

Getting as Much as You Give

The little girl was dancing and singing a song about her “long golden hair and beautiful fingernails.” Melanie Chapman couldn’t help but laugh and clap at the little girl’s exuberance and her own joy at seeing the six year old, bouncing on her bed and belting out her song, “blissfully unaware of the IV tubes in her arm and the fact that she didn’t have a wisp of hair on her head because of her latest round of chemo treatments.”

Melanie had stopped to compliment the pint-sized “Britney Spears wanna-be” on her bright new nail polish while on one of her weekly visits as a volunteer in the oncology ward at Children’s Mercy Hospital. The little girl excitedly cried, “Let me tell you about it,” and jumped up on her bed. And Melanie found, as happened so many other times with so many other children, the impromptu entertainment session brightened her own spirits.

“Telling this story always makes me smile. But even after a day that makes me cry, I can’t imagine not being a volunteer now,” said Melanie, who began volunteering five years ago as her own children grew up and went out on their own. She chose Children’s Mercy, because she had “an easy rapport with kids, a thankfulness for life’s blessings and a desire to share those blessings with others in need.”

Melanie recalled how much she loved her very first position at Children’s Mercy working at the information desk. “I often became someone’s first impression when they entered the hospital, uncertain of where to go and worried about their child. When I could answer their questions and let them know I cared, I could see the appreciation and relief in their faces.”

Today, Melanie finds working in the oncology ward extremely rewarding, but sometimes very sad. As a change of pace, she looks forward to the first Wednesday of each month when she says you’ll find her and a small band of volunteers “wheeling the hospital ‘Art Cart’ into different clinics for children awaiting treatments, spreading out our art supplies and painting or gluing with the kids while they make special, sometimes very funny, art projects.”

They had no idea how much the simple cart and silly creations were appreciated until one day, “as we rolled the ‘Art Cart’ into one of the clinics, the nurses cheered our arrival. What a great welcome!”

Melanie says many of her fellow volunteers feel, as she does, that “While you may start out thinking you’re going to help someone else, you end up finding you get so much back yourself, you almost feel selfish. The people you help often enrich your life, too.” People like her young friend, the entertainer.

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