

## CROSBY FAMILY

### LEAVING THE WORLD (FOR) A BETTER PLACE

“Each life is a miracle that changes the world and leaves it a better place than it was before.” – author unknown

Paula Crosby knows the truth in those words. Her eight-year-old son John passed away in 2001 from Adrenocortical Carcinoma (cancer), and in February, her 41 year old husband of almost 20 years, Walter Glen Crosby III also died from cancer. One thing is clear about their short lives - John and Walt both left the world a better place.

Before 2001 the Crosby family had picture-perfect lives. “They were made for each other,” says family friend Kathy Magagna. Walt and Paula met in college and married in 1986. They raised three wonderful sons, Walter (14), John, and Henry (8). Walt was very respected in the telecommunications industry, and his colleagues at RN Communications were like family to him.

Life changed dramatically in 2001. Precocious John only survived for six months after his diagnosis in April of that year. During his hospitalization at the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital, family friend Jeff Klaus recalls how the Crosbys helped other families whose children were fighting cancer. Klaus says, “They’d always look out for other people. They’d bring meals and do what they could to help.”

After John passed away, Walt and Paula continued their volunteer efforts to help the families at Mott. Paula says, “We wanted to continue the things that were provided for us (during John’s stay).” The Crosbys started a foundation with the \$15,000 that was donated by family and friends in John’s memory. Klaus and Magagna are two of the board members. Magagna says, “Paula and Walt were energized to take action. They kept giving and giving and giving. You meet very few people like that in your life.”

In February, 2002 Walt was diagnosed with a sarcoma (cancer) in his neck, but he always maintained his positive attitude. Klaus says, “He was always upbeat and looking for the positive.” Magagna says, “He was the most positive person. I never saw him complain.”

Walt even joined the Mott Hospital Advisory Board. He was committed to helping Mott patients and families and helping others learn from his own family’s experience with John’s hospitalization.

Throughout his treatment, the foundation continued to provide for the families at Mott. The Foundation also proudly contributed to research and donated numerous comforts for patients and families. Donna Murphy, Director, Child and Family Life, Mott Hospital says the recent addition of DVD players for each bed in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit has been very helpful to patients and families. Murphy says, “Whether it is music or movies, it has been a wonderful addition to that critical care area that Paula knows so

well. Her heart and thoughts are always with these families and it shows in the way she provides support.”

Walt’s cancer relapsed in April, 2004. In spite of everything they were going through, the Crosbys still worked tirelessly to help the patients and families at Mott. Sara Hickey, Program Manager, Mott Hospital Administration says, “They never missed a beat.” The Crosbys attended the Mott Golf Classic dinner on the evening of their wedding anniversary last year.

Walt also attended the annual run-a-thon in October, 2004. The run-a-thon is an annual fundraiser for John’s foundation at John’s former school – Lawton Elementary. Klaus recalls “the outpouring of love” of the people who turned out for the event.

Friend, and fellow Mott Advisory Board Member, Rick Larese recalls how happy everyone was to see Walt there. He says, “It was an inspiration to all of us to see Walt out there having a good time. ... He was operating at fifty percent, but giving 110%.”

Throughout his illness, Walt also made every effort to keep attending the sporting events for sons Walter and Henry and the scouting events they had always enjoyed together.

Even through all of the hardest times of his illness, Walt maintained his trademark sense of humor. Klaus says, “He had the greatest sense of humor. Even when he was really ill, he still had the twinkle in his eyes.” Hickey recalls that even when Walt had his voice box removed, he still found ways to communicate humor through gestures and writing. (Eventually he used an electrolarynx.) Even during the last few months of his life, he was always quick to make a joke.

His friends are unanimous in the opinion that he kept fighting to have every day possible with Paula and their boys. That eternal optimism and determination made it even more of a shock that he wasn’t able to win his fight. On February 15, 2005 Walt passed away.

Walt and John left people with lots of wonderful memories, including memories of the wonderful sense of humor they shared. They also shared a sense of purpose. Even though John was just a little boy, he always made the most of his time. Walt never sat idly during his hours of chemotherapy. He used that time to talk to Paula and the medical staff about what the foundation could do to help people.

The Crosbys’ friends talk about their extremely strong faith. It helped them through John’s illness and death, and it was something that they shared with those around them. The Crosby’s friend, and board member of the C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital Advisory Board, Rob Pollack, recalls when Walt gave the eulogy at John’s funeral. Pollack recalls, “Here was a man who just lost his 8 year old son, and he had the grace and strength to stand up and proceeded to inform all of us that all was well. John was with God, and we need to keep believing as he and Paula would be doing.”

Almost four years after John's funeral, the tape of the eulogy was played at Walt's funeral. It was the first time friends and family had heard Walt's voice since his surgery in 2003.

His words were also a reminder of Walt's strong faith. Paula knows that Walt and John are together – in a better place.

Pollack adds, "Walt knew what mattered. How can you not help but respond to such greatness." Hickey says, "He had a very full life, even though it was a short one." Klaus says that even though he is 15 years older than Walt, he learned a lot from him.

Last Fall the Mott Hospital Advisory Board decided to honor Walt and Paula with a special award in honor of all of their efforts to help Mott patients and families. Paula says that award was very special to Walt, especially since he knew his time could be limited. She says, "We worked hard, but it wasn't hard work."

When the board decided to honor Walt and Paula, Patricia A. Warner, Associate Hospital Director and Chief Administrative Officer, C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, The University of Michigan Hospitals and Health Centers, said, "You couldn't find two people with more passion and more inner strength. They show the true spirit of volunteerism and compassion for our patients and families."

There is no doubt that the Crosby Family has made the world a better place.

*For more information about how you can support the John R. Crosby Foundation visit [www.johnrcrosby.org](http://www.johnrcrosby.org) or e-mail [jcfoundation@johnrcrosby.org](mailto:jcfoundation@johnrcrosby.org)  
Donations to the foundation can be mailed to: 2348 Alder Court, Ann Arbor, MI 48103.*