

Help: Father on unemployment after he was laid off

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especially since Joan's husband Mark lost his job as an admissions counselor at American InterContinental University — in the same week the family discovered Joan had cancer.

A mother's fight

Joan was scheduled for a routine mammogram in January but canceled the appointment and rescheduled for February in order to attend a school meeting for Meredith.

Putting her children first again, she missed the February appointment to be at a meeting for Brett.

The mammogram was pushed to March, which is when Joan's doctor found a lump about a half-inch long in her right breast. An ultrasound showed nothing unusual and a needle biopsy came back as unspecified, so Joan scheduled a follow-up appointment for three months later.

But by May the lump had grown to a concerning size. Not wanting to wait, Joan had another needle biopsy, and this time it came back cancerous.

On July 14, Joan had a double mastectomy. She also had four lymph nodes, one of them cancerous, removed from her armpit.

Bi-weekly chemotherapy treatments began Aug. 17. She will go through eight sessions of chemotherapy and then begin radiation treatments.

"My first chemo, I just felt like a train hit me and I am not used to this," she said. "I'm not used to having my kids see me like this. It's scaring them, I think."

Joan's mother comes by every day to help with dinners, homework, cleaning and laundry. She also accompanies Joan to her doctor visits and tries to ease her anxieties.

"She's just our emotional and moral support," Joan said with a smile, a small pink-



JOE LEWNARD/jlewnard@dailyherald.com

Mark and Joan Evans of Elk Grove Village, with, left to right standing, Bradley, 18, Grant, 18, Brett, 12, and Meredith, 18. A fundraiser is being held for the family Saturday as Joan is battling breast cancer, Mark has been laid off and the four children are disabled.

gemmed cross and breast cancer ribbon necklace gleaming from her neck.

Still, much of the burden is falling on Joan's husband.

"For Mark, this is just hard because he's used to working and not doing the things that I do," she said. "The kids still come to me for most things and I'm trying to explain that they have to go to dad, or to my mom."

"My goal was to just keep helping with their homework and getting them through and my anxiety is that I'm not going to be able to do that for them right now, until I build up my own strength and get through this," she said.

Happy children

A visit to the Evanses' modest ranch-style home would suggest that nothing is troubling the family. The four children often break out in big smiles, especially nonverbal Meredith, who frequently asks for hugs and kisses through

her DynaVox, an augmentative communication device.

Inside the family's living room, adorned with photos of the kids since they were babies, Grant and Bradley say they are enjoying the extra year of classes Joan enrolled them in at Elk Grove High School, where they graduated in June.

"They put our typical high school boys to shame, the way that they behave," said Becky Freeman-Murray, a family support specialist at Clearbrook, an organization that serves children and adults with developmental disabilities. She's worked with the family for more than seven years. "And that's all Joan and her husband. They have raised these kids to be just such terrific kids."

When not making honor roll at school, Grant and Bradley keep busy with sports including basketball and baseball, their jobs and therapy once a week — a service that their younger brother isn't as lucky to receive.

"Brett — we had to stop

taking him because we couldn't afford the copays," Joan said. While shy, Brett thoroughly enjoys spending his time outside, riding his bike, scooter and skateboard.

Meredith, who loves communicating through the telephone and going to the mall, recently started a life-skills program at Palatine High School that she will be in until she is 22. She attends therapy twice a week, a task that proves difficult for the family because their old and unreliable Chrysler minivan can't accommodate the electric wheelchair Meredith received last October.

"People used to say, 'Joan, you need a new van,' 'Joan, she needs a (mechanical) lift,' and I'm like, 'You know what, that's just the least of my worries.' I would lift her and do all that," Joan said.

Now, though, the cancer treatments have left her too weak to lift Meredith.

"And now I realize, it's just so important for her to be going places and doing things in her

How to help

Event: Joan Evans' Family Fundraiser

When: 5 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 24

Where: Ringside Sports Bar & OTB, 554 E. Devon Ave., Elk Grove Village

What: Food, karaoke, a 50/50 raffle, a silent auction for about 50 gift baskets and items like an electric guitar, and two round trip plane tickets to anywhere in the U.S.

Cost: Admission is \$35 for adults and \$10 for children under 12

Information and donations: joanevansfundraiser.com, or Patti Stockwell (708) 606-9229

are never ones to want more.

"I see the limited resources that they have and never once did I ever hear Joan complain," said Paulson, who is helping organize the fundraiser. "To know what she's gone through so far and the struggles that they've had so far and then to have this additional crisis — I mean just unbelievable crisis come on to them, I can't imagine anybody not wanting to help out."

"They're such a loving, wonderful family," said Meg Williams, a physical resource teacher at Palatine High School who worked with Meredith through her high school years. "I don't know how (Joan) does it. She's a miracle worker. Running kids here, there and everywhere, and she keeps it all straight and all together."

"They're a very exceptional family," she said. "They're always, always willing to help out everybody else, when really we're trying to help them right now. They would never ask for assistance, so I like the fact that the community is kind of rallying (for them)."

The Evanses say they are moved by the fundraiser and can only express immense gratitude for it.

"It's great. It's a huge blessing," Mark said. "(Patti is) a big-hearted person. She's always doing things for other people."

"I get overwhelmed that people care enough for us to do that," Joan said. "I just don't want to overburden everybody."

But friends know the fundraiser is necessary.

"This is a family that has had an extraordinary amount of challenges and they have met each and every one with faith and hard work and tenacity, and yet this latest blow is really frightening beyond anything they've had to handle," Freeman-Murray said. "This is a family that needs mom. This is a family that just deserves all of our help and prayers."



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