

# Shares a Request from a Legend



**By: Carolyn Corsano Wong**

I was in my kitchen chopping up cabbage for cole slaw. The phone rang. Should I answer it or let whoever was calling just leave a message? I looked at the caller ID and did not recognize the number. I figured it was probably a sales call. Since I run a consulting business out of our home, I wiped the cabbage off my hands, put on my professional voice and answered. "Good afternoon, this is Carolyn." "Is this Carolyn Wong?" the caller asked. "Yes, speaking" I replied. "Carolyn, this is Carol Burnett." Not quite sure of what the caller had just said and especially since she said it with an air that conveyed I was expecting her call, I said: "I beg your pardon, who?" "Carol Burnett...you sent me that letter." After picking my jaw up off the floor, I began my unforgettable conversation with a legend, Emmy winner, Medal of Freedom winner, Kennedy Center honoree, my childhood hero; Carol Burnett.

The letter that Ms. Burnett referred to was sent to her only the week before her call. I wrote her to tell her about our upcoming production of THE CAROL BURNETT SHOW, and to invite her to come (I discovered she was going to be in Texas and quite close by the very weekend we open our show). I further explained that with every STAGE RIGHT production we highlight a need in our community then throw a spotlight on a non-profit organization that is helping with that need. In the past we have collected items for our local food pantry, animal shelter, and women's



PHOTO BY RANDEE ST. NICHOLAS

shelter. We've collected toiletries and snacks to be sent to our troops overseas with the US Troop Support Foundation, toys for the Marines Toys for Tots campaign and books and monetary donations for the Library Friends of Conroe. In my letter I asked Ms. Burnett what charity she would like highlighted in a show that bears her name. She very graciously thanked me for our invitation to the show but doubted she would be able to attend due to her travel schedule and prior commitments. Then she said that she would greatly appreciate our support of an organization quite dear to her; The Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation.

From their website: "The Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation (TBCF) provides financial aid assistance to low- to moderate-income families in the amount of \$2,000-5,000. TBCF receives the families' bills and pays them directly. Families are assisted with rent or mortgage payment; auto loan payment, registration, insurance, repairs, and vouchers for fuel; payment of utility bills; medications, treatments, and home care services that are not covered by insurance; funeral expenses; and other costs such as health insurance premiums, counseling, childcare, groceries/meals, overnight hotel accommodations for emergency or extended hospital stays and other day to day financial necessities.

### **Parent Support Groups and Support Groups for Children with Cancer and Their Siblings**

These groups offer a unique and beneficial form of support; offering parents both an educational presentation and a place to meet others enduring a similar situation. Only another parent with a child suffering from cancer can fully understand the pain these parents are going through, and the realization that they are not alone in their battle provides a unique sense of comfort. Our groups consist of a family style dinner followed by an open forum discussion facilitated by a licensed social worker and translator for the adults, and an art therapy group with a licensed therapist for the children



with cancer and their siblings. For children who do not wish to participate childcare is provided.

#### Care Packages

Care packages are given to families whose child is in the hospital. They consist of gift certificates from various local markets and restaurants, toys for the child and his or her siblings, and a "Parent Pax." Each Parent Pax contains toiletries (including toothpaste, a toothbrush, a hairbrush, deodorant, soap, shampoo, conditioner, and a towel) and other helpful items, such as a phone card, a disposable camera, and a voucher for food that can be delivered to the hospital.

#### Hotel Accommodations

Occasionally, the child must undergo treatment far from the family home, making visits difficult and costly. Hospitals generally have limited accommodations, and treatments can often last days, several weeks or even months. TBCF helps to ease this financial burden by offering free hotel accommodations at the Santa Barbara Encina Lodge to immediate family during an emergency or an unusually extended hospital stay.

#### Funeral Fund

The saddest reality of cancer is that sometimes kids pass away. During these tragic times, TBCF assists families with funeral arrangements, helping to pay for such things as funeral home costs, cemetery plots, headstones and other expenses that arise.

#### Kids' Days and Family Fun Events

TBCF hosts fun events for children and their families throughout the year. These "fun days" provide an opportunity for kids to meet other kids like them, helping them to feel less alone, and giving them a break from constantly thinking about their treatment. "Fun days" have included trips to Universal Studios, Mother's Day Spa Day, Fishing for Fathers, Family Fun Day, professional sporting events (basketball, hockey or baseball), Project X-Mas, Project Turkey & the annual Holiday Party.

#### TBCF Storytellers

Three times a week, a TBCF volunteer visits Cottage Hospital to read stories to the children in the pediatrics unit. The TBCF volunteer is provided with books, puzzles, activities, and stuffed animals to give to the children in the hospital.

#### Transportation

Some families may have difficulty in transporting their child to and from treat-

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# THE CAROL BURNETT SHOW



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ment, which can be as much as five times per week. When transportation is needed, TBCF arranges rides for our families to safely and comfortably make their child's treatments.

### Food Share

The cost of hospital stays can include as much as \$100 per visit for food alone, particularly for those families who do not have relatives or friends nearby to assist with bringing food during such stays. TBCF provides food vouchers to markets and the hospital cafeteria for such stays. TBCF also provides food vouchers to local markets to help alleviate some of the day to day grocery costs once home.

### Loss of Child to Cancer Support Group

In collaboration with Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care of Santa Barbara, TBCF provides an Educational Supportive group geared for parents who have lost a child to cancer. Participation encourages openness to the group no matter where parents are in their grief journey. Parents have the opportunity to bring their diverse stages/dynamics of grief and share their experiences and learn from one another. Through utilization of readings, meditation, art and writing/poetry/short stories, participants are given an opportunity to further reflect on their own grief journey, deepen their wisdom and take continued

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### **Moments in Time**

*Thanks to our wonderful sponsors, we're occasionally able to brighten the lives of some very deserving people by meeting a family's or child's special request. With the generosity of our donors and volunteers, TBCF has created these moments in time, such as building a wheelchair ramp, providing much-needed tutoring, providing a teenage girl with a salon day and a Betsey Johnson dress in preparation for her first school dance, or arranging for Owen Wilson (the voice of "Lightning McQueen" from the movie Cars) to call and wish an eight year old boy Happy Birthday. The moments are endless."*

Ms. Burnett was honored last year by the TBCF for her generous support of their organization. Sadly, Ms. Burnett lost her daughter Carrie Hamilton to lung and brain cancer in 2002. So, she knows, first hand, the devastating impact cancer diagnosis and treatment has on a family. We at STAGE RIGHT are honored that Ms. Burnett personally chose our 'spotlight organization' for THE CAROL BURNETT SHOW. We are going to be collecting donations in the lobby of the theatre for The Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation during the run of the show. We hope that by seeing the wonderful work they are doing to support families dealing with cancer you will consider making a donation, either while attending our show or via their

website [www.teddybearcancerfoundation.org](http://www.teddybearcancerfoundation.org).

Since, at present, the TBCF only benefits those living in California we felt the need to do something for families in our own community battling cancer. STAGE RIGHT is offering free admission to THE CAROL BURNETT SHOW to immediate family members with a member (mom, dad, or kids) currently undergoing cancer treatment. Families that would like to come free of charge are asked to call the box office and make a reservation for "Carol's Friends" tickets. We feel, as Carol Burnett does, that laughter is the best medicine.

THE CAROL BURNETT SHOW will be a blast back to the 1970s with comedy sketches from Ms. Burnett's famous variety show as well as musical numbers (please note that Ms. Burnett is NOT appearing in the show). Performances are April 20 – May 6, Friday and Saturday nights at 8 pm and two Sunday matinees on April 29 and May 6 at 2 pm. Ticket prices are \$20 for adults, \$17 for seniors and groups of 10 or more, \$15 for kids 16 and under and groups of 20 persons or more. Tickets can be purchased online at [www.stage-right.org](http://www.stage-right.org) or by calling the box office at 936-441-SHOW (7469). All dis-

count and "Carol's Friends" tickets must be obtained by calling the box office. The historic Crighton Theatre is located at 234 N. Main St. in downtown Conroe.

During our phone conversation Ms. Burnett expressed great interest in our show. She asked that I keep in touch and let her know how it goes. She also said that it sounds like "such fun." "Just have a ball with it!" she said. We will and we hope you'll join in the fun. ♦



PHOTO BY KAMILLA PLAMBECK

*Actress Jane Lynch with Carol Burnett when she was honored by the TBCF for her support.*

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