



Gwen (front right) and her family

Gwen's Story: Back in School and Loving It

Gwendolyn loves kindergarten, tap dance, and ballet. Having spent months in the hospital, she used to think she'd be a nurse when she grew up. Now that she is back in school full-time, however, she has decided instead to become a teacher.

Gwen was only two months old when she was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Her parents, Brian and Cathleen, were setting up a birthday party for her older sister when they noticed that Gwen's face looked swollen and bruised. They cancelled the party and raced to the E.R.

"We were told they'd have to keep her in the hospital," recalls Brian. "We figured two weeks in the hospital, then she'll be an outpatient, we'll be fine."

The hospital introduced Gwen's parents to Marla, a Friends of Karen social worker, who described the support services the organization could offer. "I said no thanks," Brian recalls. "I wasn't thinking that we were a family in need."

But when he learned that Gwen would need 48 weeks of treatment, Brian reconsidered. Friends of Karen stepped in to help pay for the lodging, gas and meals that allowed both parents to stay close to their sick daughter. Due to complications, the 48 weeks turned into a year and a half. Marla made sure that the family was part of Friends of Karen's gift program, which provided birthday and holiday presents for the two girls.

"That was just amazing," says Cathleen. "The kids enjoyed that so much, it really made them feel special."

There were rough stretches. Gwen spent weeks in the pediatric ICU with pneumocystic pneumonia, followed by seizures. With her lungs weakened from the pneumonia, she weathered a four-month bout of respiratory syncytial virus, a common infection in children that can be serious when there are other health issues. "We almost lost her," says Brian.

"Friends of Karen is not a one-time 'thank-you-we're-done' organization. They're there for your child, for your family, throughout treatment, for as long as it takes."

(continued on page 6)

Did you know...?

- **Motor vehicle injuries are the number one cause of death among children in the U.S. Cancer is number two.**
- **Every day, 46 children in the U.S. are diagnosed with cancer.**
- **Average age of a child diagnosed with cancer: 6**
- **Average number of new families each month who seek Friends of Karen's help: 25**

Memories of My Sister

By Elvis E. Herrera

My perspective when talking about the horrid illness that afflicted my sister, Alejandra, and, by extension, my whole family is unique. But then, any sibling of a terminally ill child is in a position that seems incomprehensible to most people, making every such story a unique one.

My sister suffered from rhabdomyosarcoma, a relatively rare cancer of the connective tissues. She was diagnosed in 2007 when she was ten. Due to the process of visiting and applying to private boarding schools in various states, I was completely oblivious to her condition and to the numerous hospital visits that resulted from her diagnosis. But, looking back on it now, I knew something was wrong the whole time – I just didn't know it would be as devastating as it was. I guess one could call the unpleasant feeling I felt every time I saw the undercover tumor developing in my sister's foot a brother's premonition.

After her diagnosis, I was enrolled in a private boarding school, an unimaginable privilege then and now. This, though, left gaps of about two or three months without a glimpse of my family: a double-edged sword.



Alejandra and Elvis Herrera

(continued on page 2)



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Sheila Petersen (1938-1990)

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Friends of Karen is a not-for-profit organization.
All contributions are tax-deductible to the
full extent of the law.



From Our Executive Director



Little things matter. Recently, I was speaking with a Friends of Karen dad. Teary eyed, he described what it meant for his family to receive the boxes of school supplies that Friends of Karen sent to his children. He said that he couldn't believe what was in the boxes. It was going to save him so much money and time, the latter especially being in short supply while his young son was in treatment for leukemia. But more than that – and this is what really made him choke up – he said that he was overwhelmed by the fact that people cared. Strangers wanting to help with a basic need like school supplies, so his two daughters would be prepared to go back to school in the fall.

I realized then that the everyday things that we often take for granted sometimes mean the most for our families who are struggling with the critical illness of their child. Another example is Dunkin' Donuts gift cards (for a cup of coffee during those long days in the hospital) or the postage stamps (so they can easily send us bills that need to be paid) that we include in the GO (get organized) bag that we give to each new Friends of Karen family. Like the school supplies, these items, about which we may not give a moment's thought, say to our families that "we care" down to the smallest detail. They say, "You are not alone." They say, "You have friends who you may not know that want to help you 'keep it all together' in a very difficult time."

That's what Friends of Karen is about. Our licensed, compassionate social workers offer guidance and emotional support that every family member needs when coping with a child's illness. And there are all of us – donors, volunteers and good friends – who make up the village that cares for our children and families, down to the everyday things that keep life on as even a keel as possible. Every contribution to Friends of Karen matters, whether school supplies, gift cards, birthday and holiday presents, cash contributions and more. Your generosity and caring impacts our children and their families more than you'll ever know.

Take good care,

Judith Factor

My Sister from page 1

I cannot say that I was present during most of my sister's suffering or that I spent countless nights at Newark Beth Israel Hospital caring for her as she underwent chemotherapy. I can only recount the deep helplessness I felt when I returned home from school during her rigorous treatments. The unfortunate circumstances I was in forced me to witness a fast-paced version of my sister's deterioration.

The years during which my sister fought cancer were very dark for my family. They brought upon us a lot of suffering. Suffering which would have absolutely decimated my family if not for all of the support that we received from the blessed strangers who came to our door and helped us along the way. I honestly do not know how my family could have weathered such a storm without the monumental help provided by many organizations.

Friends of Karen I remember out of all of these organizations because they truly lessened the blow of my sister's cancer on my family. They sent a beam of light when things were looking their darkest. They, through monetary and emotional support, gave us the willpower we needed to keep living our lives in the wake of disaster. They allowed us a Thanksgiving and a Christmas when we thought that they were out of the question. They gave us hope.

Unfortunately, my beloved sister lost her battle with cancer in January 2010, leaving my family and me with very mixed feelings. Though I am glad that my sister will not suffer any longer and know her presence will never leave us, I will miss her dearly for the rest of my life.

Note: The writer is 17 years old. His sister was 13 when she died.

“Because of Friends of Karen...I could concentrate on my son and be there for him.”

Jemar's Journey

On a lovely spring day in 2008, Jeffrey got a call from his four-year-old son's daycare provider. “She said Jemar is crying and complaining that his left leg hurt,” Jeffrey recalls. “That call changed the way I understand life.”

A fast trip to the pediatrician turned into a nightmarish trip to the hospital, multiple lab tests, and the next day a diagnosis of acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

“I was absolutely certain that he was going to die because I had a friend back in Jamaica who died of leukemia,” says Jeffrey. “I was lost, confused, alone, angry, and totally uneducated about this disease that was trying to take my son from me.”

While Jemar began a rigorous course of chemotherapy, Jeffrey gathered information about helpful organizations, “but I didn't think they'd do any favors for me.” Then, three weeks, one seizure and two emergency room trips later, he met social worker Beth who explained how Friends of Karen could help. “I did not believe it, I couldn't understand why Friends of Karen cares,” Jeffrey says. “But I told Jemar, ‘I think we have an angel.’”

Jemar tends to be a shy, quiet boy whose passion is reading, but during his illness he frequently stated that he just wanted to be “a normal child.” Now he has that wish: in late July he completed chemotherapy, went to Camp Sunshine (a sleepaway camp in Maine for children with a life-threatening illness and their families) with his dad for a week, and has just started second grade.

“Because of Friends of Karen, I didn't have to concentrate on how the bills were killing me, I could concentrate on my son and be there for him,” says Jeffrey. “Friends of Karen kept their word about everything. There's not enough of me to give back for all they did for me and for my son. That's why I tell everyone to give to Friends of Karen, because of how they gave to us, and that's how it will be for the rest of my life.”

But Jeffrey did find one way: he spoke at the kick-off dinner for our annual Journey of the Heart, a bike ride through the Berkshire hills over a September weekend. He decided to ride, too. Each rider commits to raising at least \$2,500 for Friends of Karen. “But I didn't have a bike,” Jeffrey says, “so another rider donated one for me! I train every weekend, and now I'm just waiting for that bike ride.”



Jemar and his dad, Jeffrey



Jim Witt

Weather or Not, Jim Witt Shines for Friends of Karen

Since the age of five, Jim Witt has been interested in weather, but “in those days, there was no guidance counselor,” he says. He went to Adelphi University on a baseball scholarship and majored in Biology as a pre-med student.

“The last day of college I decided I didn't want to be a doctor,” he says. “So I went to the guidance office and asked about a job in Biology somewhere. ‘The last day? Are you kidding? All the jobs in Biology are gone!’” he recalls being told. The only science-oriented job available was teaching Earth Science.

So he began teaching at Lakeland High School (Shrub Oak, NY), where he also organized a Weather Club. The club became internationally renowned, and later Jim took a job as the weather forecaster at WHUD 100.7. “In February, I'll be there 40 years,” he says. “I'm the only guy who was there when the station started.”

In 1986 Jim created a calendar with long-range forecasts and photos of the Hudson Valley. Three thousand copies were printed and it was popular, but WHUD's owner wanted to do something different. He knew Jim loved kids from his teaching days, and Jim knew Sheila Petersen, Friends of Karen's founder. They decided to revise the calendar to be a fundraiser, and created the Hope for Youth Foundation “just to raise money for children who've been dealt a lousy hand in life,” Jim explains. Friends of Karen became the first charity on their list.

Nowadays, WHUD prints close to 20,000 calendars, still with stunning photos of places in the Hudson Valley and featuring the forecast for every day of the year. But now, the calendar costs \$10.00 “and every penny goes to the children” helped by the Hope for Youth Foundation. Last year, over \$100,000 was raised to support children's charities.

“We just love Friends of Karen,” Jim says. “Now I know we're giving the money to the right people.”

To order the special editon Friends of Karen 15-month Hope for Youth 2012 calendar, contact Maureen Mullen at 914-617-4050 or maureenmullen@friendsofkaren.org

Thanks to all our friends for making our events successful!

A few of our recent community events



TD and Lisa Fitzgerald host the Mardi Gras event.

Fitzgeralds Do Mardi Gras in Westchester

Lisa and TD Fitzgerald held their fifth annual "Thomas D. Fitzgerald III Memorial Fund Mardi Gras", honoring their nine-year-old son who died of brain cancer. The evening included a live DJ, auctions, buffet dinner and dancing, and a portion of the proceeds was donated to Friends of Karen.

Bright Lights and Big Music at the Harris Family Foundation

A star-filled evening was the backdrop for the fourth Annual Charity Auction and Concert held at the home of Long Island Advisory Board member Elliot Harris and his wife Lisa. Hundreds of guests enjoyed music, food and fabulous raffle items that raised over \$12,000 for Friends of Karen.



Elliot and Lisa Harris hosted a gala evening.



Players round a turn on the polo field.

No Horsing Around at Polo Benefit

Two teams competed to a cheering crowd at a polo match to benefit Friends of Karen. Played at Gardnertown Farm, the annual event is hosted by Erica and Duncan Huyler, whose son Peter died of leukemia at age two. The Huylers are Board members of Friends of Karen, and donated over \$30,000 raised at the event.

A Hole in One with the O'Connors

Sponsored by Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, the fifth Annual Erin O'Connor Memorial Golf Tournament raised nearly \$50,000 for Friends of Karen. The event is in honor of Eileen and Michael O'Connor's daughter who died of a brain tumor at age 13.



Shannon, Eileen, Kathy and Mike O'Connor hosted the golf tournament.



Gwen Salmo (Friends of Karen Events Manager) receives a gift from Bud von Heyn and Phil Masi, President and Treasurer of the Somers Lions Club.

Somers Lions, Hear Them Roar

A long-time supporter, the Somers Lions presented Friends of Karen with a check for \$5,000 at their annual spring dinner.

A Rock & Roll Cruise-In

The third annual charity bash hosted by LI Super Sport Team (Oyster Bay, NY) featured classic American cars, live music, food and fun for the hundreds of attendees.



Long Island Super Sport Team President Arthur Funk and Friends of Karen's Patricia Conway present the Charity Choice Trophy to John Rothmeier.

Goldman Sachs Packs 'Em Up

Members of Goldman Sachs' Jersey City and Manhattan offices spent a day packing and wrapping 40 boxes of supplies as part of our Back-To-School program.



Volunteers from Goldman Sachs on the front steps of Friends of Karen.

First Data Thinks Ahead

In addition to dozens of participants in the 2011 Walk/Run for Friends of Karen fundraiser, First Data held a one-day flower sale that raised almost \$4,300. They hosted a planning meeting for the 2012 Walk/Run, where team leaders were presented with a plaque honoring their year-round efforts in support of Friends of Karen.



Patricia Conway and Nancy Mariano (FOK staff), Laura Diaz, Karen Whalen, Deborah Stellakis, Leanne Boller, Laura Gallagher, and Melanie Mouzakes (FOK staff) at First Data.



"Friends of Karen helped to keep our heads above water when we felt as if we were drowning."

- Molly's dad

FUNdraising For Children



(l to r) Declan shows the money he earned for Friends of Karen; Sean with some of the gifts he collected for Friends of Karen children; Friends of Karen mom Jessica hugs her nephew Zachary who stepped in to help while his cousins were in the hospital.

Penny Harvest Reaps Big Rewards

Students at six New York City schools have contributed their energies to raising \$2,475 for Friends of Karen children. We warmly thank the students of P.S. 1 (Manhattan), P.S. 5 (Manhattan), P.S. 63 (Queens), P.S. 69 (Brooklyn), P.S. 91 (Bronx) and P.S. 138 (Bronx) for the excellent results of their commitment!

Declan Declines an iPod

First grader Declan Minnich was saving for an iPod®, doing extra chores to earn money and making loomed potholders to sell. But one day, “I felt like I didn’t need the iPod® so much, that the money could help sick kids more.” So he donated his proceeds to Friends of Karen. Thank you, Declan, for your thoughtfulness and generosity!

Two-year-old Philanthropist Knows How to Share

Games, picture books, art sets, a kite – these are some of the gifts that Sean Condon received when he turned two. The birthday party was a fundraiser for Friends of Karen, and guests were asked to bring items on our toys wishlist. Thank you, Sean, for your kindness in helping our sick children and their siblings!

Cousin Pitches in at Blood Drive

Jayden is a Friends of Karen child who has sickle cell disease, requiring transfusions and a bone marrow transplant (his two-year-old brother was the donor). His parents spent weeks organizing a blood drive and bake sale, but the day of the event both boys were back in the hospital. So their cousin, Zachary, stepped in to help make the event a success. Thanks for your enthusiasm, Zachary!

Breezemont Camp Reaches \$400,000 for Friends of Karen

For over a quarter century, Breezemont has held a Swim-and-Walk-a-thon to raise money for Friends of Karen. This year, they passed the \$400,000 mark for the life of this annual event. Thank you, JR, Priscilla, Rachel and all you HAPPY campers!

Pequenakonck Elementary School “Shares and Cares”

PQ (North Salem) donated \$1,000 to Friends of Karen, presented at a special assembly. Thank you, PQ, for your wonderful “caring and sharing” community spirit!

Comsewogue’s Got Talent

Talent galore was on stage at the 24th annual “Night for Jason”, a talent show produced and directed by students at Comsewogue High School, which raised \$7,100 for Friends of Karen. Thanks to all the students for your talent, energy and effort!

“Thank you for all Friends of Karen does to help. We are very fortunate to be supported by strangers who care.”

– Benjamin’s mom



Some of the hundreds of Breezemont campers and staff who support Friends of Karen.



Dennis Tandler of the North Salem Central School District helps Cubby with the “check” from PQ.



Regional Director Nancy Mariano accepts check from students Daniele San Roman, Nicholas Guma and Kristen LaCherra and Student Advisor Dana Urbinati at Comsewogue High School.

**Win a new
Acura for
only \$20??**

Yes! Acura of Westchester is raffling off a two-year lease on a 2012 Acura TL, and 100% of each raffle ticket you buy goes to support children with a life-threatening illness and their families.

Tickets are \$20 each or 6 for \$100 or 15 for \$200.

The winning ticket will be drawn on Wednesday, November 16, 2011. Winner need not be present to win, and will be notified by phone by November 18th. Winner must be at least 21 years of age to claim the prize, and must have valid insurance coverage. Approximate value of the prize is \$15,000.

Call for tickets at 914-617-4042. We'll mail them right out to you and you could be the winner!



Honoring the lives of the children who have died since March 2011

- Andy, age 17
- Bryan, age 11
- Carly, age 10
- Christian, age 20
- Ciara, age 10 months
- Dana, age 19
- Diego, age 9
- Dominique, age 20
- Edwin, age 14
- Edwin, age 17
- Elizabeth, age 7
- Hanna, age 20
- Hector, age 15
- Jaheda, age 15
- Janiah, age 9
- Jessica, age 6
- Juan, age 4
- Juan Jose, age 13
- Kelvin, age 13
- Krishna, age 6
- Leniyah, age 5
- Leo, age 5
- Lucas, age 4
- Magdalena, age 2
- Mark, age 13
- Mayerline, age 16
- Rovaldy, age 11
- Savion, age 12
- Shemar, age 9
- Tanner, age 3
- Tatiana, age 4

A Decade of Dedication

The tenth anniversary on October first of Friends of Karen’s Long Island office is a milestone in our work to reach families wherever they live in the New York Metro area. With five staff (including two social workers), the office covers Queens, Nassau and Suffolk counties. Before the Long Island office opened, staff based at Friends of Karen’s Westchester headquarters in Purdys met with families from the entire Tri-State region.

“Friends of Karen realized that 30% of our families were coming from the Long Island and Queens area, so there was a strong need to have staff locally,” recalls Nancy Mariano, Regional Director.

Nancy knew about doing positive things for families; before coming to Friends of Karen, she worked with the Suffolk County Special Olympics for 20 years, including 13 years as Executive Director. Opening the Long Island office presented several challenges, including how to let families and others know what Friends of Karen does. One of the solutions was to create an advisory board, and Nancy affirms that this was a top accomplishment during the office’s first decade. “Our Long Island Advisory Board is a corps of 50 leaders from business, health care and elsewhere, who literally roll up their sleeves to make a difference,” she says. “They are amazing, they work so hard to get Friends of Karen’s name well known!”



Nancy Mariano

They achieved a key goal in raising awareness about Friends of Karen. “The community knows who we are now,” says Nancy. “We never turn away a family, and to do that we need many kinds of support: financial, volunteers, gifts of goods and services. Every gift is so important.”

The Long Island office is located at 21 Perry Street, Port Jefferson. Phone: 631-473-1768.



“We never turn away a family, and to do that we need many kinds of support: financial, volunteers, gifts of goods and services. Every gift is so important.”

Gwen *(continued from page 1)*

Still, Gwen completed treatment before she turned two. Ten months later she relapsed. In October 2007 she received a bone marrow transplant. Friends of Karen returned to help the family as Gwen began eight months of isolation to manage the transplant – successfully.

“Friends of Karen is not a one-time ‘thank-you-we’re-done’ organization. They’re there for your child, for your family, throughout treatment, for as long as it takes,” says Brian. “It’s not ‘Here’s five hundred dollars, that’s it.’ It’s ‘Let us help make your holidays brighter.’ It’s ‘Your child’s birthday is coming up. Here’s something special for her.’ The organization is there to help in big ways, but also there to help in small ways. That’s what makes it a great organization.”

As for Gwen, she’s keeping up with her kindergarten class. She is small for her age, but she devours picture books in the *Biscuit* series and loves playing with her sister and brother. “Overall she’s happy,” says Brian. “She does everything that a normal six-year-old child can do – and that’s amazing.”

Friends Of Karen Current Events/Coming Attractions

The Sounds of Motown: Live at the Capitol Theatre



Friends of Karen's Spring benefit definitely was not "The Same Old Song." "Mercy, Mercy Me", partygoers spent "All Night Long" having a good time! NBC Correspondent Kate Snow was the gracious emcee for this "Unforgettable" event which honored the Children's Hope Chest.

Emcee Kate Snow, event chairperson Sharon Weiner and Executive Director Judy Factor "Get Ready" to party.

The Walk/Run for Friends of Karen at the LI Marathon



On April 30 and May 1, 220 walkers and runners helped raise over \$110,000 for Friends of Karen families. Friends of Karen received the trophy for fielding the largest team for the second year in a row.

Some of the many participants on the Friends of Karen team.

Golf Outing at Meadow Brook Club



Friends of Karen hosted the ninth Annual Golf Outing at Meadow Brook Club (Jericho, NY). Honoree John Koumpourlis brought many new friends to Friends of Karen and the Sause family's story was inspirational to all.

(l.) Honoree John Koumpourlis with his parents, Nick & Despina Koumpourlis. (r.) Friends of Karen child Catherine Sause with parents Regina and Greg.



Tribeca Rooftop Gala



More than 300 guests enjoyed our summer Tribeca Rooftop gala. The entertainment included "American Idol" star Robbie Rosen, who performed his original song "Make it Through," for eight-year-old Friends of Karen child Mayra, who has battled leukemia. The evening's honoree, Michelle Paige Paterson of EmblemHealth, could not attend, so her husband, former New York State Governor David Paterson, spoke on her behalf. For more photos go to: www.facebook.com/FriendsOfKaren

"American Idol" star Robbie Rosen sang to Mayra

In Celebration of The Adina's Angels Fund



Paula, Justin & Adina

How do you go on after the unimaginable happens? In February 2010, Paula Berkowitz's husband, Steven, died of non-smoker's lung cancer. A few months later, Justin, her 20-year-old son, died unexpectedly. Then, in June 2010, her 17-year-old daughter, Adina, lost a four-year battle with acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

At a time like that, most people would be consumed by their own pain. But Paula is not most people. She determined to make something good come out of all this by helping others. Friends of Karen had helped the family throughout their ordeal, so Paula established The Adina's Angels Fund to "give back" to Friends of Karen.

Paula will be hosting a fundraiser with Friends of Karen for **The Adina's Angels Fund on Wed., October 26** at Gotham Comedy Club, 208 West 23rd Street, in New York City.

"There are so many who have experienced the world caving in, never to have their family togetherness again," says Paula. "I am looking forward to a great laughing event with you in honor of Adina's Angels to help support Friends of Karen in this endless fight for critically-ill children and their families."

For ticket information go to www.FriendsOfKaren.org and click on the photo of Adina and Justin.

Being Thankful for Togetherness

Picture the traditional Thanksgiving: extended family gathered around a festively decorated table that is full of platters of lovingly prepared food. For families caring for a child with a life-threatening illness, Thanksgiving may be a sandwich and a cup of coffee in a hospital cafeteria. But you can change that: your donation of items of food or supermarket gift cards gives a family the chance to have a wonderful holiday meal and, more importantly, spend time together.

To help, please contact Gwen Salmo at gwensalmo@friendsofkaren.org or 914-617-4051.

MBIA volunteers with some of the dozens of Thanksgiving "baskets" they donated, packed and shipped.



There may be more events in your area. visit www.FriendsOfKaren.org/events



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Holiday Adopt-A-Family Program – You can make a difference

Every child looks forward to the holidays, no matter their age or health.

Many of our families are struggling to pay for medicine, transportation to and from the hospital, and other things critical to the care of their sick child, leaving little for holiday gifts let alone time for shopping. Help us fulfill a child's holiday wish list through our Adopt-A-Family program and put smiles on the faces of children who often have little to smile about.

You can purchase one gift or several gifts on a child's wish list, it's up to you. And if you don't have time, make a cash donation and we'll do the shopping!

To help, please contact Denise Tredwell at denisetredwell@friendsofkaren.org or 914-617-4052. What better way to celebrate the spirit of the season than by giving to a child?



Juliana unwraps a wish list gift.

For more information on all that we do, visit our website

www.FriendsOfKaren.org

or write to

info@FriendsofKaren.org

"Thanks a million for making our Holidays such a happy time. We enjoyed the gifts so so much! The hard work you put into preparing it for us is very greatly appreciated. We thank you all at Friends of Karen from the bottom of our hearts."

– The Linder Family