



Ashley Hoben
Volunteer 2015, 2014 and 2013

CTF Ride Volunteer Ashley Hoben was stunned when she was diagnosed with colon cancer three years ago. She credits Smilow with saving her life and knew that Smilow was the place to go after the heartbreaking news that her son was diagnosed with lymphoma just two years later.

Three years ago, shortly after turning 40, I was diagnosed with colon cancer. Of course, we were all shocked. There was no family history of cancer and I was considered pretty young for this particular type. We went straight into fighter mode. After all, I had a husband and three small boys at home. My first step was to find a hospital and oncologist for treatment. The minute I walked into Smilow, I knew there wasn't any need to go anywhere else. Everyone made me feel so comfortable and special. I just knew I was going to be okay. I have been cancer free for three years now and every time I go in for a follow up, I am still greeted with hugs and questions about how my family and I are doing.

I first became involved with the Closer to Free Ride in 2013 when my mom asked me to join her for her second year of volunteering. It was very emotional watching the riders cross the finish line, especially my own oncologist, Dr. Hochster who rode the full 100 miles (as if he doesn't do enough!). This past September, my husband and children joined me at the finish line festival despite the torrential downpour. Little did we know as we all cheered on the riders, that two months later cancer would invade our lives once again.

Two and a half years after my diagnosis, my 11-year-old son was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. It was almost impossible to wrap our heads around. We didn't waste any time. We knew that Smilow was where he needed to be. My son actually started treatment the same day he was diagnosed. I can't even describe how incredible pediatric oncology is. Dr. Ali, the hematologist who spoke to me the first night in the ER, was there every time my son was admitted for treatment or there for a test right through his very last weekend of treatment. His oncologist, Dr. Pashankar, and the amazing nurses and support staff at both Smilow in New Haven and the satellite office in Trumbull doted on my son's every need. Even now, though his treatment is done, my son still sees one of his favorite nurses, Jenn Ledyard, who volunteers for The Sunshine Kids.

Everyone at Smilow is so genuine and passionate about what they do and it shows. Cancer doesn't discriminate. It doesn't care that we already went through this once. It doesn't care that it's a million times worse when it's your child. Everyone at Smilow knows this and does everything in their power to help you get to the words "cancer free." We are incredibly grateful to be able to say those words about my son who is once again a healthy 11-year-old getting ready for all of his summer adventures. This year will be my third year volunteering for the Closer to Free Ride. Once again, my mom will be by my side parking bikes and my husband and boys will be they're cheering everyone on. It is our opportunity to show how grateful we are for Smilow and all of the amazing people who saved my son and me. Well, really, saved my whole family.

