

After overcoming Burkitt's lymphoma, Caitlyn Mortus began Keep Kids Connected, which gives laptops to children with serious illnesses





# Katyites of Courage

Katy Cancer Survivors  
Dedicated to Helping  
Others Overcome the Odds

Written by Natalie Cook Clark

Photography by Suzi Issa & April Pizana

Caitlyn Mortus and her mom  
Dawn Mortus, who has been very  
supportive of Keep Kids Connected



Krista and Howard Guild

Krista Guild has survived both  
ovarian cancer and thyroid cancer  
and participates every year in M.  
D. Anderson's Sprint for Life



When life gives you lemons, make lemonade! That's the motto of courageous Katyites Jan Sidle, Krista Guild, and Caitlyn Mortus, who despite the pain and suffering of cancer, have stayed strong and made it their mission to give back to others. "Everyone experiences some type of tragedy in their life, and there are two ways to handle it: Be bitter or be positive," says Guild. "I refused to be bitter." Life may have given Guild and her fellow Katyites obstacles, but they have triumphed over them all.

## *A Blessing in Disguise*

Caitlyn Mortus was a spunky and energetic student at WoodCreek Junior High when a bump on her face during a routine soccer game changed her life. Instead of healing as most bumps and bruises do, Mortus' injury only worsened. When her parents sought medical

care, the result was nothing short of a nightmare. Mortus had Burkitt's lymphoma. In reality, her soccer injury was a blessing in disguise, since it led to her diagnosis and early treatment. Mortus was pulled out of school to begin chemotherapy and radiation. She had a home-school teacher to help her stay up on her studies.

"Being away from my friends was sometimes worse than the illness," explains Mortus. When her immune system was compromised due to her treatment, she was limited on who she could see. Sometimes, her own siblings were not allowed to visit her in the hospital. Her idea for starting the organization Keep Kids Connected came from her own desire to use her parents' laptops when they would work from her hospital room.

Jan Sidle (at right) and her sister Pat Fischer, who sent her a smock with Velcro on the sides when she was battling breast cancer



## Keeping Katy Kids Connected

When Mortus got a laptop of her own, it opened up a whole new world from her little hospital room. She could keep up with her friends on Facebook and Twitter. She could Skype her friends and family and even see her dog via webcam. Staying connected to family and friends lifted Mortus' spirits, and she knew that this was a way she could help other children going through illnesses and experiences similar to her own.

Mortus is now cancer-free. Along with her family, she acted on her idea and founded the nonprofit organization Keep Kids Connected, where kids with cancer or other serious medical conditions can get a free computer to help them stay connected as Mortus did. "We've really noticed how much Caitlyn has grown up," says her mother Dawn Mortus. "Caitlyn's motivation during her illness was to get well, so she could try out for cheerleader. She got to try out and made the team, but now she also takes great joy in delivering the laptops to recipients." Keep Kids Connected operates by donations. Each fall, they host a spaghetti supper as their main fundraiser. For more information on Mortus' story and Keep Kids Connected, visit the organization's website [keepkidsconnected.org](http://keepkidsconnected.org).

## Stitching a Tale of Hope

Jan Sidle was diagnosed with ductal carcinoma in situ, a form of breast cancer, in the spring of 2007. Luckily, doctors caught the cancer in its early stages, due to a routine mammogram. Sidle did not need chemotherapy, but began radiation that next fall. "I had wonderful support from my children and close friends," she shares. "They were great at

# CHOICE+ER

# 24/7

Prompt. Professional. Personalized.

## Katy's Only

### Licensed Freestanding

# 24/7

## Emergency Room

### Katy Location

1560 S. Mason Road, Suite E  
Katy, Texas 77450

Located at the northwest corner of  
Mason Road and Highland Knolls in  
the 24 Hour Fitness shopping center

PHONE 832.321.1000

EMAIL [info@choice-er.com](mailto:info@choice-er.com)

Find us on  



[WWW.CHOICE-ER.COM](http://WWW.CHOICE-ER.COM)

832.321.1000



keeping me doing other things, so I would keep my mind off of the cancer. My sister in Pennsylvania sent me my smock. She volunteered for an organization called Dignity Robes.”

This smock had Velcro on the sides that allowed Sidle to reveal only what she needed to for the radiation, letting her stay comfortable and covered elsewhere during the procedures. “It was wonderful to keep some dignity, and soon, women began asking me where I got my smock,” she says. “That was when I knew that I had to do something for the Katy area and I created Smocks for Life.”

### *Smocks & Support*

Smocks for Life is a nonprofit organization that operates out of St. Peter’s United Methodist Church in Katy and relies on donations. A group of women meets on the first Tuesday of each month (breaking for summer in June, July, and August) at St. Peter’s. The smock-making magic begins with a cutting party, and from there, the materials are bundled into sacks with sewing instructions and given to sewing volunteers. Sidle and her daughter Amy inspect each smock that is sent out, checking it for quality and including a note of encouragement.

To date, Smocks for Life has given out over 700 smocks locally, nationally, and internationally to breast cancer patients. “It gives me a sense of pride knowing that I am making a difference to people that are going through what I’ve been through,” says Sidle. The city of Katy has also been very supportive of Smocks for Life. “Whenever I say we’re running low of fabric, the next day some gets dropped of at the St. Peter’s office. I call them the fabric fairies,” Sidle shares. Katyite Joan McMicken used her smock during her breast



Jan Sidle began Smocks for Life to help other breast cancer patients feel comfortable while receiving treatment

plastic surgery in  
**PLAIN ENGLISH**



 **LOU PLASTIC SURGERY**  
plastic | reconstructive | aesthetic

[www.louplasticsurgery.com](http://www.louplasticsurgery.com) | Call 713-932-7290 or email us at [info@louplasticsurgery.com](mailto:info@louplasticsurgery.com) for more information.

**Lou Plastic Surgery** | Professional 3 Building  
915 Gessner Rd. Suite 470 | Houston, TX 77024

713-932-7290 Office  
713-932-6056 Fax



cancer treatment. Now, she gives back and helps the organization. "I think it is wonderful that someone cares enough to take the time to make the smocks," she says. To learn more about Smocks for Life and how you can get involved, visit the organization's website [smocksforlife.org](http://smocksforlife.org).

### *A Life-Saving Follow-Up*

Krista Guild is a Katy mother of three who has an eye-opening story. She learned of her ovarian cancer because of her persistence to follow up on a cyst that had formed on her ovary. Guild went in for surgery to have what was believed to be an endometriosis cyst removed. She woke up later that night with a tube down her throat and in intense pain. "I knew I had cancer just by looking at my husband's face," she says. After major surgery, Guild went through chemotherapy and radiation. "The pain was horrible and draining, but I kept my faith and knew I would make it through," she shares.

### *Sprinting for a Cure*

It was during the recovery from her surgery that Guild decided to make a difference through service. She learned about Sprint for Life, an annual fun run and walk hosted by M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. The event raises money for the Blanton-Davis Ovarian Cancer Research Program. Guild decided to begin raising money for a team. At the same time, she also learned about Caitlyn Mortus, who lived in her neighborhood, and began helping her with the Keep Kids Connected program.

### *Taking Initiative with Her Health*

Finally, the day came when Guild was pronounced "a patient with cancer history." Eight months later, she scheduled a follow-up with her endocrinologist. She had not lost weight after finishing her chemo like she thought she should have. Again, Guild took the initiative and inquired about her health. Once again, she had been right to suspect something was wrong and was diagnosed with thyroid cancer.

Today, Guild is cancer-free, but still monitors her health closely after seeing firsthand that you are your best advocate. She still works year-round raising money and awareness in the Katy and Houston areas for Sprint for Life, which takes place each year on Mother's Day weekend. To learn more about Sprint for Life, visit [mdanderson.org](http://mdanderson.org) and type in "Sprint for Life" in the keyword search. **KM**

*NATALIE COOK CLARK enjoys freelance writing and sharing stories from her hometown of Katy.*



## *Get Involved*

### *Smocks for Life*

Help sew smocks for breast cancer patients

Visit [smocksforlife.org](http://smocksforlife.org)

Call St. Peter's United Methodist Church, where the organization meets, at 281-492-8031

Sewers can contact Quilt 'N Sew at 281-398-0670

### *Keep Kids Connected*

Visit [keepkidsconnected.org](http://keepkidsconnected.org)

Email [info@keepkidsconnected.org](mailto:info@keepkidsconnected.org)

### *Sprint for Life*

Visit [mdanderson.org/how-you-can-help/community-events/sprint-for-life/index.html](http://mdanderson.org/how-you-can-help/community-events/sprint-for-life/index.html)

**JUNE 6 – AUGUST 22**

# Summer Program





The exceptional summer program at The Goddard School® includes:

- Arts and Crafts
- Computers and Technology
- Cooking
- Drama
- Literature and Language
- Manners
- Music and Movement
- Science and Nature
- Special Visitors
- Sports and Games



**NOW ENROLLING!**  
**KATY • 281-392-1912**

Goddard Systems, Inc. program is AdvancED accredited.

[www.goddardschool.com](http://www.goddardschool.com)

The Goddard Schools are operated by independent franchisees under a license agreement with Goddard Systems, Inc. Programs and ages may vary. © Goddard Systems, Inc. 2008