

# Sharing the Sunshine

*Fighting cancer is tough. That's why the world needs nurses like Duke Raleigh's Tracy Hausfeld.*

**By staff writer Christopher J. Bushnell**

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When Wilma Drayton was diagnosed with lung cancer, she had never met Tracy Hausfeld. But as Tracy, a registered nurse, treated Wilma for the illness at the Duke Cancer center in Raleigh, a special relationship developed between the two.

"No matter how bad I hurt or felt she always made me laugh," Wilma said. "I will never forget her. She made me feel special."

Tracy remembers meeting Wilma for the first time, too.

"We hit it off. She's just a great person," Tracy said. "She's like family. We hug everyone and treat them like family."

As Wilma was recovering from a procedure to remove part of her lungs, Tracy called her to see how she was doing. Her health was improving but talk turned to other real-life problems.

"I told her my light bill was due and I didn't have the money," Wilma recalled. "Along with the other nurses she works with , Tracy arranged to have the bill paid on Wilma's behalf.

"It meant a lot lot me because without electricity I would have had to use a kerosene heater, which would have been very unhealthy and unsafe for me," Wilma explained. "I was thankful."

The money to assist Wilma came from the aptly named "Sunshine Fund." As institutional as it may sound, the Sunshine Fund in not an official program of any kind - the nurses at Duke Health created it on their own.

In the beginning its purpose was so the nurses could buy small gifts for one another on special occasions. But they keep finding themselves wanting to help patients who were facing tough circumstances.

"So we decided that, instead of giving each other stuff, we should use the fund to help them instead. Because we don't need anything," Tracy explained matter-of-factly.

Raised in Dayton, Ohio, Tracy and her husband packed up and moved south when he was promoted to President of Drees Homes in Raleigh. Aside from missing being close to family - and the ever-present winter snows she grew up with - Tracy can't imagine doing anything else, anywhere else.

"I love it down here," she said enthusiastically. "I've never had more friends and I love my job."

As gratifying as she finds her life today, it is remarkable that the Midwestern girl's career was just one conversation away from going in an entirely different direction. While she always knew she enjoyed taking care of people, Tracy wasn't convinced she was built for nursing.

"It is funny actually. I was debating whether or not to become a cosmetologist or a nurse," she said with a chuckle. "Lucky for so many, Tracy's grandfather persuaded her to go into medicine.

"He told me in his little German accent, you know, 'You can do this!' And he really encouraged me."

Tracy wasted no time and enrolled in the Miami Valley School of Nursing. Twenty-two years of nursing later, Tracy is certain there couldn't be a better occupation for her.

"Oh my gosh, I can't even tell you. The people that I've met the things I've learned," she said, her voice breaking a little. "I mean how many people get to go home and say, 'I really helped someone?' The job satisfaction is unreal."

Patients, fellow nurses and administrators alike are all more than satisfied with the job Tracy does too. Her effort and attitude are widely acclaimed at the Duke Cancer Center in Raleigh. Conscientious, eager to learn, and amazing are just a few of the array of adjectives that colleagues tap to describe her.

"Her high energy and positive attitude lead her to go above and beyond to help our patients and her colleagues," said Lori Pickens, director of Oncology. Interim Nurse Manager Paula Davis observed that Tracy is "thorough, always smiling, resourceful, and highly effective at bringing people together.

The respect and appreciation is mutual. Tracy feels fortunate to work for and alongside an outstanding group of people.

"I work with the best nurses in the world," Tracy boasted of her coworkers. "Patients tell us all the time that this place is above and beyond what is done anywhere else. We hug hello, we hug goodbye. We take people out for pizza. One lady, with lung cancer, we took her to Cracker

Barrel and then to go shopping. And we bought her a little cat dish. And she said it was one of the best days of her life."

Those opportunities for people to escape from their role of cancer patient - even if it's just for an afternoon - can be therapeutic for the mind and soul. Back in the clinical setting, where people make progress fighting the illness itself, Tracy remains focused on the entire human being.

"I always put myself in their place," she explained. "If that was my mom or brother or sister, how would I want to be treated?"

It might come as a surprise to some that a person who devotes their career to helping others feels that they are lucky. But Tracy is one of those people.

"I guess we get so much because we give so much," she observed. And as that rule holds true, Tracy Hausfeld can expect a never-ending exchange of love, laughter - and lots of hugs. Short of an old-fashioned snow day to go with it, it's the best forecast she could hope for.