DO NOT RESUSCITATE

The hospice nurse laid the DNR form on the kitchen table, a pen next it.

“You know you have to sign it eventually,” she said, gently, as she had at every visit for two months.

DO NOT RESUSCITATE.

The words glared up at me. I could barely stand to look at the paper, let alone pick up a pen and sign my name.

I walked away—again—as I had each time before, not looking at the form, not ready to face the responsibility of signing away my son’s life, my baby, only 11.

Hospice care was a respite … an illusion of treatment, minus the needles and CTs and MRIs and chemotherapy and radiation.

Nurses still visited, doctors consulted over the phone, therapists comforted. Visitors stopped by from morning to night with food. We were enveloped with love and prayers.

It was easy to pretend there was still hope.

My son had just turned six when he was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a deadly childhood cancer, almost six years earlier. At stage four, his chances weren’t good for survival. But his very first chemotherapy treatment yielded a negative bone marrow result, and there was hope.

Six months of hospitalized chemotherapy, 12 weeks of isolation with two, back-to-back stem cell transplants and one month of radiation and oral therapy, and he was declared cancer-free.

We lived as normally as we could for the next five years. My son played Nintendo at doctor visits, rode the IV pole like a scooter and romped at Disney World in a Make a Wish visit. We never shied from the “cancer” word, certain that the relapse after two years was a temporary glitch that could be vanquished once again by the powerful chemo drugs.

Then one day, the doctor asked us to wait after a routine scan. “There’s nothing more we can do,” he said. “We can’t stop the cancer.”

More than five years after diagnosis, four years after stem cell transplants, two years after relapse, and we’d run out of time. I wasn’t ready.

The hospice nurse waited patiently in the kitchen as I walked back in. “You know you have to sign it eventually,” she said again, softly, firmly, sadly.

I picked up the pen, tears streaming down my face, willing the strength to steady my hand so I could complete this unspeakable act.

“No parent should ever have to sign a form like this,” I said bitterly, at last scrawling my name, taking away my child’s last hope. I laid the pen on the table and walked away.

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Fall 2004