

Taylor Diercks rests in the townhouse where Houston Haven first started as a ministry.

A Welcoming Home for The Weary

CRU STORYLINES

words by **RACHEL STREICH**

photos & videos by **TED WILCOX**

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Patty Holloway never considered herself a fan of long commutes.

As she battled lung cancer, the short 5-mile distance between her townhome and the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center felt like a small blessing. Even still, some days, Patty could barely make it home without becoming sick after a chemotherapy treatment.

“I’m so thankful that I live in Houston,” Patty said.

Patty’s daughter Jane Nodskov knew the road from the townhome to the Cancer Center well as she drove back and forth, caring for her mother. In 2011, Patty passed away, having fought cancer for a year. After her death, Jane began to dream of a way her mother’s home could become a gift to others. Today, Patty’s townhome has become a place of rest for people in need.



Jane Nodskov (right) gives Taylor Diercks her favorite beverage and treats.

Jane stands in the summer heat outside the townhome, holding a box of cookies and a large cup of Chick-fil-A iced tea. A young woman named Taylor Diercks cheerfully opens the door and welcomes her. Jane steps inside to the living room and sits on the edge of an ottoman, chatting with Taylor about her latest update from the doctor.

Taylor and her husband, Cory Diercks, moved from Alabama so Taylor could receive treatment for leukemia at the MD Anderson Cancer Center. They were blessed with a temporary place to stay at Patty's former home.

Jane and her husband, Keith, started a ministry, which they named Houston Haven, in 2019 to provide housing for those in need who are on medical journeys. The ministry has since partnered with a similar organization called Suites of Hope and expanded to eight residences in total, including apartments and houses in close proximity to the Texas Medical Center.

Houston Haven opens doors for people to extend and receive comfort. And God brings compassion to their experiences through friendship and practical care.



Jane (left) meets Cheryl Bost (right) and Cheryl's cousin in one of the Houston Haven apartments. Cheryl traveled from Corpus Christi, Texas, to receive treatment for breast cancer.



Jane checks on a lightbulb in Cheryl's apartment. She lends a hand to take care of quick fixes in the homes from time to time.



Cheryl says her Houston apartment feels like home.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we

ourselves are comforted by God.”

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4 (ESV)

Laying the foundation

In 2019, Jane and Keith joined their friends Mike and Jenny Moore at an Astros baseball game. Mike and Jenny serve with Embark, the city ministry of Cru® for young professionals, which Jane got involved with in her 20s.

At the game, Jane and Jenny chatted about Jane’s mom’s home. Jane opened up about her desire to offer it as short-term housing for people receiving cancer treatment.

“Well, why don’t you do it?” Jenny asked.

The idea seemed daunting. At the time Jane and Keith had a young child and full-time jobs. Keith works as a risk manager, and Jane uses her organizational and people skills in commercial real estate. Spontaneously launching a non-profit company felt far from their home base.

But the couple sensed God leading them to take the leap, and with Jenny and Mike’s help, they began to build the ministry. Jane now balances three jobs: caring for her

family, working in real estate and serving with Houston Haven.



Jane stops by the ICO Commercial real estate office. She thrives in managing tasks as a senior partner in the company, while reserving capacity for her kids and for ministry with Houston Haven. Jane's co-workers support and volunteer with Houston Haven as well.



Jane and her son Nolan play together at their home before dinner. The Nodskovs make time for fun, like traveling to San Diego, where Jane was born, and soaking up sun at the beach.

Mike and Jenny serve on the board of directors for Houston Haven, furthering the ministry's mission of meeting people's physical, emotional and spiritual needs in trying times. Other friends and acquaintances have rallied around the vision as well.



Jane calls the newest Houston Haven house by its street name, but other homes bear the names of board members' loved ones who walked through cancer. This house belonged to a community member who offered it to the ministry.



Jane (left) and her best friend, Skyer Obregon, eat Tex-Mex together and chat over lunch. The two have stayed close since sixth grade, supporting each other through life changes and family members' cancer journeys. Skyer and her husband, Alex, serve on Houston Haven's board of directors.



The Nodskov family, including 4-year-old Claire, Jane, 1-year-old Nolan and Keith, pray before dinner. They also pray together for Houston Haven requests and families before bedtime.

Karen Campbell works part time for Houston Haven and coordinates the logistics of the ministry, answering emails, taking phone calls and keeping up with families. She first heard about Houston Haven through her involvement with Cru City. Young professionals involved in Cru City have volunteered by working on the homes where needed. Some young women also committed to bring meals for guests during the pandemic.

Most individuals and families move to Houston unfamiliar with the city. Because of MD Anderson's reputation,

patients travel from all over the world to receive treatment. The hospital is ranked number one for cancer care in the nation by [U.S. News & World Report](#).

Rest in chaos

Houston Haven guests begin a new season when they pack their bags and head to Texas. The ministry houses families for up to three months at properties ranging from \$25 to \$35 a day. Finding an apartment in the city poses an overwhelming challenge, and Taylor and her husband, Cory, grew familiar with absurdly steep hotel costs. Houston Haven also helps with the burden of meals, as volunteers deliver home-cooked food and takeout meals once a week.

As Taylor talks with Jane, she sings the culinary praises of a volunteer named Jill, who brought over beef stew and biscuits, blueberry cobbler and cookies.

“We’ve been blessed the whole way,” Taylor says.

Taylor first heard the word “leukemia” as a diagnosis shortly before giving birth to her daughter in 2018. She buckled in for a roller coaster of unknowns. Doctors told her she couldn’t hold her baby girl for seven days because radiation from chemotherapy could transfer.

Cory describes their journey as chaotic, with ups and downs. Still, he reflects on gratitude and wanting to take notice of people in a different way. When he bumps into someone having a bad day, he says he knows what it's like to endure the worst of times.

“When someone’s lost,
aimless and adrift
Take the time, give ’em a lift
Yesterday is history,
tomorrow is a mystery
But today, you can be their
gift.”

SQUIRE RUSHNELL, “WHEN GOD WINKS AT YOU”

Compassion in community

The day after visiting Taylor, Jane drives her SUV to Marshalls department store to pick up personal care items for a guest in the hospital with an infection. Jane wondered if the young woman might feel bored as she sat

in the hospital room, where one night turned into 10 as doctors searched for the cause of the infection.

“It’s a lot more emotionally tolling than I thought it would be,” Jane says. “You’re invested in people and you know their stories; you know about their family and you know what they’ve been through.”



Jane brings artwork to liven up white walls in a guest’s apartment. While the young woman stays in the hospital with an infection, her dad helps hang the decorations.

Bonds form as guests interact with volunteers. Houston Haven’s “ambassadors” keep in touch with families each

week to hear how they're doing, ask for prayer requests and engage in deeper spiritual conversations when the opportunity arises. Jane believes that moments for "the greatest witnessing" happen in the context of relationships through which people see gestures of love that reveal God's character.

"I'm praying that some of these families ... maybe not right now, but maybe down the road, they'll realize there was something different about that Houston Haven ministry," Mike Moore says.



Keith and Jane (left) talk about an upcoming Houston Haven event with Mike and Jenny Moore. Jane first met Mike and Jenny in high school through another ministry.

Faith in a new challenge

Jane waits outside another home, this time in an apartment building. The door swings open and a woman dressed in pink, from her mask to her blouse, greets Jane. Inside, a black sign on the kitchen counter reads, “Houston Haven Welcomes Rachel.”

Rachel Vazquez shows Jane a sticky trap for bugs, and they talk about the smoke detector. With the little apartment details covered, the women dive deeper into conversation on the couch. Six weeks have passed since Rachel moved in while receiving treatment for breast cancer at MD Anderson.

Rachel has always been an advocate of women with breast cancer, working as a mammographer while she served in the Navy. Then a scan showed her own tumor. She traveled from Virginia, where she retired from the Navy after completing 20 years of honorable service. She didn’t know where she would stay, but Houston Haven stepped in.

“They answered a prayer and took my worries away,” Rachel says.



Rachel Vazquez (left) tells Jane her story of finding Houston Haven. She says God sent His people in answer to her prayer for a place to live.



Rachel displays cards from loved ones on a side table in her apartment. Houston Haven also provides Christian books for guests to read.



Rachel seeks to know God and His purposes in her day-to-day experiences and challenges. “Things don’t happen to you; they happen for you,” Rachel says.



Houston Haven: Rachel
Cru Storylines

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Rachel describes how Houston Haven blessed her during her time of cancer treatments.

As a mom to a 12-year-old daughter, occupying the position of receiving care clashes with Rachel's normal way of life. Tears well up in her eyes as she describes the feeling.

"I'm just used to doing and making it better for everyone else, but not for me," Rachel says.

The meals Rachel received from a volunteer named Tori struck her as unnecessary; they felt like too much. But Jane assures her that Tori wanted to help.

"You're blessing us by letting us do that for you. It brings us so much joy to do that," Jane says.

Rachel more comfortably gives that kind of love to others. She pulls a small book of prayers out of her purse, one provided for her from Houston Haven, and tells Jane what it has meant to her. When she's at the hospital, Rachel opens the book and sometimes reads the prayers with other women in the waiting room. Her eyes stay open to the people around her, and Rachel's prayers manifest care.

Comfort in prayer

Houston Haven ambassadors demonstrate concern and spiritual support by checking in and letting families know

they're praying for them.

According to the [National Cancer Institute and cited studies](#), “spiritual well-being, particularly a sense of meaning and peace, is significantly associated with an ability of cancer patients to continue to enjoy life despite high levels of pain or fatigue.”

The Houston Haven application includes the question, “How can we pray for you?”

Volunteer Karen Campbell reads the answers while she works and notices what happens when she asks people in person. The question about prayer opens a window into people's experiences — and leads to getting to know someone more.



The Texas Medical Center in Houston is the largest medical city in the world. More than 160,000 people visit it daily, with over 10 million patient encounters annually.

Karen has also discovered that prayer helps her reflect on the greatness of God.

“We pray for a successful transplant; we pray for a successful surgery and chemo,” Karen says. “But I think [working with Houston Haven] has also made me reevaluate and remind myself that I can ask God for really big things, and I can trust Him to answer them how He wants to answer them.”



Jane picks up cookies for guests from a walk-up shop that operates as an extension of a Houston restaurant.



Jane stops by to see the Ryan family. Mark (far left, wearing the blue hat), Lizette (right) and their three children moved from Virginia for Mark to receive treatment for leukemia. Tropical-themed party decor still adorns the home after the Ryans celebrated their son's graduation. Jane lets the family know she lives close by if they need anything.



Lizette (right) shows Jane a malfunction with the house's dishwasher. Jane's Houston Haven to-do list includes needed repairs and small chores.

Houston Haven continues its support because of the prayers and help of people who want to be part of bringing comfort to others.



Houston Haven: Karen

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Volunteer Karen Campbell describes what it means to her to be able to help those walking through their cancer journeys.

“We are on the ground floor of something that is growing,” Keith told a group of Houston Haven board members, “thanks to God and what He is doing and the people He is using to move this ministry.”

LENDING A HELPING HAND

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