

The Love's Baked In

After her son's diagnosis, Gretchen Holt Witt had a sweet idea: a cookie business that raises funds for pediatric cancer.

FOR GRETCHEN HOLT WITT, LIFE IS DIVIDED neatly into before and after February 2007. That's when her 2-year-old son, Liam, was diagnosed with stage IV neuroblastoma, a cancer of the nervous system. "It's like a bomb went off in my life," she says. "As a parent, the last thing you want to hear is that your child has the C word."

After Liam underwent 11 hours of surgery and five rounds of chemotherapy, Witt learned about another treatment in the research pipeline that could help him. Unfortunately, there was no funding for its development. In fact, her oncologist told her that even though cancer kills more children than any other disease, it receives just 4 percent of the National Cancer Institute's roughly \$5 billion annual research budget. "I asked him, 'Why don't I know this?'" says Witt. "His answer was: 'Because kids with cancer don't make headlines.'"

That December she recruited 250 volunteers and held a giant bake sale (nearly 100,000 cookies, made with 167 dozen eggs, 667 pounds of butter, and 833 pounds of flour). "I'd always worked for companies that deal with food prep," says Witt, 42, now head of corporate communications for OXO kitchen tools, "and I thought, *Do something you know.*" The sale raised more than \$400,000—plus a lot of interest from parents who wanted to help in their own communities. Witt realized: *We're onto something.*

She launched Cookies for Kids' Cancer the following September, with a Web site that provides all you need to stage a charitable bake sale, including recipes, banners, and links to packaging suppliers. The site offers cookies for sale, too—chocolate chip, oatmeal raisin, and lemon sugar, all made with natural ingredients—and at least 70 percent of the purchase price goes to fund pediatric cancer research at comprehensive cancer centers like Dana-Farber in Boston, Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, where Liam was treated.

The group has inspired more than 200 bake sales, raising hundreds of thousands of dollars.



Witt's organization has inspired more than 200 bake sales. Liam and little sister Ella help out.

When Witt's first bake sale—250 volunteers and nearly 100,000 cookies—raised \$400,000, she realized she was onto something.

"There's never been a week that I go to the mailbox and don't find the proceeds from a bake sale," says Witt, who works with her husband, Larry, a medical advisory board, and a board of directors to review applications for the funds. Even though Liam is doing well, there's no cure for his cancer, and his

mom knows that money and awareness are the only defense against the disease. As such, to Witt, the C word now means cookies. "A bake sale is just one way to do the right thing," she says. "But do something." (For information go to cookiesforkidscancer.org.) —Almee Lee Ball