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Making A Difference

By Jenn Borjeson

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Cancer. Just the word brings fear into the heart of whoever hears it. Unfortunately, the chances are high that at some point in each of our lives, we will be affected by cancer. We may suffer from it ourselves, or we may have a friend or a loved one diagnosed with it. No matter what the situation, it's terrifying to have cancer be a part of your life.

Whether you've been affected personally by cancer or not, you probably wish you could help those who have been. If you had a chance to offer support and encouragement to a cancer patient, to make an immediate and positive difference in their lives, would you jump at it?

Meet Laura Armstrong, a woman whose father died of pancreatic cancer in 1989. The years passed and Ms. Armstrong joined an online support group for women who had given birth in August of 1999. One of the women in her group was going through chemotherapy treatment for breast cancer. This struck close to home for Ms. Armstrong and she decided she wanted to do something nice for her friend, to encourage her throughout her treatment. After her treatment was over, she let Ms. Armstrong know how much the support had meant to her, and she told Ms. Armstrong that she had thought of her as her "chemo angel". Ms. Armstrong suddenly had an idea – in August of 2000, Chemo Angels was born!

Chemo Angels is a web site (www.chemoangels.com) that gives visitors to it an opportunity to become an angel to a patient undergoing treatment for cancer. The service is provided through postal mail (and sometimes e-mail), so they will accept both volunteers and patients from all over the world. The web site consists of an application page for both volunteers and patients. Patients range in age from babies to elderly folks, and despite the name "Chemo Angels" patients can be going through any stage of cancer treatment.

There are three ways to volunteer as an Angel. A Chemo Angel supports their patient by sending cards and small gifts a couple of times per week. Gifts don't have to be extravagant and/or expensive, but can be such items as bookmarks, candles, stickers, magnets, books, snack foods – it can be kept simple or can be as creative as you like. Another way to volunteer is to be a Card Angel. Card Angels stick to sending cards to their patient, and often include items that can fit into a card such as bookmarks, stickers, inspirational poems or stories and the like. The third way to participate in the Chemo Angel program is by becoming a Special Assignment Angel. "Special Assignments" are sent via e-mail to all who sign up. Any Angel can submit their patient to the Special Assignment group.

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These special assignments consist of patients going through a particularly tough time, a death of a patient or patient's loved one. They also consist of birthday lists of all patients being e-mailed to the Special Assignment Angels, who can then choose which assignments to respond to. When you volunteer to be a Chemo Angel, you can choose whether you'd like to be a Chemo Angel, a Card Angel, or a Special Assignment Angel – or you can choose all three!

Before you can become an Angel, you must read the rules and guidelines provided on the web site. Taken directly from the web site, "Being a Chemo Angel is a long-term commitment that should not be entered into lightly." Some of the reasons listed on the web site for not becoming an Angel are having your own health problems or caring for someone with major health problems, expecting a major life change (new baby, move, etc.), the financial burden might be too great, or having a personal situation that may interfere with your angeling commitment.

Once accepted as an Angel, you will receive a copy of your patients questionnaire, listing their

personal information such as name, address, birthday, religion, and their "likes." This will help give you some ideas of things to send and talk about in your letters/cards.

Although the web site lists the specifics, the following information is a general guideline when becoming a Chemo Angel (taken from the Frequently Asked Questions page at www.chemoangels.com):

*While it doesn't cost a lot to be a Chemo Angel, it does require spending some money. Most folks find they can angel a patient for about \$25–\$30 per month, including postage.

*Chemo Angels communicate with their patients through the postal service – each patients' questionnaire will state whether or not they wish to have e-mail contact with their Angel.

*Some folks pair up or form groups to co-angel a patient together. This is a great way to help while sharing the expense.

*Because it is such a serious commitment, Angels are encouraged to stick with one patient at a time. This way, they can really focus on "spoiling" their patient. However, if you have the time and financial resources to be a great Chemo Angel to more than one patient at a time, you certainly may.

*If you are unable to continue your commitment to Chemo Angels, you are asked to let Ms. Armstrong know as soon as possible so that she may assign another Angel to your patient.

*Patient feedback varies enormously. Some patients and Angels enjoy a friendship relationship and communicate often. Other Angels don't hear from their patients at all. Response or lack of response from a patient is no indication of the impact you are having on that person's life. Chemo Angels is not meant to be a pen-pal service, and it is important to remember that many patients are very ill and even though you may not hear from them, you can be sure that you are very much appreciated!

When a patient is done with his or her treatment, they receive a note from Chemo Angels offering a few options. They can decide to be done with Chemo Angels, they can be assigned to an "e-mail buddy" who will continue to offer support and encouragement mainly through e-mail, they can be referred to some terrific "cancer survivor" websites, or they can choose to stay with their Angel for a few more weeks while recovering from treatment.

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As of the first week in June, there were 946 Chemo Angel volunteers, 164 card angels, and 367 Special Assignment Angels. Many of the volunteers are cancer survivors themselves, others consist of students, professionals, homemakers, retired people – people just like you and me who simply want to make a difference in someone's life. Even though the purpose of Chemo Angels is to bring some happiness into the lives of a cancer patient, the Angels themselves often get just as much joy out of volunteering and knowing that they are making a difference.

Ms. Armstrong has taken a personal life experience and turned it into a full-time job helping others. She is a stay-at-home mom of three boys, two teenagers and a toddler. She administrates Chemo Angels from her home in the mountains of California. Her commitment and dedication to Chemo Angels can be heard in her comment, "I feel as if I have finally found my 'mission field', and it is perfect for me! I thank God for allowing me to do this, and give Him any glory that may come out of it!"

If you'd like to make a difference in the life of a cancer patient, please check out www.chemoangels.com. If you are unable to make such a commitment, but would still like to make a difference, there are other less time-consuming options. One is to donate blood or platelets (called pheresis) at your local American Red Cross, hospital, or community blood drive. Also, there are two other web sites that you may be interested in. Hugs and Hope (www.hugsandhope.com), founded and administered by Marsha Jordan, and Make A Child Smile (www.makeachildsmile.org), founded and

administered by Alexandra Davila, are two fabulous web sites that are exclusively for children. Every month, several children are featured who have some kind of illness or disease. Visitors to these web sites are asked to send a card, a small gift, or even just an e-mail to let these children know that people care. Once you visit these web sites, you will almost certainly be compelled to return to them on a monthly basis. Ms. Jordan and Ms. Davila are two extraordinary women who dedicate all of their time and energy to maintaining these web sites simply because they love children.

Don't ever think you can't make a difference – you can. You can make a difference by being an Angel to someone going through cancer treatment. You can make a difference to that one child you decide to send a card to. What may seem like a small gesture to you may mean the world to a suffering child or adult. You can make a difference.

Jenn Borjeson lives in Holden, Massachusetts, with her husband and two children. Mrs. Borjeson will be receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology in Spring, 2002. She enjoys volunteering her time to help sick children, reading, writing, and being with her family.

Can YOU Make a Difference?

By Chrissy Redmond

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Can YOU Make a Difference?

From the Humane Society to the Red Cross, there are many non-profit organizations that change many people's and animal's lives. Many volunteers are needed to help the organization be a success and while kids are too young to be a vet or a doctor the world wide web is our generation's tool! For

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business, information and just keeping in touch the web has become a common way to communicate.

In the next month or two, www.catholicschoolkid.com is going to have a new web page. The page will be focussed on making a difference in other people's lives. I will be publishing a book (e-book) on the web that will show step by step instructions for creating your own web site. If you follow the daily steps, within a month you will have your own web so that you can make a difference too. (Our proceeds go to help pro-life causes.) Your work can help non-profit organizations like:

Humane Society
American Heart Association
National Cancer Society
Hospice
Make a Wish
American Red Cross
Paws for a Cause
Leader Dogs for the Blind

This page will also have links to your web so we can promote your new site!

Visit us in a month or two and start making a difference. For more information e-mail me at:

<mailto:info@catholicschoolkid.com>

Chrissy Redmond is one of the creators of <http://www.catholicschoolkid.com>, a site dedicated to raising funds for pro-life causes. You can learn more by visiting the site:
<http://www.catholicschoolkid.com>



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