



In the summer of 2003, I was working in the Sacred Heart doctors building, enjoying my pregnancy with my first child, Anna. It was the summer that Sacred Heart opened their new children's hospital. As I looked out the window from the office, I thought how wonderful it was to have this children's hospital in town for all those sick kids.

On March 2nd, 2007, one month before the due date for our second child, my daughter Anna became one of those kids. The ER doctor said the words no parent wants to hear. "Your daughter has cancer."

That was the moment our lives were forever changed, and so we began this journey called childhood cancer. The shock and pain of our daughters illness was immediate, but so was the support from American Childhood Cancer Organization Inland Northwest (ACCOIN).

We were given a new patient bag filled with the necessities a family needs that has come to the hospital unprepared for a long stay. We were given books about childhood cancer, and gift cards for the cafeteria for meals for my husband and I. ACCOIN provided snacks for the families, so when the cafeteria was closed, and Anna was so hungry from the steroids, she could have something to eat.

Since Anna's diagnosis we have received gas cards, grocery cards, gift certificates for a parents night out, and tickets to the Nutcracker Ballet. ACCOIN has started a support group at Sacred Heart for the parents to share our stories and encourage each other as we struggle through this journey. They provide units of blood through the blood bank, which helps families whose children need frequent and expensive blood transfusions.

ACCOIN also hosts an annual summer party and Christmas party for the families to have fun together and be somewhere other than the hospital where nobody stares at a child with a bald head or scars on their bodies.

But most of all, since ACCOIN is a parent to parent organization, we can count on each other for moral and spiritual support. When you are thrown into a world of unfamiliar doctors and nurses, it gives you hope to speak to people who have walked in your shoes.

I am so proud to say that Anna has been cancer free for nearly 19 months now. We are looking forward to the end of Anna's treatment on May 9th, 2009, and we know that ACCOIN will be there to support us for the years to come, guiding us through the trials that come with having a child in chemotherapy for 2 1/2 years.

I encourage you to think of Anna and the other children that are patients on the pediatric oncology floor of Sacred Heart Children's Hospital. These ACCOIN kids are tough, but kids can't fight cancer alone!