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**HALLOWEEN
COSTUMES
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**AUTUMN FAIRS
AND FESTIVALS
GUIDE**

Women's Health

**FRAMINGHAM MOM
FIGHTS FOR HER FAMILY**

**HENNA ART EMPOWERS
CANCER SURVIVORS**

**HOW A LOCAL MOM TAKES
HER WEIGHT LOSS SERIOUSLY**

*Voted Best Parenting Publication in North America
2004, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2010*





Welcome

I can still remember the phone message that a friend left on my answering machine.

"Jen, I'm fine, I'm at UMass, and you can call me back, but I'm fine." I immediately knew that she wasn't fine. How could she be? She was in the hospital.

My heart stopped as I walked across the floor to dial her back on the phone, my mind started thinking, *It couldn't be a bad car accident because she sounded calm on the phone.* The walk across the kitchen floor took only seconds, but it seemed endless, and as I dialed I thought that whatever she needs, I'm there.

"Hi, it's me," I said with all the strength I could muster, chanting in my head, Please be okay; please be okay. "Are you okay?" "Jen, I'm fine, but I'm in the hospital - I have leukemia." That day, my world changed. Someone I

was close to and loved had cancer.

As friends, family and co-workers came together, we all joined in her fight to battle cancer.

Whether it was helping to babysit, making dinners, visiting her in the hospital or joining together to pray and comfort each other, we did everything we could to not only support her, but make her battle with leukemia as easy as possible on her and her family.

I had known Carla since college - we both went to school in Worcester and our husbands were in the same fraternity. Carla had always been a friend who was just there for you no matter what. She was easy to be around and always willing to listen and share. That never changed during her battle with cancer. She died in 2006, but her memory lives on in her daughter and husband and all of those who love her.

Out of her struggle, an organization called Carla's Champions was born, and each year members of the group get together to support the Light the Night Walk in Worcester and other walks around the country.

Carla was so grateful for all those who reached out to her - it spurred her on during her battle.

As you read through our Women's Health issue this month, you'll read about a woman who donates her time using Henna art to turn a person's battle with cancer and the after effects of chemotherapy into beautiful artwork.

You'll also read about a community banding together to help former Framingham teacher Kris Burke, and her family battle cancer for more than a decade as they struggle financially. Kris has always been the one who others leaned on, but through this experience,

she shares how thankful and grateful she is for the outpouring of support.

Melissa Shaw of Millbury lost more than 100 pounds in the last two years and is a mother of three. She has turned her weight loss experience and expertise into a career - she's now a Weight Watchers leader in the area and an avid runner who is hoping to help change other people's lives.

Holistic Health Coach and Yoga Instructor Lisa Mair shared recipes and tips as she helps others learn to be healthier through meditation, yoga and nutrition.

Women's health is a huge topic to cover, but the overwhelming theme through those featured this month is that, as women and mothers, we need to remember that while we take care of others, we need to take care of ourselves most importantly.

These women inspire us with an inner strength and drive to not only stay healthy for themselves, but for their families. We all want to take care of our children, but these women are champions for both their children and for themselves.

I hope you are as inspired as I am by their stories, so please share what has inspired you to make your own health a top priority. Email letters and comments to editor@baystateparent.com, and we'll include them in our next issue.

Jennifer

Jennifer Lucarelli, editor

MEET THE COVER MODELS

Kris and Skyler Burke

AGES 5 1/2 AND 44, FRAMINGHAM

Family: Her family includes Ben, her husband, and her daughter, Skyler

What was it like doing the cover shoot? Skyler was excited to get out of school early and go to the shoot, so that made it extra exciting. The shoot itself was pretty cool, very friendly, peaceful, easy-going. I had brought wigs and wore a bandana for the first part of the shoot, but then I took it off- it was liberating.

Where do you find inspiration? My daughter Skyler is my inspiration. Her smile always brightens my day...her youth, vigor, eagerness to find fun, her imagination. We play all of these imaginary games she makes up-it's great to remember being young and

losing yourself in that.

I also find inspiration through nature-today coming back from the court house, I was thinking about how cruddy I was feeling and things going wrong. Then, I took a deep breath and looked at the trees and the sky with big billowy clouds forming. It reminds me to breathe and remember that there's a lot more going on than what we are. Inspiring.

What advice would you give others? Every day is really a gift and I try to find the good in every day that comes because I know that I've had bad days and good days, and one day it could start going downhill so fast. Every day is a gift, and I have to find inspiration,



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beauty and happiness in just being alive. The beauty of being alive is what we forget with everything else that goes on in our lives. Enjoy the kids while they're young and fun. As a fifth grade teacher I saw just how fast they grow up.

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Keeping Kris STRONG

BY jennifer lucarelli



It was like any other morning. When Kris Burke stepped out of the shower, she wrapped a towel around herself to dry off and started to get ready for her day. “As I wrapped myself in the towel, I felt a lump in my breast,” she says. “I went to the doctor, and they tested it. When they called with the results and said I had to come into the office, I knew it was cancer.”

That was in 2001 and at the time, Kris, now 45, lived in San Francisco. She had a lumpectomy and went through “hard-core” chemotherapy and radiation treatment. She was dating her husband Ben at the time.

“As soon as he heard about the diagnosis, he was right there for me,” Kris says. “He has been through everything with me – he’s amazing.”

Kris and Ben got married three years later and immediately wanted to start a family. They tried everything including in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and intrauterine insemination (IUI) after her first battle with cancer. “I had wanted to keep my ovaries, so I could get pregnant,” she says. “Nothing worked – we tried everything.”

The doctors say they wanted to do a hysterectomy, so she made an appointment thinking there was no way she was pregnant.

“I called the day of the hysterectomy to tell them I was pregnant with Skyler,” she says. “Once you give up, then you get pregnant – that’s what everyone says.”

Skyler was born in 2006.

After Skyler was born, she had a pain on her right side.

“I thought it was because I was carrying so much stuff around including Skyler,” she says. But the doctors found masses in her liver. The cancer was back.

By that time, Kris and her husband had relocated to Massachusetts and she had treatments at Dana Farber in Boston. She had grown up in Massachusetts and throughout the treatments, she was able to teach fifth grade at the Framingham Public Schools.

“I was able to go to work while I went through treatments,” says Kris. “The kids and staff at school were great – they really supported me and understood if I had bad days or was losing my hair.”

To make her cancer a teaching lesson for the kids, she wore crazy wigs. “I wore blue, purple and pink wigs, so the kids would feel comfortable around me,” she says. “We had fun with it.”

After four years as a teacher, Kris lost her job and with it her health care through the school system. “I would have been a tenured teacher after four years and one day of school working, but I was let go at the end of my fourth year,” she says. “We chose to use my husband’s health care, but it was extremely expensive, and it would have been better at the time to have used the school’s COBRA plan after I left the school.”

Now after 12 years of battling cancer, Kris and her family are on the brink of losing everything she and Ben have worked so hard to build.

“They could lose their home,” says Lori Greene, a family friend who is working with those who love Kris to get the word out to raise money. “She keeps thanking everyone for helping, and I keep wondering where Oprah or Ellen are to just make this better for the family.”

In September, Greene says Kris’ family filed for bankruptcy. The past medical bills were wiped out, but come January, the high deductible on Ben’s insurance will kick in, and the bills will stack up again. Her disability is about to run out as well, so even with Ben’s income, they will not be able to afford their mortgage payments.

“I’ve done the most extreme treatments in an attempt to get rid of the cancer,” Kris says. “I had thought about stopping the treatments because the cost is so high, and it would leave my family in such a bad financial situation.”

She asked others what they thought, and finally her social worker gave her a different perspective.

“She said your family would rather have you here longer than not, so you may want to do everything you can to beat this,” Kris says. “So, I’ve decided to continue treatments.”

Kris says that it’s important for people to always seek out advice and don’t be afraid to ask for new perspectives. “One of the best things I’ve done is to be open to other people’s perspective and keep asking questions,” she says. “I also think it’s important for you bring someone else to a doctor’s appointment – you can’t remember everything, so you may also want to write down things that the doctor says.”

Kris says that she has good days and bad days.

“On my bad days, Skyler knows that I have to stay in bed, so she’ll come and hang out and want to play Crazy Eights or just be with me,” she says. “She started kindergarten this year, and she’s had some separation anxiety, but we’re dealing with that with the help of her teachers.”

The teacher suggested Skyler bring in photos of her mom that she can keep in her backpack. “She’s afraid I’m not going to be here soon,” Kris says. “So some days she has to stay home, but we’re trying to encourage her to go to school.”

In Her Words....

When we asked what it is like battling cancer, she says, “It sucks – knowing that you have a stupid disease, and it’s not going away. But you can’t focus on that every day. It’s important to find beauty and inspiration though... otherwise you could just dwell on the disease. It’s scary. I think about all of the people around me who are affected by the disease. I worry about how Ben and Skyler are and how they’re going to be as it progresses. I could keep going on and on about these thoughts that aren’t the happiest and you have to find a reason to fight through every day. You don’t feel good most of the day when on chemotherapy and radiation – I just put on a happy face. One of my faults is that I worry about how everyone else is feeling – I don’t want anyone to feel uncomfortable or sad.”

Throughout her own struggles dealing with cancer, Kris has been so touched by others who have helped in any way.

“I was always the one to help everyone else, so it’s hard for me to accept help,” she says. “I don’t know how to say thank you enough, how deeply grateful we are for all of the help we’ve received. It has really touched us and means a lot. I don’t think every community would have come together this way. I’m glad we moved to Framingham.”

Family and friends have put together a website www.KeepingKrisStrong.org so people can donate to help them reach their goal of raising \$25,000 a first step to help them to keep their home. There is also a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/groups/keepingkrisstrong/) where you can donate. Checks can be mailed to Keeping Kris Strong, Middlesex Savings Bank, 235 Old Connecticut Path, Framingham, MA 01701.

Greene says if you can't offer financial help, there is something you can do – the family needs help with meals, transportation and other resources.

Greene shares these ideas for helping:

- If 12,500 of us gathered up the loose change in our pockets or purse and donated \$2, we'd raise \$25,000.
- If 5,000 of us decided not to stop at the coffee shop today and donated \$5, we'd raise \$25,000.
- If 2,500 of us brought our lunch to work instead of ordering it from the deli and donated \$10 we'd raise \$25,000.
- If 1,250 of us donated \$20 instead of taking our kids out for ice cream after school today, we'd raise \$25,000.
- If 500 of us (only 500 of us!) donated \$50 instead of ordering take-out for their family tonight, we'd raise \$25,000.

And if 250 of us decided we could live without those new shoes and donated \$100, we'd raise \$25,000.

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