

Laurie Schar's Story

At age thirty-six with two young sons, the furthest thing from **Laurie Schar's** mind was Mt. Evans Hospice and Home Health Care. She and her husband, Pete, had been married just four years and their life together was still just beginning—that was until Pete found out he had colon cancer.



“He was very healthy, a marathon runner,” Laurie says, recalling the diagnosis. By the time it was discovered though, Pete’s cancer had already spread to his liver. “We knew it would be a true miracle for him to live,” Laurie says. But the Schar’s sought every treatment possible until November of 2003, when Pete’s condition started to deteriorate. At that point, his doctors suggested home health care and contacted Mt. Evans to provide the services. “The staff from Mt. Evans thought of things that we never would have thought of,” Laurie says. “Better ways to sleep, better ways to move around the house, better ways to do everything.”

Eventually, when Pete’s trial medications rendered no response, his doctor suggested hospice care. “This was a whole new language for us,” Laurie says. “It was something we knew nothing about but the staff was very compassionate with everyone and always cared for Pete in such a respectful way. It was a God-send.” The Schar’s nurse from Mt. Evans, “talked to the kids every day,” Laurie says. “She was a part of the family, not a

clinical stranger. My husband loved her.”

On the day Pete died, Laurie knew she had only one phone call to make. “I called our nurse and she was there in less than twenty-five minutes,” Laurie remembers. The nurse did everything, from calling the coroner and funeral home, to helping Laurie decide when to wake up the boys for them to say their goodbyes and making sure Laurie had her own special time with Pete as well. And though at that time Mt. Evans’ care of Pete had ended, the care of Laurie and her then four-year-old and twenty-three-month-old had just begun.

Soon after Pete died, Barb Lamperski, Mt. Evans’ Bereavement Coordinator, called Laurie to ask if she would like to have a bereavement volunteer contact her. Our bereavement volunteers offer individual support through phone calls, letters, or one-on-one meetings to those who have recently experienced the death of a loved one. “It was so nice to have someone check in on you, to let you know that they’re there,” Laurie says. “And my volunteer

knew what I was going through. She'd been through it, too."

Before long, Barb contacted Laurie again to invite her to join Mt. Evans' bereaved spouses group, which meets monthly to share a light meal and the trials that come with the loss of a spouse. Although Laurie admits that she was initially concerned about the age difference between herself and other members of the group, she quickly found acceptance and much-needed encouragement there. "When Pete died, I still had to be a mom," she says. "It was important to have a place where I could talk about my issues—to be able to walk into a room where people understood. They were all going through the same thing, but the group was truly supportive."

Laurie's oldest son, Tanner, found the same acceptance and understanding when he attended Camp Comfort, Mt. Evans' bereavement camp for children. "Tanner was very aware that he was alone in his experience in his kindergarten class," Laurie says. "It was great for him to be with other children that had lost someone they loved. Camp Comfort gave him things that I couldn't—in a different format so appropriate for children. It was a life-changing event for Tanner." Laurie says her youngest son, Donovan, will likely attend Camp Comfort when he is old enough and when he goes, Tanner will return to camp with him.

Eventually, Laurie also attended an eight-week grief support group, which she describes as much different from the spouses group, but equally important in her grieving process. "The eight-week group was more work and very intense," she says. "You

were taught how to work through what you are feeling." And for those who might face a similar situation, she encourages reaching out to find support. "And to have it from people who know the path you have walked makes a difference—it really does," she says.

This January marked the three-year anniversary of Pete's death, and April 2nd would have been his fifty-third birthday. "Eleven of us went out to celebrate his birthday," Laurie says. Her sons were there and together, everyone at the intimate gathering toasted Pete's life. "I'm great," Laurie says when asked how she's doing. "I wish it wasn't the hand that was dealt to us," she continues, "but you learn to live with what you have and make the very best of it."