

In 1997 I began my work as a Best Buddy, after taking part in the very first training program and being one of the first "graduating class." Since then, I have experienced seven different patients and families. The ages of my patients have ranged from infancy to 8 years. There have been many similarities in the families. All parents are worried, most are weary, some are angry, all just want the very best for their child. The children have all been dear to my heart. Some have been very sick and on the unit for a long period of time, some have breezed through the transplant with few complications and a very short stay.

The one constant that I have learned is that there are no constants. Every family and every patient have different things they need and desire from a Best Buddy. C.J.'s family needed my constant attention and love. Now, two years after their return home, I still feel a part of their family. Katrina's family only needed occasional visits the very short time she was on the unit. Some Moms need a break while I play with or sit with their child, other parents won't leave, but seem to enjoy a little conversation. Some kids cheer when I come in and are eager to play, others just want to sit quietly, maybe watching tv while the grown ups talk.

Whatever I have done with and for the patients and families I have been lucky enough to work with over the past 2 years has helped me to grow as a person and taught me so much. From the Best Buddy side of the equation, I believe this program is invaluable. It's meant to be an open-ended gift for the families and patients of whatever they need and it is a gift of learning, growth, and commitment for the volunteers.

Kathy, Best Buddy Volunteer