

Living Her Dream

LORI GRIFFITH DITCHED A CORPORATE CAREER TO DO WHAT SHE REALLY WANTED TO DO: HELP FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WHO ARE FIGHTING SERIOUS ILLNESSES

by LINDA MARX

Lori Griffith has long found fulfillment in helping others. Born in Canada and raised all across the United States before eventually settling in Jupiter, she spent 18 years working in the health care industry as office manager for a neonatal physician group in Palm Beach County and also volunteered extensively with organizations that assist children battling life-threatening illnesses.

After seeing so many parents suffer financial and emotional trauma when their children were diagnosed with dangerous diseases—and nearly losing her own son a dozen years ago—she knew she wanted to devote her life to helping those in need. “It’s pretty amazing to be able to go to bed at night and know that you truly made a difference in the life of another human,” she says.

Griffith, who also works as a photographer, is the woman behind Chasin a Dream Foundation (chasinadream.org), a nonprofit that provides assistance for families with children who are fighting cancer, cystic fibrosis, and other deadly diseases. But her involvement with the cause so close to her heart started long before that.

Since 2011, she has been working with Freedom Waters Foundation. Based in Naples, the charity enhances the lives of children and veterans with cancer and other illnesses and disabilities by providing therapeutic boating experiences. As the foundation’s program coordinator in Palm Beach and Martin Counties, she is in charge of pairing boat owners with children. “An afternoon of boating helps the kids [at least temporarily] forget about being sick and just relax and have fun,” she says. “It is rewarding for the children, their siblings, and their parents.”

It was in 2013 that Griffith first started her own grassroots movement to help children. One day, she met a fellow single mom in the parking lot of St. Mary’s Medical Center in West Palm Beach. In conversation, Griffith learned that the woman had lost her house, moved into her car, then lost the car due to mounting bills related to her 2-year-old daughter’s unsuccessful fight with leukemia. “Her heartbreaking story got me going,” says Griffith. “I started

my first charity soon after.” Along with a few friends, she launched Kiting for Kids, a local beach toy drive for children fighting cancer that became a wonderful community effort. The charity event grew from collecting 50 toys to amassing many thousands, which have helped delight more than 100 children.

By 2017, her corporate health care job was in flux, and she was pondering whether to accept another secure position. She decided instead to take a leap. Griffith took the less-than \$10,000 she had in savings and put it—and all of her energy—into building Chasin a Dream Foundation.

“I have always believed in the power of community and the concept of ‘locals helping locals,’” says Griffith, who has even trademarked the phrase. “When people can directly see where their donations are going in the community, I believe they want to become more involved.”

Today, Chasin a Dream provides an array of services to children and their families—everything from supplying hospital backpacks filled with items like pillows, blankets, stuffed bears, and iPads to helping with funeral costs to matching service dogs with children in need. This past July, a 6-year-old girl in Wellington who was left paralyzed from the neck down after a car accident was united with an adorable service dog with a little help from Chasin a Dream. Griffith was able to connect the girl’s family with Furry Friends in Jupiter, who offered up a new pup named Juliet for the job.

“Lori put her whole life and savings on hold to chase her dream of helping kids,” says John Huempfnier, who leads the charity’s board of directors, along with his wife, Norma. “In three years, she has made Chasin a Dream into a phenomenal organization.”

The foundation aims to help more and more kids as it grows and hopefully obtains grants. And to Griffith, there’s nothing more rewarding. “I have never worked so hard or made less money, but I have also never been happier,” she says. “I am blessed to be living this incredibly fulfilling life.” ♦

