There’s this big picture when you come in the front door at There With Care, you see this warm, friendly wave. It’s James, and it’s the first thing that hits you…his eyes, his smile. You certainly don’t see James as a 9-year old with cancer, it is much deeper than that.

James was diagnosed with A.L.L. in 2004 at age three. We went through more than three years of chemo. He soared through it perfectly and was in remission. We had to go in every 28 days for blood work and check-ins, but because of suspicious lymph nodes he went in several days earlier. That day was James’ first day of fourth grade and after his labs, we went to Pizza Colore. While we were there, the lab called and said they found “abnormal cells.” James was complaining about going to the doctor, with a slice of pizza in each hand. “This is stupid, why do we have to go?” He got in the car with his two slices of pizza and begrudgingly we went to the hospital.

As we waited, I was thinking, “Why is this taking so long?” Then, when the doctor came in, my heart sank to my feet. He had a fat thick folder in his hand that looked a lot like our chart. And so it began all over again.

James was going in to get his new chemo port put in and his friend Caleb came. The boys were doing all kinds of silly things in the holding area of the operating room. Nurses were laughing, he was still wearing his t-shirt from the day before, and I remember the nurse asking if his friend wanted to walk him back to the OR. His friend put the yellow sterile suit on, hat over his head, and they two of them went marching back together. They let Caleb stay with him until they put James on the table.

The day he relapsed I was thinking: “How am I going to manage this as a single parent?” I had two other kids. Spending every day, all day in the hospital, you want to be there for your child. I felt like that is where I needed to be, but there was so much to get done at home and siblings are often forgotten. They needed me, too. There With Care was there to make sure that life happened, even when I wasn’t able to be there.

No one knows why this late relapse happened. James’s course of chemo was extremely aggressive and he became septic. He had no resources, no immunity left to fight back. Everything unraveled in a matter of hours and he was gone. I miss him every second – of every day.

Now James is The Greeter at There With Care. Sometimes, when it’s closed, I come by and peek in the window; I know he’s there and he’s a part of the lives of so many people who work there, who volunteer, and who are there for the families they serve. He’s the gateway, and I’m really grateful he’s a part of their world. And that they never forget him.