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# HELP, PLEASE: GRETCHEN HOLT-WITT OF COOKIES FOR KIDS' CANCER

CHIEF CORRESPONDENT AND NEW MOM SUCHIN PAK FINDS OUT HOW OTHER MOMS PARENT

By SuChin Pak



When Gretchen Holt-Witt's 2-year-old son, Liam, was diagnosed with pediatric cancer, she decided to raise awareness by doing what Liam loved most — baking cookies. But this is not a story about a scrappy little bake sale: With the help of friends and volunteers, Gretchen baked more than 100,000 cookies in eighteen days. That headline helped launch [Cookies for Kids' Cancer](#), a national organization that has raised more than \$4 million to date to fund pediatric cancer research through cookies and bake sales. In 2011, Liam's courageous four-year fight with cancer came to an end. But Gretchen's commitment to his memory and the fight against children's cancer continues.

— *SuChin Pak*

**Tell me the story of how [Cookies for Kids' Cancer](#) began.**

A few days after Liam first entered the scary and uncertain world of cancer treatment, one of his oncologists shared with me the sobering statistic that cancer is the No. 1 disease killer of children in the United States. As someone who considers herself a well-read person, I was dumbfounded. How could I not know that cancer claims the lives of more children every year than asthma, AIDS, MS, and MD combined? When I pressed him on why people don't know this awful statistic, he said:

"Kids don't make headlines when they're diagnosed because no one cares about a kid who gets cancer." I'll never forget that moment. To this day, more than six years later, those words are just as shocking. But what he said next is something that I just couldn't believe and still have a hard time comprehending. He told me how little funding goes to childhood cancer. In fact, less than 4 percent of the National Cancer Institutes's multibillion dollar budget goes to the dozens of types of childhood cancers.



When Liam was declared to have no evidence of cancer in his tiny body after a grueling seven months of treatment (which included multiple rounds of high-dose chemo, radiation, painful antibody therapy, and a twelve-and-a-half-hour surgery), I knew I had to do something to give back. I was sitting on the steps of Liam's school after dropping him off for a day of sheer bliss, a simple act that seemed nothing short of a miracle to me, trying to think of a way I could raise money, to help generate awareness in whatever way I could. I knew it had to be something irresistible — something that people wanted to be a part of instead of wanting to turn away from because it was just too scary. And so the idea of baking cookies during the holidays with the help of some friends and donating all the proceeds to pediatric cancer seemed to be a good idea.

What I didn't know was just how hard it would be to actually pull off my little idea to bake 96,000 cookies. But I'm not sure that would have stopped me. I would have done anything to help make a difference.

**Over the years, Cookies for Kids' Cancer has raised millions of dollars for pediatric cancer research. Can you share one story that especially moves you?**

Oh, gosh. There have been more than 4,000 events — and our eyes are focused on the number 5,000, which is quickly approaching. Each one tells a story of love, compassion, and caring for others. Together, they weave a tapestry that covers my soul and helps me grieve. The stories that come from each event are awe-inspiring and help me to continue moving forward. I still open every piece of mail we receive, which is something that is so important to me. And whether it's a child hosting an event or an adult or a business or a school or community group, they all say the same thing. They all say "thank you" for making them aware of the need surrounding pediatric cancer and an opportunity to get involved. Can you imagine that? People are thanking us for the opportunity to work hard to raise money for us? My goodness!

**You have a second cookbook out this year, *All the Good Cookies*. Tell us more.**

I am so proud of this book! It is a collection of irresistibly delicious cookie recipes that cover every type of cookie lover, including those with nut, gluten, or dairy allergies. It has recipes that are quick and easy, and ones that have as many nuts, fruits, and other wholesomeness that can be packed into a cookie.

Two dear friends, Fraya Berg and Jackie Plant — who met when they were the food editors at *Parents* magazine — worked incredibly hard developing, testing, and testing again until the recipes were perfect. The recipes are the heart of the book, but the soul is found in the more than 40 profiles of the wonderful event hosts across the country.



**Your day job is working at OXO, which has one of my favorite kids' lines, Tot. What are some of the most common frustrations you hear from moms about baby gear?**

There was a five-year period at OXO where 25 babies were born, including my son, Liam. There were quite a few new parents experiencing the same frustrations about limitations of baby products. It became the talk around the water cooler: for example, how frustrating it was when you wanted one wipe and instead got something similar to a stream of Tibetan flags. So we invoked the spirit of Sam Farber, who founded the company in 1990, and got to work designing a better mousetrap — well, in this case, baby products. As consumers, we have become accustomed to accepting the status quo. But at OXO, we take those everyday pet peeves and work on making a product that's easier to use and therefore makes the experience more enjoyable. And whoever thought you could say that using a mop could be more enjoyable?

**You try to achieve work/life balance by:** Oh, this makes me laugh. When I figure it out, I'll tell you! I live a life ruled by passion and love, and find I don't have much time to worry about work/life balance.

*Can you imagine that? People are **thanking** us for the opportunity to work hard to raise money for us? My goodness!*

**Don't forget to:** Say thank you and make sure people know how much you appreciate them.

**Say no to:** Being complacent.

**Say yes to:** Challenging yourself beyond your comfort zone.

**The thing no one tells you about parenthood:** How incredible children are if we just take the time to really get to know them.

**The best piece of parenting advice you've received:** Let children be children as long as they can be. As a parent, my job is to do the worrying, but my children were responsible for one thing: being children.

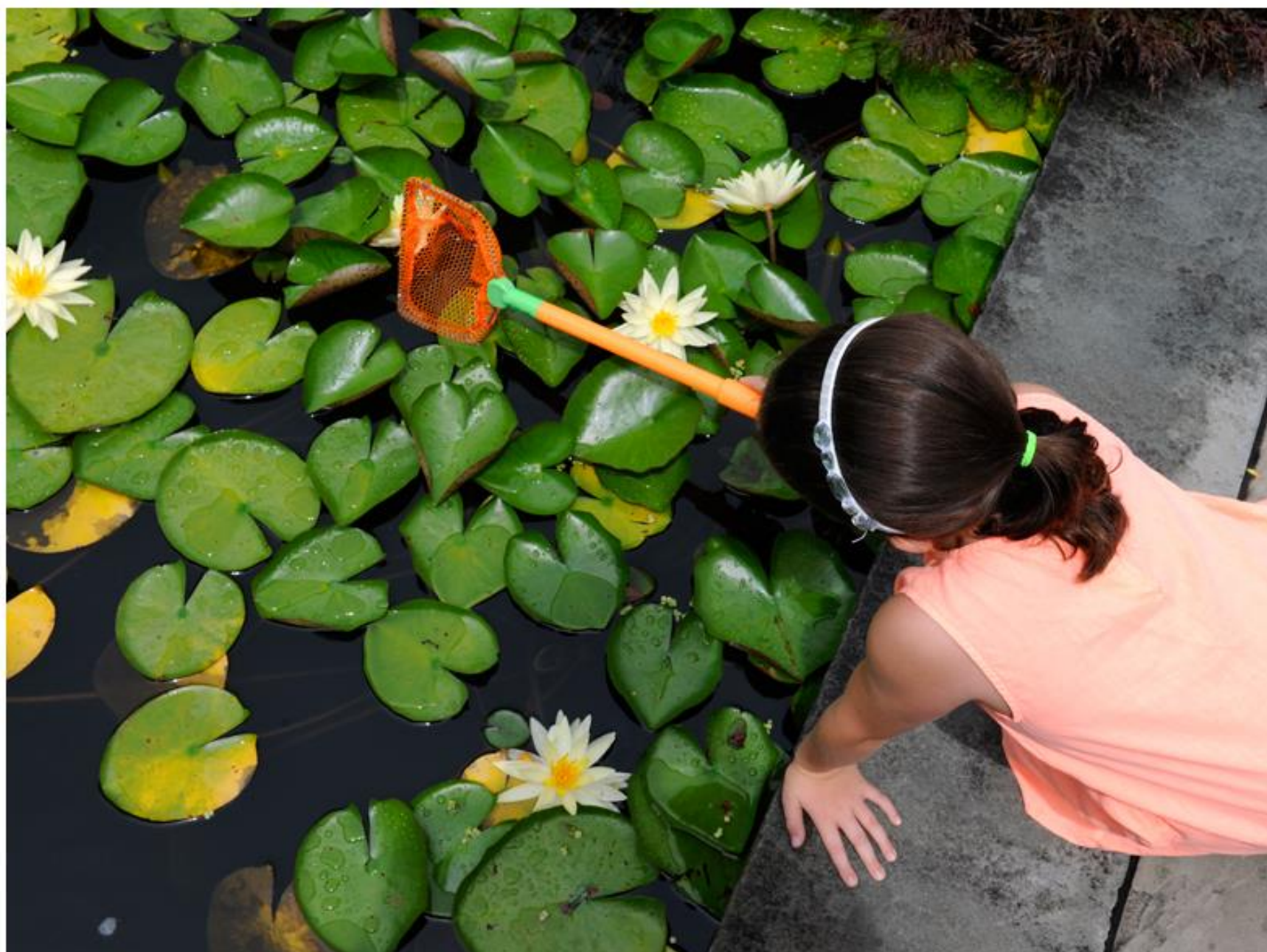
**Imagine your daughter, Ella, has written a book about you. The title:** *Love Is All You Need.*

**Your secret remedy for the common cold:** My mom.

**Your favorite cookie baking memory:** How much Liam loved to be in the kitchen with me. I couldn't make anything without him wanting to be by my side. If the stand mixer was out, Liam was there regardless of how he felt. He loved to bake because baking to him was his way of showing his love.

**I'm just starting to get out of the pureed baby food stage for my son. Any tips or recommendations?**

Graduate to the coarse setting on the food mill or ricer and try everything! You'd be amazed at what budding palates will take a liking to.



**Your go-to sunscreen:** Anything on the Environmental Working Group's website that has a rating of 2 or lower.

**S'mores or ice cream?**

Ice cream — every day.

**Favorite beauty item in your makeup bag:** It's a tie. Argan oil or my favorite mascara, Lancôme Définicils.

**Kiddie bedtime book:** *The Curious Garden* and *The Cloud Spinner*. They are Ella's go-to books when she wants to be comforted.

**Your summer beach read:** You won't believe it, but I'm totally into *The Emperor of All Maladies*, which is the history of cancer and dedicated to a child. The first time I read the dedication, I cried.

**Go-to baby gift:** OXO Tot feeding spoons, an OXO Tot wipes dispenser, and a stack of fashionable burp cloths.

**Go-to family dinner:** Neither Liam nor Ella liked red meat, so ours tend to be bean burritos. For Ella, it would be anything with cheese, which is the center of her food universe.

**App:** Without a doubt, NPR. Love that app — couldn't live without it.

**On your bedside table:** *The Emperor of All Maladies* and my thyroid medicine, which I'm always forgetting to take!

Photos: Stacia Grossman for DailyCandy