It is hard to imagine that at less than a year old, Roselia battled a rare form of liver cancer and has undergone a liver transplant. Her infectious smile and giggling are in sharp contrast with the difficulties she and her family faced in a short time.

Soon after birth, it was discovered Roselia had liver cysts, and when she had her first surgery attempting to remove them, doctors discovered most of the cysts were inoperable and she would need a liver transplant. Then, scans and pathology tests revealed the cysts contained cancerous cells called hepatoblastoma. Her father, Leo, was a match for Roselia, so he donated part of his liver for the transplant.

“Fear consumed me at that moment she was diagnosed,” her mother Rachel said. “I’ve lost several family members to cancer and all I could think about was ‘the what ifs’ and how this would affect the four of us and my extended family.”

Rachel was connected to Friends of Karen because she had mentioned in passing to the oncology nurse that before every hospital visit they left the house an hour early just to look for street parking. They were parking on the street because paying for a parking lot had become a challenge since they came to the hospital several times a week and New York City parking can range from $30 to $50 a day.

Rachel called to see what help was available and she was soon meeting with Friends of Karen social worker Beth. Beth started helping by reviewing their monthly budget, since they were now living on one salary as Rachel left her job to care for her family.

Friends of Karen conducts this review as part of a comprehensive assessment with all families with a seriously ill child, because this major life event puts them at risk for financial hardship. Beth’s assessment identified that the parking expense was just one of several critical concerns. The family’s health insurance had been through Rachel’s job, and that meant they also needed help with their monthly COBRA insurance premium, as well as other illness related expenses.

The assessment also covers any emotional struggles the family might have, and Rachel asked for help speaking with Roselia’s toddler sister, Liana, about all the major changes in the family’s daily life. Friends of Karen sibling support specialist Melissa brought great peace of mind to the family.

“I was thinking how Roselia’s cancer would affect all of us and it’s been an immense relief having Melissa to coach me on the best ways to speak with Liana about what was going on,” Rachel said.

Rachel readily admits it was tough at first to accept the help, but she sees how it has enabled her to worry less and spend the time she needs with her family. Friends of Karen even helped the family keep up holiday traditions they thought would have been impossible.

“I never thought the sight of wrapping paper would bring me to tears, but Friends of Karen thinks of everything,” Rachel said. “I was so happy we could celebrate the holidays, because there was no way I’d have had time to shop for Thanksgiving or Christmas, and they provided all we needed. Friends of Karen is an answered prayer.”
Our Mission
To provide emotional, financial, and advocacy support for children with life-threatening illnesses and their families, in order to help keep them stable, functioning, and able to cope.

Founder
Sheila Petersen (1938-1990)

Headquarters
118 Titicus Road, North Salem, NY 10560
(914) 277-4547

Long Island Office
21 Perry Street, Port Jefferson, NY 11777
(631) 473-1768

New York City Office
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FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“What is the Essence of Life? To Serve Others and to Do Good.”
— Aristotle, 2,300 years ago

Dear Friends,

Among the many things I am most proud of at Friends of Karen are our volunteers who dedicate over 4,500 hours of service each year. Both in our Long Island and Westchester offices, we are blessed with volunteers of all ages who devote their time and talents to supporting our ill children and their families in the most amazing ways. Whether packing holiday gifts to surprise the children, planning a special fundraising event, decorating lucky shamrocks for our annual St. Patrick’s Day sale, addressing remembrance cards that our social workers send to bereaved families, making “Birthday in a Bag” gifts for each child, serving on our advisory boards, and through a myriad of other wonderful efforts, volunteers are cherished members of the Friends of Karen team. They have been since the very beginning when our founder Sheila Petersen mobilized members of the community to help Karen and her family more than 40 years ago.

Recently, I asked Rae, a frequent volunteer in our North Salem office, what motivates her to devote so much of her time to Friends of Karen. She told me, “Volunteering provides me with a sense of purpose. A purpose that makes a difference in someone else’s life as well as my own.”

The truth is that our volunteers have an enormous impact on our ability to provide support for our children and families, and they serve an especially important role as Friends of Karen ambassadors, spreading the word in their own community about who we are and the needs of our families.

I happened upon this quote that seems so fitting now. “Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in.” The Friends of Karen community is a caring one, filled with remarkable people who choose to devote their time, talent and treasure to helping hurting families caring for a seriously ill child.

We honor our precious volunteers in April during Volunteer Recognition Month and all year long. Displayed in our offices are signs that say “We Love Our Volunteers,” and we really mean it!

With thanks for your help,

Judith R. Factor

P.S. There are lots of opportunities to volunteer in all sorts of ways. Please contact our volunteer coordinators to find out more, Denise Tredwell (914) 617-4052 in Westchester, or Rebecca Plant (631) 473-1768 ext 303 in Long Island.
In most families, there is some sort of order — a hum of a daily routine, a way of doing things that makes sense and brings comfort. When a child is diagnosed with a serious illness there are changes. Lots of them. A family’s sense of safety and familiarity of home life can be quickly swept out the door when they are reeling from the news and trying best to adjust to the “new normal.”

The sacrifices for a family may be monumental or seemingly small. These sacrifices include changes in living situations, missing the presence of caregivers, donating blood or bone marrow, or missing out on playdates or going to the community pool on a hot summer day. Siblings are not immune to carrying the weight of all they must give up, sometimes with confusion or resentment, but always lightened with love. Love is the first word that comes to mind upon meeting Rebecca, seven, and her four-year-old brother Justin, and their parents Diane and Graig.

Upon learning of Justin’s diagnosis, their mother Diane was immediately concerned with the well-being of both her children. She wondered how she would ever explain cancer to Rebecca. She recognized the needs of her children, but also acknowledged that she had to be the mom and wasn’t equipped to be a therapist as well. She asked around and searched for support but couldn’t find anything that met the needs of her family until she was referred to Friends of Karen by her oncologist.

Friends of Karen provided the family with a social worker and sibling support specialist. This support gave them a sense of relief and helped tremendously. Rebecca receives home visits bi-weekly from the sibling support specialist who provides emotional support and illness education through art therapy, play, books and games. Rebecca looks forward to the visits especially when Justin joins in at the end and they create beautiful art together with lots of stickers. During one of these visits Rebecca shared her heartwarming and honest point of view on being a sibling of a child with a serious illness.

**What are three special things about you?**
I like to sing. I’m a very good singer, my favorite song is “Let it Go.” (Sings “Let it Go”)
I have a little brother Justin and I’m a good big sister. I’m good at drawing — I can do cute drawings of cats. Can I say 4 things? I’m great at doing cartwheels!

**What do you like best about being a big sister?**
I like playing with him. We love playing “Hide and Seek.” He loooves when I play with him — when I walk in the door he says “Rebecca! Play with me!” He always wants to play because he doesn’t go to school like me, but sometimes I have to do my homework!

**How do you show Justin that you love him?**
I give him hugs and we play outside. We snuggle on the weekends. I love him because he is special.

**How does he show you that he loves you?**
He hugs me and says “I love you” and he always wants to be with me.
Friends of Karen Gala 2019 at Guastavino’s in New York City. The evening sparkled with inspiring stories and energized fundraising. Pictured (left to right) are our honorees, volunteers PK Klein and Richard Klein; and Patricia Vance, president of the Entertainment Software Rating Board.

GinaMarie Napoli organized her volleyball team — The Jaspers at Manhattan College — to raise funds for Friends of Karen in September during Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. GinaMarie is the sister of “Super” Sophia, who we helped when she had a brain tumor.

Friends of Karen’s Journey of the Heart Bike Tour Team, strong and mighty, helped raise over $185,000!

Avery is one of 950 children that had their holiday wish list filled by friends like you through our Adopt-a-Family program.

Friends of Karen received a donation on behalf of the LI Marathon. Pictured is Michael Bauer, FoK Race Director, Corey Roberts from Race Awesome, Nancy Mariano, FoK Long Island Regional Director, and David Feldman, FoK LI Advisory Board member.

Friends of Karen’s Long Island Advisory Board pictured with member and esteemed guest speaker Dr. Jeffrey Lipton, Director, Hematology/Oncology and Stem Cell Transplantation Cohen Children’s Medical Center of New York.

Volunteers from Hampton Bays High School who manned 2 water stations supporting Friends of Karen’s Walk/Run Team and thousands of others at the Hamptons Marathon in September.

Would you like to hold a fundraising event?
Contact Gwen Salmo at GwenSalmo@FriendsofKaren.org or (914) 617-4051.
On Long Island, contact Rebecca Plant at RebeccaPlant@FriendsofKaren.org or (631) 473-1768.
The summer of 2013 before Leah started school was great, filled with activities and no signs of an illness. Shortly after school started, my precious Leah, age five, felt sick, and was diagnosed with Leukemia.

My mind was at ease feeling confident that Leah would be healed, then suddenly I panicked wondering how we were going to pay the bills. Leah was going to get better, but how can I take her home from a hospital visit if there is no home to go to? How can we get home if we no longer have a car? I was thoroughly overwhelmed by the thoughts about the future.

While at the infusion center, someone referred us to Friends of Karen. They said Friends of Karen assists families with children fighting cancer or another life-threatening illness.

Making the call instantly gave me a resounding sense of peace and calm. I spoke with Friends of Karen social worker Rhonda. She was pleasant and reassuring that Friends of Karen was here to help. All my time was dedicated to caring for, not only Leah, but also for her little brother, Mike. They are one and a half years apart in age.

Friends of Karen was right there for us, putting things into motion long before we knew what we needed. There was no time to plan a Thanksgiving dinner, and no time to shop for presents. Friends of Karen sent us a Thanksgiving meal through the Feed-a-Family program, and my kids received presents on Christmas. We are so thankful to everyone that participated in the holiday Adopt-a-Family program.

We’re now back to our first normal. The kids are back to fighting over who gets the front seat and whose turn it is to play with the Nintendo Switch. I’m back to work full time, and Leah is doing well and loves playing Pokemon and watching Anime cartoons.

Thinking back to her illness I can see that all the medicine saved Leah, and all the things Friends of Karen did, like helping to pay our bills and providing the support we needed, saved the health of the family. For anyone going through something similar, I encourage you and urge you to make the call and allow Friends of Karen to become a support system you can rely on.

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**Why I am a Committed Supporter of Friends of Karen**

"Friends of Karen is a relatively small and local organization that does so much to help critically ill children and their family’s at the most difficult and bewildering time in their lives.

By visiting Friends of Karen in North Salem, I was able to meet the tireless and dedicated staff and learn exactly how the donations which they receive are used. I saw rooms of gifts being readied for camp, back-to-school, birthdays and holidays for so many ill children and all their siblings. I learned from one of the social workers about the emotional support they give to the children, their parents and siblings when they visit these families.

There are many reasons that I support Friends of Karen, the foremost being the dedication and real commitment I have found in all the wonderful people I have met there. They really care and they make a huge contribution to the well-being of so many local families."

— Bette Greenwald, Fishkill, NY
Supporter since 2009

"There are many reasons that I support Friends of Karen."
Cancer doesn’t give you time to adjust to a new normal

Sa’Ran Shares her Family’s Story

I will never forget that day in October 2019. My twin sister called. She was at Advanced Radiology with my 17-year-old son Nazear. I needed to meet her there. I was told the swelling in his neck may be a symptom of Lymphoma and I immediately took him to Yale-New Haven Children’s Hospital. I heard the dreaded words, “Nazear has cancer.”

The next few weeks felt like a tornado. As a single mother, everything is your responsibility and in your control. Not this time. Suddenly everything was out of my control. I had to take an unpaid leave of absence from my job, withdrew from my graduate program, withdrew Nazear from his first year of college and relocated my younger son Christian temporarily to live with my sister. All my focus had to be on Nazear.

On chemotherapy days, we know what we’re going to get. I know Nazear is going to feel sick. He will feel tired and lose his appetite. Cancer impacts your ill child’s health, but it also attacks the financial and emotional health of all the family members as well. What I didn’t realize is how quickly a serious illness can wipe out all of your savings within a few weeks’ time. I met with our hospital social worker Katie. I was sobbing, unable to breathe. I was worried about how I was going to pay my bills when Katie said, “We’re going to call an amazing organization, Friends of Karen.”

“Friends of Karen is the take charge organization we needed.”

Friends of Karen is the take charge organization we needed. My car was two days away from being repossessed when I met Friends of Karen social worker Rhonda. Our refrigerator was nearly empty. I felt helpless, yet Friends of Karen was proactive in helping to meet the needs of my family, both financially and emotionally. Friends of Karen always seems to call when we’re having a rough time. When Friends of Karen creative arts therapist Jane is working with Nazear, in most cases it’s the only visitor other than family that comes inside the house due to Nazear’s fragile immune system from the treatment. Illness can be very isolating for a young adult like Nazear.

Cancer doesn’t give you time to adjust to a new normal, but Friends of Karen was there to stabilize our situation and even help us to experience moments of joy. Our family enjoys singing and we are so thankful for the karaoke machine we received through their holiday Adopt-a-Family program. Friends of Karen made everything easier. They helped cover so many everyday expenses so we were able to stay comfortably in our home and feel relief from the stress of how to provide for my family. My son Nazear also expresses his thanks to Friends of Karen for relieving his mom of the stress and worry of how she was going to take care of us. Our family mantra is “fight hard” and we encourage anyone going through something similar to stay in the fight! Thank you to all the staff and supporters of Friends of Karen.
GUARDIAN OF HOPE
Give HOPE all year long!
Bring critically ill children and their families the HOPE they deserve all year long. As a Guardian of Hope, you Donate Monthly. With your help, children will receive the emotional support they need and the tools to find hope and joy in each day. Each month, you will help families with daily living expenses such as food and heat or mounting medical expenses such as co-pays, hospital travel and lifesaving medication to bring them hope and comfort in their time of darkness. Visit our website for more information or contact GabriellaDisisto@FriendsofKaren.org.

SHEILA PETERSEN LEGACY
OF GIVING CIRCLE
Leave your imprint to benefit future generations.
Naming Friends of Karen in your estate plans will continue to impact the lives of critically ill children and their families well into the future. When you include a bequest in your will or trust, you create a legacy that continues your compassionate support for years to come. Visit our website for more information or contact JudithFactor@FriendsofKaren.org.

BACK TO SCHOOL
Help our children and their siblings start the school year with new backpacks, school supplies and $25 clothing gift cards. A list can be found on our website or contact DeniseTredwell@FriendsofKaren.org.

HOLIDAY ADOPT-A-FAMILY
PROGRAM
You will be matched with a Friends of Karen child or children and can purchase one or more items on their wish list. What better way to celebrate the holidays than by putting a smile on the face of a sick child or sibling? Visit our website or contact DeniseTredwell@FriendsofKaren.org.

HELP FEED OUR FAMILIES
Help parents provide healthy regular meals for their family. Gift cards in the amounts of $25, $50, $100 are much needed from American Express, Visa, Mastercard, Shoprite, Key Food, Stop & Shop, Walmart and Target. You can mail gift cards to Friends of Karen, 118 Titicus Rd., North Salem, NY 10560 or Friends of Karen, 21 Perry Street, Port Jefferson, NY 11777.

BIRTHDAY PROGRAM
Every child looks forward to their special day. Help support this program so that birthdays remain happy occasions even in the midst of illness. To make a donation, visit our website or contact DeniseTredwell@FriendsofKaren.org.

Ways to help

SAVE THE DATES!

Walk/Run for Friends of Karen at the LI Marathon
Friday-Sunday, October 2-4, 2020
Eisenhower Park, East Meadow, NY

Friends of Karen Open House and Brick Dedication
Thursday, June 11, 2020
118 Titicus Road, North Salem, NY

Erin O’Connor Memorial Golf Tournament
Monday, July 13, 2020
Salem Golf Club, North Salem, NY

Journey of the Heart Bike Tour
Saturday-Sunday, September 12-13, 2020
Heritage Hotel, Southbury, CT

Adina’s Angels Annual 5K Walk in the Park
Sunday, October 4, 2020
Rockland Lake State Park, Valley Cottage, NY

Mamma Rosa Italian Dinner Party
Monday, October 5, 2020
Mamma Rosa Ristorante, Somers, NY

Gala 2020
Wednesday, October 21, 2020
Guastavino’s, New York City

For more information about these and other upcoming events and programs, please visit our website at friendsofkaren.org/events
“Friends of Karen has allowed me some stress relief with the resources provided. We are extremely grateful for the wonderful Friends of Karen family.”
— Avery’s Mom

When you have finished reading this newsletter, please share it with a friend.

Celebrate a Special Friend

Mother’s Day is just around the corner and a brick contribution is a great way to celebrate this and other special occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, graduations and more! Best of all, your brick order comes with a small replica keepsake brick with the same message, perfect for displaying.

Don’t miss out! Brick orders are due no later than April 27, 2020. For more information visit our website or contact GabriellaDisisto@FriendsofKaren.org

4” x 8” brick for a $250 contribution.

1. Complete the reply form and mail your contribution in the enclosed envelope.
2. Order online at friendsofkaren.org

We invite you to join us at our Friends Open House and Brick Dedication on June 11, 2020.
RSVP to Gabriella Disisto at (914) 617-4047 or email GabriellaDiSisto@FriendsofKaren.org.
For a contribution of $250, consider giving a brick in honor or in memory of a special friend or loved one.
These bricks will be placed at Friends of Karen headquarters in North Salem, NY along with others included in the Pathway of Compassion and Hope we dedicated in 2019.

Follow us on:  
Text “FRIENDS OF KAREN” to 22828 to join our email list and stay current on all our programs and activities.