

## "How Did my Sister Get Cancer?"



The blistering Texas sun was moving high in the sky as I visited with Scott Simmonds beside the archery range at Peaceable Kingdom Retreat for Children this summer. “My grandparents had a grandson, my cousin Charlie, who was born with a heart condition,” he shared. “They learned first hand how exhausting and stressful long hospital stays and multiple medical procedures can be for the whole family. They had the vision and were fortunate enough to have the means to create a place of respite for special children and families. I’m proud to continue their labor of love.” And what an impressive labor that is! Now operating as a 501 (c) (3) non-profit entity, PKRC, located just outside of Killeen, hosts camps year-round in partnership with groups like Scottish Rite Hospital, Texas Commission for the Blind and Any Baby Can. Four years ago after the Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation joined the Any Baby Can family, we found PKRC (with help from great supporters Dennis and Kandace Eakin who own businesses in Killeen) as a new location for Camp Grey Dove, our respite camp for siblings of children with cancer. The goals of Camp Grey Dove are to help these siblings make new friends, feel safe and supported, develop courage, acceptance and empathy, and benefit from self disclosure and self understanding.

After my visit with Scott, I dropped by the main lodge for a glass of ice water. A group of campers was just finishing their afternoon therapeutic session. (See questions from another session in the box to the above right.) One courageous 10 year old volunteered to explain the poster her group had hung on the wall. She pointed to the backdrop, a big ocean with some calm patches frequently interrupted by rough waves. Then she showed the small boats various members of the group had drawn in. Her boat was a life raft. She shared that in the group discussion earlier that afternoon, she had begun to think about things that give her support for her life raft...her diary, pictures of her brother, baking cupcakes with her grandmother, a special friend “who understands.” “It is important to put things on your raft that keep you afloat,” she explained.

As I drove back to Austin, I couldn’t get that image of her life raft out of my mind. I began to think of all the clients, children, siblings, parents and grandparents that make up our ABC family. What does each one need on his or her life raft? How can we make sure that each family returns to calm water? Then I thought of you, our partners, supporters and donors. It is through you that ABC is able to provide so many lifelines of hope to vulnerable families who find themselves in the rough parts of the ocean. You are the invaluable cargo on our life raft. You keep us afloat. Thanks so much for your partnership in this important voyage.

Fondly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ellen".

Ellen Balthazar  
Executive Director  
Any Baby Can