

Jeanine Patten-Coble –Founder and President, Little Pink Houses of Hope

Jeanine was a high school history teacher and professional educational trainer for 15 years before being diagnosed with breast cancer in 2009. Her own battle with breast cancer inspired the creation of Little Pink Houses of Hope. Her work, providing breast cancer patients and their families with a week long vacation away from doctor appointments and treatments, has made an amazing impact across the United States. Jeanine was recently named a 2017 CNN Hero, honored by SELF magazine as the 2014 Women Doing Good award winner and by Former President George HW Bush as a Point of Light Award Winner. Her joy comes in knowing the way in which the national non-profit serves women in 48 states and Canada. She is inspired by all of the wonderful people that she has met through her service and is thankful that God showed up in her life in such a big and powerful way to put her on this mission. Jeanine has a Bachelor's degree from Saint Louis University, a Master's degree from NC A&T University and a certificate in Non-Profit Management from Duke University. Jeanine is thrilled to have a wonderful husband, Terry and son, Jake who carried her through her own cancer journey with their strength, support and love. She currently lives in Burlington, North Carolina.

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Jeanine's Story

On June 15th, 2009 I was officially diagnosed with cancer. We were supposed to be leaving the next day for a family vacation to the beach and I asked my doctor, "can I still go?". He answered with an emphatic YES! Then proceeded with the killer caveat- "you better go and enjoy yourself because when you get back you are ours for the the next year."

With that statement, I packed my bags and headed to the beach with my husband and son. We have been vacationing in Buxton, North Carolina for the past 15 years, but this trip was going to take on new meaning for our family in more ways than we could ever imagine.

We arrived at the house and I put on my running shoes to try to clear my head. That night, we were going to tell my son I had cancer and I was dreading even thinking about the experience. So what better way to handle it than to put on my shoes and run away. Little did I know that I was running towards something.

I ran down the Old Lighthouse Road and when I got to the end of it I was incredibly perplexed. Here was a big compound of houses with a chain link fence around it and no one in sight. I ran around the fence trying to find some marking to help me better understand what it was. I finally came across a sign that indicated that it was owned by the US Coast Guard. It looked like a ghost town- completely abandoned with no one in sight.. And keep in mind this is all oceanfront property access.

I turned around and started my run back to our beach house. The thought that these houses were supposed to be used kept running through my head.... I could paint them pink...Little Pink Houses...I could create a cancer retreat center... families could come to get away from the daily life of cancer...I am supposed to do something amazing with this...you just found out you have cancer...what are you thinking?

What a great distraction for me. Here I am staring down the barrel of telling my 12 year old I have cancer a mere 24 hours after I have found out, and I have already starting making plans to change the world with this compound of houses. I laughed at myself (repeatedly). Talk about getting cancer and thinking that you are going to change things right from the very beginning. I was laughing even thinking about it and realized I better focus the rest of my run on how to tell my son that our world is about to change.

All week long, these houses kept calling to me, in a way that I cannot explain. Sometimes you do not know what you are supposed to do until you trip across your destiny. In my case, I feel like I ran right into it on a warm summer day in my running shoes.

This experience is what led me to develop the plan for Little Pink Houses of Hope. The beach is a place where we were able to reconnect and get stronger as a family as we prepared for the cancer journey. We have returned throughout treatment to find that same solace and place of peace. Little Pink uses a model of donated beach houses and volunteers to create that environment of which I dreamed. I have never felt more alive or moved by the plans that God has for me. I look forward to you dreaming with me!

