



Luray Shepard
Volunteer 2015 and 2014

In 2013, my cousin died in August and soon after her wife road 100 miles in her memory in the Closer to Free Ride. That year, I stopped at various points along the shore to cheer her on, ending at the Guilford Green. I didn't know how much happens at the Yale Bowl until I saw the video of her crossing the finish. I decided then that I had to be a part of the whole day.

For the last two years I have been the Captain of Bike Parking at the Yale Bowl, volunteering from the very beginning to the last cyclist leaves. Though it's a long day, it's great to be a part of such an amazing event and the time flies by. I wouldn't want to miss the opening ceremony, the entertainment throughout the day and cheering the riders as they return- especially the CTF Century riders. If they can ride a bike 100 miles all day, I can cheer them as they return, help them hang up their bikes and get a needed respite.

I have a lot of firsthand experience with the wonderful treatment that Smilow provides to patients. My cousin Jennifer had a very rare cancer, Leiomyosarcoma. She lived for 6 years- longer than anyone else with this cancer- going through 4 surgeries, 2 rounds of radiation and 28 different kinds of chemotherapy. Clearly we spent countless hours at the hospital as both inpatient and out. I spent many nights sleeping in her room, often confusing her nurses since she preferred the futon and I was in her bed. Everyone was overwhelmingly professional, caring and helpful to her as the patient, but also to all of us, the concerned family and friends who often took over her room if not the whole floor. Jennifer never gave up believing that she'd be the miracle to survive and neither did her doctors and nurses. She was an inspiration to us all, living in constant pain with a smile and surviving long past any predictions.

Volunteering for the Ride is the best way I can give back to the hospital that gave our family so much. My twelve hour day is nothing compared to the hours the staff work to help those in their care. It's also a way to raise essential funds so we can be Closer to Free.

