. They send gas cards to help with transportation and came by yesterday with a delivery of a snack bag. When I go to the hospital, I can just throw a few granola bars and some mac and cheese in my bag and that really helps. There With Care brought bags with some toys for each of the kids too. Those things give everybody just a little bit of joy when there are so many raw emotions in our house right now.

They inspire me, and when I'm out of this, I want to volunteer my time because I know how it makes me feel. There are people out there who don't even know us, they don't know Gabriella and they want to help us. We really appreciate that.

