



By Shanna Walker / Photography by Darien Lewandowski of Darien Marie Photography and Courtesy of the Saunders Family



Scott and Jennifer Saunders met while they were in college at nearby Furman University. Scott was pursuing a Computer Science-Business degree while Jennifer earned a degree in Business Administration. They married in 2001 and settled in Greenville to begin their life together.

Building a Business, Growing a Family

Scott and Jennifer were working full-time in the business world when their first baby, Kate, arrived. Becoming parents changed Scott and Jennifer’s priorities. They wanted to find a way that Jennifer could continue working but have the flexibility to be more available to their family.

“We decided to go out on a limb and start a business,” Jennifer tells me. “We were young and wanted to take the risk early on.”

Scott and Jennifer researched multiple business concepts



and landed on joining the Great Clips franchise model. They opened their first Great Clips on East Main Street in Spartanburg, and two more locations quickly followed. Over the next decade, the business continued growing steadily. The Saunderses now own and operate 11 Great Clips salons in the Upstate. Scott stepped away from his full-time job in 2018 to help manage the business, and enjoys being involved in the day-to-day management of the company.

“Being in this business has been so rewarding. We especially enjoy working with and developing employees and watching their careers grow,” Jennifer says.

All that time the business was growing, so was the Saunders family! Scott and Jennifer have four children, Kate (16), Ben (14), Will (12), and Mary Brice (8).

Kate is a junior at Saint Joseph’s Catholic School and enjoys playing volleyball and lacrosse. Ben is an eighth-grader at Five Oaks Academy and likes playing basketball and golf. During his free time, you can usually find him hitting golf balls. Will is in the seventh grade at Saint Joseph’s and loves everything sports-related. He is on the middle school football



A family trip to Glacier National Park in 2019

team, plays AAU basketball and YMCA soccer. Mary Brice, the one who completes this busy family, is a third-grader at Five Oaks. She plays CESA soccer and loves anything art-related.

It’s safe to say this is a family that stays on the go!

When Life Pulls a Punch

It would seem that the Saunders family is a perfect example of a family that runs like a well-oiled machine with everything on track. They have a thriving family business and healthy, growing children. They are happy with one another and active in the community with many dear friends.

While all those things may be true, no family



Saunders Family visits Jennifer at the hospital

is immune to life’s cruel twists. On July 24th, 2020, at the age of 43, Jennifer heard the words no one ever wants to hear: “You have cancer.” Stage 4 Non-Hodgkins Follicular Lymphoma, to be specific.

“It was a shocking diagnosis,” Jennifer confides. “One you don’t expect in the prime of your life. This type of cancer is a slow-growing blood cancer that I likely had for several years. The only symptoms I had were a persistent watery eye and severe hip pain. Nothing that would make me think cancer.”

Those symptoms weren’t indicators of cancer to Jennifer’s doctors, either. The persistent watery eye was thought to be a sinus infection, then a blocked tear duct. A CT scan revealed a mass to be the cause of the blocked tear duct, but doctors were fairly sure it was benign and could be surgically removed.

Once the surgery was performed, doctors knew they were dealing with something much greater than a benign mass. When the full pathology and imaging reports returned, Jennifer learned that not only was the mass cancerous, but it had spread all over her body, including her spleen, lungs, bones, and throughout her lymphatic system. It was hard to find anything encouraging in the news they were given.

However, the Saunders family was determined

to fight. Jennifer started treatment as soon as possible.

Cancer is not a fight anyone should face alone, and the Saunderses soon found that they had plenty of people in their corner.

“My neighborhood friends and the community immediately rallied behind me and my family,” Jennifer says. “A meal train was set up, posters were made, t-shirts were ordered, a joint Tropical Smoothie Café and Barre 3 outdoor class was organized, the list goes on. My family was truly overwhelmed with the community support!”

A Journey of Highs and Lows

Jennifer and Scott felt blessed to find an incredible oncology team right here in Greenville to form her treatment plan. They felt immense relief when the initial chemotherapy and immunotherapy treatments seemed to be knocking out the cancer. The plan was working! Then, at what was supposed to be her sixth and final chemotherapy treatment, Jennifer noticed several external nodules on her body. Doctors wasted no time sending Jennifer for a biopsy of the nodules.

Heavy disappointment followed. Not only were the nodules cancerous, but the aggressiveness of the cancer had increased. Instead of seeing her treatment come to an end, Jennifer had to dig deep to outmatch the cancer with a harder-hitting

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treatment. After consulting with specialists, the decision was made to prepare Jennifer for a stem cell transplant.

Before the transplant could take place, Jennifer would have to undergo more chemotherapy. Among other side effects, it was inevitable that she would lose her hair.

“When that process started, I went ahead and decided to let one of my General Managers at Great Clips shave it,” Jennifer says. “We kept the situation as light as possible, and we even did a Mohawk before shaving it all off!”

After a grueling six consecutive days of inpatient chemotherapy, on March 16th, 2021, Jennifer had her stem cell transplant, using her own stem cells. For 18 days, she was an inpatient on the Bone Marrow Transplant wing at Prisma’s Greenville Memorial hospital. Fortunately, everything went exceptionally well, and Jennifer was able to return home to recover.

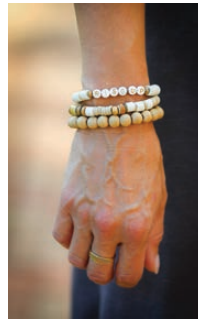
A Community Rises Up

During the difficult months of Jennifer’s journey, a group of her close neighborhood friends decided to organize a 5K race in her honor. They named it “Rise Up for Jennifer 5K” and set a goal to raise \$10,000. It was a virtual race, full of local business sponsors and donations. People from all over Greenville and even across the country joined in the race, which ultimately raised over \$25,000. The money was donated to the Follicular Lymphoma Foundation to further research. The Second Annual Rise Up for Jennifer 5K is already set for March 12, 2022. More information can be found by joining the Facebook group RISE UP for Jennifer 5K.

During her cancer journey, a friend suggested that Jennifer consider working with the organization Let There Be Mom (LTBM). LTBM is a local non-profit organization with the mission of preserving the legacies of Upstate parents who have been diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses.



Making the most of chemo hair loss with a fun Mohawk



Jennifer was hesitant at first because she didn’t think she needed their services. But after a talk with founder Kipra Anderson, she was reassured that her participation in the program didn’t mean she was admitting to losing her battle.

“I began to see it as a way to ensure that my kids will always have a piece of me for all their important milestones,” Jennifer explains.

Two LTBM projects have already been a blessing to Jennifer’s family. The first is a video interview of shared memories that she wanted to be documented, things like how she and Scott first met and each of the children’s birth stories. Another favorite project used articles of Jennifer’s clothing to make a pillow for each of her children. On the back of each pillow is a note in Jennifer’s handwriting. Jennifer was able to leave the pillows with the children during her extended stay at the hospital for her stem cell transplant.

“Hopefully, I will be here for each of these milestones we created gifts for, and I can hand them to the children myself. But if for some reason I’m not, I have a lot of peace knowing that a special part of me will be here with my children forever.”

It all comes full circle. Scott and Jennifer’s oldest daughter, Kate, is currently serving as a Student Ambassador for LTBM. Student Ambassadors are responsible for spreading the word about LTBM’s mission, volunteer opportunities, and upcoming events. Kate is eagerly giving back to the organization that has been such a blessing to her family.



Saunders Family Christmas 2020



Incredible turnout for the “Rise Up for Jennifer 5K”

Thankful Hearts

The Saunders family is elated that Jennifer’s cancer is currently in remission. The PET scan taken 100 days after her transplant showed no evidence of disease, and she is being closely monitored. Follicular Lymphoma is an incurable cancer, so the goal of treatment is to keep it at bay for as long as possible.

“I am thrilled to currently be cancer-free, and hope that my story can encourage others to keep going and find beauty, even in the hardest of times,” says Jennifer.