

My cancer diagnosis blindsided me and my family.

Like most families, we were busy, active, and focused on the rhythms of everyday life - until everything changed in the spring of 2025. I found a golf ball sized lump just ten months after a clear mammogram.

It wasn't long until I was diagnosed with triple-negative breast cancer. In an instant, my husband Chris and our two children, Ellie and Jack, were thrust into a new life we never expected - one filled with uncertainty, fear, and a long road ahead.

What followed was a year of relentless treatment. I traveled regularly from Pittsburgh to Cleveland for care, including six months of weekly chemotherapy, a full year of immunotherapy, a double mastectomy, and weeks of daily radiation. Through it all, we tried to hold onto some sense of normalcy, school, sports, and even adjusting to life with our new puppy, Pepper.



Photo credit: Kate Buckley Photography

But this cancer diagnosis didn't just impact me... it impacted my entire family.

Chris became my caregiver overnight, managing appointments, taking care of me when I was sick, and carrying more than his share at home. He's shared, *"This is definitely the hardest thing we've ever gone through as a family."*

As a mom, and a therapist, I knew we needed support. Not just for me, but for all of us. I wanted my kids to have a space of their own, and I wanted us to have a way to navigate this together.

We were introduced to Cancer Bridges, and from that very first conversation, everything began to shift. What started as a search for support quickly snowballed into something more - a community, a place where each of us could find what we needed.

Ellie and Jack began counseling and attended Camp Clubhouse. Being surrounded by kids who understood made a difference in a way I can't fully put into words. Watching that - especially for Ellie, who is more reserved, was a turning point for me. Seeing her begin to open up, to feel comfortable, to realize she wasn't alone... that's when it hit me:

We had found something really special at Cancer Bridges.



*"I just feel like anything that you could need or want as you're going through this process, Cancer Bridges offers. We are extremely grateful that we found this place and that it's available and that it's completely free. Cancer Bridges means so much to our family."
- Sarah*

Cancer Bridges also gave Chris and me something we didn't even realize we needed - space to just be together, knowing our kids were supported and having fun. To have a night like the Valentine's Dinner at Cancer Bridges where we know they're okay... and we don't have to worry - it was really, really nice.

And as a family, the programs that we can do together became something we truly looked forward to. Cooking classes, art workshops - those became the moments we held onto.

Today, after a year that changed everything, I can say this: we are okay. **Not because this was easy - but because we didn't have to go through it alone.**

I liked being around other kids who have experienced the same stuff... and hearing what they've gone through and what helped them get through it.

I'm excited to see my friends again this summer.

- Jack



We all shared something in common you don't really talk about at school, but at camp it felt okay.

It was really different from any other camp I've done -and it felt good to just be myself, whether I wanted to join in or just take a moment.

- Ellie

Because of supporters like you, families like mine have access to these programs at no cost - programs that support each person and strengthens us as a family.

I hope you'll consider making a gift to Cancer Bridges so that other families can find the same support, connection, and care that means so much to us. **Because no family should have to face cancer alone.**

With gratitude,

Sarah Chris Ellie Jack

The Irwin Family