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-Magen Mullen
Buchanan Community Schools Parent

#LearnbyHeart

At Buchanan Community Schools, we **LEARN BY HEART!**



There are moments in life that challenge us beyond belief, moments that define our lives going forward.

For Magen Mullen and her family, that day was August 25, 2020 when her youngest daughter Lily was diagnosed with Renal Clear Cell Sarcoma, a rare aggressive cancer of the kidney. Shortly after the diagnoses, Lily underwent surgery to remove her right kidney and 48 hours later, she was given her first chemotherapy treatment, and soon after that, radiation.

“Honestly I was a mess, I couldn't breathe, I couldn't think, I couldn't wrap myself around anything,” said Mrs. Mullen of the experience.

On top of this devastating news, the first day of school was fast approaching and she and her husband had made no decisions on in-person or remote learning for Lily or their other two kids, Madison and Cody.

“I couldn't make calls or return messages, much less manage to sign my kids up for school,” she said.

But then, Mrs. Mullen received a message from Ottawa Elementary Literacy Coach Wendy Murphy. Mrs. Murphy had been Lily’s first grade teacher the school year before and was checking in to see how everyone was doing and find out how she could help them. Mrs. Mullen promised she’d get the kids signed up for remote learning but being at the hospital with Lily was too much of a distraction. Mrs. Murphy continued to call and check in and eventually offered to help Mrs. Mullen register for the school year. It was one less thing she had to worry about.

“The weight lifted off of my shoulders was amazing,” said Mrs. Mullen.

Lily was soon released from the hospital but would be making trips back and forth to Bronson Hospital in Kalamazoo for treatments. Mrs. Mullen had two kids at home that would need to have food and support, too, and the Buchanan community jumped in to help. Mrs. Murphy and fellow teachers had hot meals delivered during Lily’s intensive weeks of chemotherapy.



Lily has been fighting her cancer battle for almost two years now, and Mrs. Murphy has seen to it that Lily knows she is always loved and supported.

“Wendy has driven to my house countless times to either test Lily on days she was able, or sometimes she would come and have Lily lay on a blanket and Wendy would just read to her and pet her hair,” Mrs. Mullen said. “She has even stopped in just to show Lily she wasn’t forgotten, even calling daily at a point when Lily wasn’t eating anymore, just to see if she could bring her a shake so she could get something in her. Wendy has driven all the way to my house just to paint Lily’s nails and show her love.”



Mrs. Murphy’s dedication and support shine throughout the Buchanan school district.

“Mrs. Murphy is always willing to go above and beyond to help you without hesitation,” said fellow Ottawa Elementary teacher Lisa Traeger. “She’s kind, compassionate, caring, and loves working with students. She never stops learning about what’s best for kids. She truly is a gift to not only our school but to our community. We all love her!”

Lily treasures her time with Mrs. Murphy and said she feels safe with her, just as she feels safe with her mom. She knows Mrs. Murphy really loves her.

“Wendy Murphy is an amazing person and an extraordinary teacher who truly loves with her whole

heart,” said Mrs. Mullen. “Wendy has become our family, and I don’t know what I would have done without her. I am blessed to call her friend and even more blessed that she played a part in all three of my children’s education.”

As Lily continues to fight her cancer battle, there are still so many things that Mrs. Mullen is grateful for, and the Buchanan community is one of them.

“It helps to know that there is a herd of Bucks that have her back,” she said.

Thank you, Mrs. Murphy, for being a great example of how we can all Learn by Heart!