



November, 2023

Dear Friend,

I thought I was invincible!

I was heading into my last year of high school, and life was good!

My only worries were homework and looking after my horse, Caroline.

Until I heard three tiny words...

The words that no one wants to hear: “you have cancer”.

It all started at a regular annual physical. Mum insisted on coming with me because she just had this nagging feeling that something wasn't quite right with me.

She thought my throat didn't look “normal”; it was like I had an adam's apple.

But I felt fine. I really did!

Little did I know that from then on for the next seven months, my life would be chaos.

But, at the very beginning, when the scariest thing was the unknown, when we did not know what was wrong, the staff at Ajax Pickering Hospital helped make me (and my parents) feel supported, and as comfortable as possible as I went through different diagnostic tests.

That's why I'm writing to you today.

I didn't know it at the time, but donations from generous supporters like you, help fund equipment & technology like what was used to determine my cancer diagnosis.

Your generosity helps all the hospital staff look after their patients – whether the need is as complicated as providing lifesaving diagnostic testing or as simple as a comforting touch.

So will you please share a kind gift of health this holiday season? Your donation will mean so much to me and all the other patients who are dealing with their own cancer diagnoses this holiday season.

My family doctor suspected that something was going on with my thyroid.

That's a small, butterfly-shaped gland in the front of your neck. It makes hormones that control the way the body uses energy. These hormones affect nearly every organ in your body and control many of your body's most important functions.

And to start figuring out what was going on, I had to get a thyroid uptake scan.

My parents and I were so glad that we didn't have to travel to a hospital far away because Ajax Pickering Hospital has a top-notch diagnostic department.

Don't you, also, feel such a huge sense of relief to know that you are able to receive great & dignified care in our own community, from highly-trained doctors & nurses, whether it be because of an emergency or for a complicated surgery, or spending the last tearful moments with a loved one or celebrating the magic of childbirth?

And it doesn't matter what day of the year it is or what season we are celebrating; the Ajax Pickering Hospital is there to care for every single one of us.

My friend who works at the hospital has told me about how the nurses probably spend more time at the hospital than they do at their own homes with their own families.

And that one of the fantastic things about Ajax Pickering Hospital is that staff do not consider it as just a workplace but really as a home-away-from-home, their colleagues are like family members.

That means that a lot of the staff make every effort they can to bring some of the joy and colour of the yule-tide festivities onto their units, as well as some of the sounds of the seasons.

They've probably already started decorating as you read this letter!

Now as a competitive horse rider, I'd had my fair share of bumps & bruises & broken bones. But I'd never before been to the hospital for something so serious.

(And quite frankly, if it hadn't been happening to me, I would have thought this test was pretty cool!)

Brian, the Nuclear Medicine tech, guided me into the room with the gamma camera, and helped me up onto the stretcher. Next, he set me up with an IV so that a radiotracer could start to flow through my body.

He could tell that I was nervous and definitely wanted to be anywhere but in his room! Thankfully, he didn't take it personally, and just kept on reassuring me that the scan wouldn't hurt.

Behind the glass, he operated the camera to take a series of images that would show how much more-or-less-than-normal the "uptake" of the radiotracer was by my thyroid gland's cells.

Obviously, the results of this scan were not good because just days later I was back at Ajax Pickering Hospital, this time down the hall from Brian in another room, lying on another stretcher waiting for a biopsy to be performed on my thyroid.

Knowing that this test was going to be scarier & a little painful, my friend had snuck into the room before I got there and left a unicorn for me to hold.

And oh man, I'm glad she did!

I was lying down, trying not to be anxious, and trying not to move.

The unicorn was so comforting in my arms!

I watched the staff member come in and prep everything for the test... including a long thin needle.

And I squeezed the unicorn even tighter!

That's when she moved closer to me and reached out to give me a comforting squeeze on my arm.

Such a small gesture, I know, but it helped keep some of my fears at bay.

At the same time as I was recovering from the soreness of the biopsy at home, its tissue samples were being processed in the hospital's lab then being studied under a microscope by the pathologist.

Clearly cancer didn't care that I was an otherwise healthy person, that I was trying to figure out what I was going to be when I "grew up" and that cancer treatment had not been part of the plan.

Several weeks later, I had surgery to remove the whole thyroid but knew I would be back in the hospital in the New Year to be put into isolation so that I could have radioactive iodine treatment.

I consider myself lucky, though.

Thanks to the great care I received at Ajax Pickering Hospital, on Christmas morning, I woke up in my own bed, at home, not the hospital.

The twinkling lights that I saw through my half-opened eyes were from my family's Christmas tree, not bedside medical monitors.

The constant background hum was carols, not the din of doctors and nurses on the unit.

Diagnosing and removing my cancer so quickly meant that I got to open presents & eat Christmas dinner at home with my family.

Your donations to Ajax Pickering Hospital make this happen because they help fund more equipment & technology that the amazing doctors & nurses use every single day to care for their patients, like me.

So during this season of giving, I am personally asking you to share a meaningful gift with our community's hospital. Your kind and thoughtful gift of health could help someone else like me be home to celebrate the holidays with their friends & loved ones.

And that is truly a gift worth giving!

All the best of the season to you and yours,



Kate
Ex-Patient & Cancer Survivor

P.S. Your special holiday donation means that you, me, our friends & loved ones have access to the best health care all year-round. Please share the spirit of the season and give the gift of health today!