



Wendy Gniady and Steve Chase
Cyclist 2015, 2014 and 2013

On his father's birthday, ten years after losing him to cancer, my husband Steve Chase was diagnosed with primary brain cancer (Grade 3 Anaplastic Oligoastrocytoma) in the ER at Yale. This began a long and loving relationship with Smilow and the Closer to Free Ride that continues to this day.

As far as we'd known, Steve was perfectly healthy before; a grand mal seizure that came out of nowhere forced us to rush to the ER. Within a month, he was undergoing chemotherapy treatment while recovering from the brain surgery to remove a large tumor from his parietal lobe. The surgery was performed by Dr. Piepmeier at Smilow Cancer Hospital, the very same doctor who was on call in the ER that fateful day. This was all such a crazy whirlwind and we were still trying to come to grips with what his diagnosis meant for Steve and our future. While searching for information, I came across the Closer to Free video from Union Station in New Haven. We watched it together and were moved by the strength and smiles of the survivors in that video, and energized by the words & music. Steve and I knew immediately we had to be involved, for so many reasons. For me, taking action to fight against cancer made me feel like I was exercising some control over what was happening to Steve and our lives. We both wanted to give back to everyone at Smilow for saving Steve's life and for caring for both of us so lovingly. We also wanted to honor his dad who was also his best friend, and to help our loved ones and others battling cancer.

Nervous about whether we'd actually be able to meet the fundraising minimum, I called and peppered Jess at CTF with many questions. She was patient, encouraging, and incredibly supportive. She was right; our friends & family were willing & generous & we raised the needed funds just by posting our CTF pages on Facebook. My sister had tee shirts made and we officially became Team Steve! So in 2013, immediately after completing his final round of 10 months of chemo, Steve rode 25 miles, joined by my sister Niki and me. It was certainly challenging, but that just made Steve and I feel all the more victorious when we crossed that finish line amidst hoots and cheers and clapping from family and our newfound friends. We'd done it!! We felt empowered, supported, and cared for. The other survivors, riders, supporters, volunteers, and our friends and family were absolutely incredible. Survivor's high-fived and exchanged uplifting stories with Steve. It's hard for me to describe the feeling of that day in 2013. Love, hugs, and cheers were abundant. It was absolutely the most emotional yet most powerful, inspiring and uplifting event we have ever been a part of. We knew without a doubt we would always continue as long as we're able. Plus, seeing Steve's oncologist Dr. Baehring ride 62 miles and raise funds for US and for those like us really touched us.

If you're considering riding, you will have all the help you need before, during, and afterward, so don't hesitate. If you need encouragement, ride. If you need your voice to be heard, ride. If you have any connection to anyone with cancer (and who doesn't), ride. If you don't feel strong or in control, ride and you will feel empowered!! It's therapeutic. It's healing. I urge you to come and be one with the people that are bringing the world closer to free emotionally, spiritually, and in the flesh. If you can't ride, then come be a volunteer and partake in the magic of the day. Uplift others. It's my belief and hope that you'll leave feeling like you can conquer anything, because you are not alone. We're all in this together, and together we stand! Where there is great love, there are always great miracles.

