

Peggy Gibson-Carroll

In 2008 Peggy Gibson-Carroll was faced with the heart-breaking news that her father, Chuck Gibson, had advanced stage 4 lung cancer.

Peggy grew up in Cary, North Carolina, and earned a degree in business administration and management from the Kenan-Flagler Business School at UNC-Chapel Hill. At the time of her father's diagnosis she was working as a patient advocate with the pharmaceutical company Bristol-Myers Squibb. Part of her job was helping cancer patients connect with community support. She also frequently volunteered for events and causes related to cancer such as the Tour of Hope, the Komen Race for the Cure, and health screenings for oral, head and neck cancer.



Peggy Gibson-Carroll <http://www.fillyourbucketlistfoundation.org/photo-files/>

“My whole career I was trying to help patients with cancer,” Peggy said. “From that work I knew we didn’t have much time. I asked Dad specifically what was his bucket list and to write it down.”

Chuck Gibson didn’t have a long or extravagant bucket list. He wanted to visit his brother, his old Marine buddies, and to watch his grandchildren play in the school band during football games and at competitions. Peggy describes her reaction to his diagnosis as “overwhelmingly motivated to help him fulfill his dreams.”

The family marked off each item---game nights, meals together, visits with friends. The cancer took him within a few months after he was diagnosed. The day after they finished the list by watching his granddaughter perform with the school marching band Gibson died.

“My dad saw my daughter’s last band competition the day before he passed away,” Peggy said. “We did it all, we said it all. They were special times and I knew that fulfilling those final wishes had meant a lot. I realized that the bucket list could be a really important thing for a cancer patient. I then thought that one day I want to do this for other people too.”

She began by talking to her father's oncologist and asking his opinion if granting wishes like she did for her dad was something that could be done for other people. He responded by suggesting a patient who would benefit from a "bucket list" wish. Peggy next approached a representative of the Make-A-Wish Foundation, which grants wishes for children fighting cancer, to see if there was a need for granting wishes of adult cancer patients. They confirmed there was an unmet need for adults.

"They said they get calls every day from adults but they have more than they can do with children. We pick up where Make-A-Wish leaves off," Peggy stated.

In August 2014 she founded the Fill Your Bucket List Foundation (FYBLF). Based in Cary, North Carolina the organization grants wishes of adult cancer patients in North Carolina with the goal of allowing them to fulfill lifelong dreams and create lasting memories with their families and friends. The team of two paid employees and almost 500 volunteers have granted almost 70 wishes to North Carolina cancer patients since its founding.

Peggy said the foundation's success has only been possible because of the Triangle's tight-knit community and motivated volunteers.

"We've been so blessed by this community. I tell people all the time the Triangle has been the perfect place to start the foundation," Peggy said.

There is also no doubt that Peggy's job at Bristol-Myers Squibb and her volunteer work provided her with extensive oncology and advocacy experience that helped her in her efforts in achieving this goal. She gained experience not only in patient advocacy but also in corporate relations, sales, marketing, project management, and professional alliances.

Her professional and personal lives didn't collide but complemented and coincided with one another. She retired from Bristol-Myers Squibb in 2012 and began work with Rodan and Fields, a dermatologic skincare company that allows employees to work on their own terms and schedules. The company helped her launch Fill Your Bucket List Foundation through their community support program and gives her the flexibility she needs to devote to the foundation while still maintaining an income for herself.

When asked what her bucket list is for the foundation Peggy smiled as she ran through them. First is funding. As a nonprofit FYBLF receives no federal or state funding and is completely dependent on the generosity of donors. Donations can be cash or in the form of air miles, hotel points, activities, gifts in kind or the lending of a vacation home for a week. Peggy emphasized she is always open to fundraising ideas.

Another important wish is for people to raise awareness of FYBLF by going to its Facebook page or website and liking it and sharing it with friends, family and co-workers. Volunteers are another wish on Peggy's list. They are needed to help plan and carry out a cancer patient's wish, such as to take people to where they need to go, meet them at the airport, take pictures, and provide support and help with the details in fulfilling the wish.

Peggy said that her ultimate wish or dream is to "have chapters of Fill Your Bucket List Foundation throughout the United States, like a Make-A-Wish for adults."

The goal for Peggy is to help cancer patients escape the routines of dealing with cancer and make happy memories with their loved ones.

“Your entire life, your mindset, shifts when you get that cancer diagnosis,” Peggy said. “I want them to be able to get away from that even for a little bit.”

“Recipients are suggested by their doctors, other health care professionals, friends, family or themselves. There’s no requirement that they are terminally ill. Some have only months to live while others are struggling through treatments,” according to Peggy.

“A number of items go into who’s chosen from among those recommended. They must be from, living in or receiving treatment in North Carolina. They must have a demonstrated financial need usually at the national poverty level or below. They need to be healthy enough to perform their wish such as if it involves travel. The wish also needs to be something FYBL can accomplish for them. We do have a budget,” Peggy explained.

“Many don’t even know what they want when told they are being granted a wish. Most have never been on a vacation. There are those who want to go to Disney World with their children or grandchildren, others who want to attend a local sporting event, some want a dinner or barbeque with all their family and friends, and still others just want help with electric, gas or water bills,” Peggy stated.

“Cancer puts life in perspective. A cancer diagnosis forces us to live life to the fullest every day. It’s a chance to do the things you want to do and say the things you want to say. The wishes teach us that what’s important is spending time with the people we love. All have brought friends and family to share experiences they likely wouldn’t have had without the foundation,” according to Peggy.

“There’s something to this list. It may not be anything big but to the family to be able to do these memories means a lot. And the patients feel better when they come back from a trip or the wish is completed,” Peggy said.

“She looked healthier and happier than she had in a long time,” a doctor told Peggy about one of his patients upon returning from a granted wish.

“While there is a lot of medical intervention for cancer patients, we try to provide an emotional intervention. Memories that can last for them and for their families,” Peggy said.

*Thank you to Peggy Gibson-Carroll, who wanted me to refer to her as Peggy in this interview, and to Marie Otto, for their assistance and time.