

Excerpt from Chapter 15

I'll never forget the day I checked my e-mail and found the note from a hospital social worker.

"Here are some resources you might find helpful," it read. It was a list of websites for support groups both within and outside the hospital. Then came the offer that no parent wants her child to receive: The social worker wrote that Karla "qualified" to be the recipient of a gift from a wish-granting foundation. It was as if the world was telling me that my child was going to die—that she would be granted a "last wish"—and I wasn't ready to accept that. My heart felt as though it had stopped—just like it feels now as I write this.

About 20 years ago, when I was working as a flight attendant, I encountered a young girl on a flight to Hawaii. With a smile on her face, little Jennifer told me that she had leukemia and that this trip to Hawaii with her mother was her "wish." I was young and had never been touched by something so deeply. I took special care of them during the flight, and later, I received a lovely thank-you note from her with a few photos, including one we had taken together during the flight. The pain I carry from that beautiful experience is that I never responded to her. I didn't know how. I never found out what happened to Jennifer, but I now understand firsthand what her mother was going through. And I also know how a young child with cancer—a child you barely know—can touch your heart so deeply.