

Flowers for Trisha

What makes you excited to wake up every morning? What are you anxiously anticipating? It's different for all of us. From fresh baked cookies, to riding a motorcycle on a sunny day, to sweet, quiet moments with loved ones, to attending eardrum blowing concerts of your favorite band. Life has endless possibilities for meaning and quality. Even at the end.

Chris Brown has always been a Trisha Yearwood fan. He is also a Center for Hospice Care (CHC) patient. When Chris was dating Darlene in 1993, they saw Trisha on her first tour. From that point on, they made it a point to see her every time she has been on tour, no matter where that took them. From Pennsylvania, to New York City to Tennessee, the Browns have followed Trisha Yearwood devotedly, appreciating her smooth country vocals.



Left to right: **Darlene Brown**, **Chris Brown** and Center for Hospice Care nurse **Tracy Freeze**.

Then Chris was diagnosed with ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis). ALS is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. His diagnosis came in March 2016 after he had already realized significant struggles. He had to retire at 46 years old. The possibility that they wouldn't be attending future Trisha Yearwood concerts was a disappointing reality.



Chris presenting the coffee can full of daisies (bottom left corner) to **Trisha Yearwood**.

In September 2015, Chris asked his wife if she wanted to go to Milwaukee. Trisha had just released a cookbook and she was doing a book signing at a small bookstore. Two days later, Chris, Darlene and their son took off for Milwaukee. He stood in line, cane in one hand and a coffee can full of daisies (actually, pens with silk daisies attached) in the other. Any Trisha Yearwood fan knows why. Her "Cowboys are my Weakness" lyrics state:

You'll never hear me knockin' an old pair of boots
A man who wears his Wranglers for a Sunday suit
The kind that ain't afraid to get dirt on his hands
And brings you fresh daisies in a coffee can

Needless to say, Trisha was thrilled. However, Chris always wondered if those daisies eventually got tossed aside. As a celebrity, she was bound to get so many gifts from fans. In April 2016, Chris had just had an appointment at the Cleveland Clinic. His decline was hastening and he had gone from a walker to a wheelchair. "I went down to the lobby to get him some breakfast," Darlene shared. "I came back, and he was sobbing." Worried that something awful happened, Chris quickly

explained. "You don't understand. These are happy tears." Before Trisha does her Saturday morning network show, she has an online coffee talk. Chris was watching. There, next to Trisha and her assistant, was his can of daisies! Chris quickly reached out to her via online chat. He said, "You have no idea what that can of daisies and seeing them right now means to me. I just got diagnosed with a terminal illness." When she wrote back to him, she shared that she has the daisies with her all the time. She keeps them in her dressing room. She sent her thoughts and prayers to him. And Chris wept with joy.

The muscle deterioration seemed to come so quickly. The minor things Chris had always taken for granted, were now such a challenge. That can be quite frustrating when your mind and will far surpass the limitations of a body with ALS. Chris was able to obtain a pretty remarkable wheelchair. He's a big guy, over six feet tall, and it was this wheelchair that was vital to another important trip.

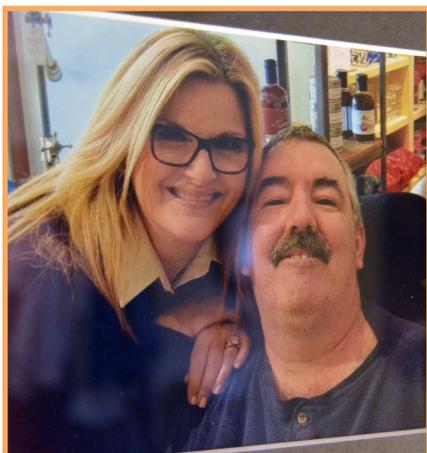
CHC was key in connecting the dots to make the trip to Erie, Pennsylvania possible while contacting another hospice in that location. Through the collaboration of both hospices, Chris was able to get a hospital bed, Hoyer lift and oxygen in his hotel suite. They even provided him an aide to help him bathe and get ready for their daughter's wedding. His remarkable wheelchair was able to rotate Chris to standing position. "You should have seen the looks on people's faces," Chris said. "When I stood in the chair straight up and down...it was amazing." And he danced with the bride in joyous celebration.



Chris dancing with his daughter at her wedding.

It may take a bit more planning and effort to make these moments possible, but these are the moments that provide the quality of life that everyone desires. When all our previous "normals" aren't a reality anymore, we crave to hold on to some of the pieces of life that make us feel "ourselves." To be able to help Chris and Darlene enjoy 5 days of celebration with their family in Erie, Pennsylvania is exactly what CHC is here to do. The grandchildren were able to enjoy the pool at the hotel, while Chris's needs were attended to. For a few days, Darlene said their lives could be just a "little bit back to normal."

The quest to continue this quality of life was a momentum from the moment Darlene realized it was a possibility. That light bulb had been turned on, and she was determined to continue to follow Trisha as long as they could. So, in December 2017 Trisha was going to appear in Nashville. Darlene booked the tickets knowing full well that their CHC support would make this possible. Details from the hotel measuring the room for a hospital bed, to medical equipment to valet parking were all ironed out.



Trisha was doing a book signing at Williams and Sonoma. Worry crept into Darlene's mind as she saw the line of over 200 people. She stood in line while Chris drove his chair to the front of the line, hoping for some grace to get in quickly. Grace was found. The crowded line waved Darlene to the front as they knew the both of them were waiting to talk with Trisha. "You're a lot taller than the last time I saw you," were Chris' first words.

Trisha looked quizzically at him, searching her memory. "He wasn't in a wheelchair," Darlene explained. "I have a picture for you," Chris said.

“Can I give it to you?” He gave her the picture of her and him in Milwaukee. Recognition spread across her face as she said, “I know exactly who you are! I think about you all the time.”

Trisha asked about the concert that day. Darlene shared that they got tickets late and they had to sit somewhere in the third tier. “Oh no,” Trisha said. “You’re family.” Her assistant made sure that the two of them had VIP treatment. They never had to go through security lines, were personally escorted to their wonderful seats and to this day they have the tickets that Trisha issued in her name. They may be Trisha Yearwood fans, but Trisha just may be a Chris Brown fan.

As it becomes increasingly difficult for Chris to move and now speak, these amazing moments have brought them so much joy. In fact, his living room has been transformed to his own “man cave” inclusive of all the equipment he needs daily. Trisha’s pictures and memorabilia are on a small table near his bed. He is blessed to have a wife who works and advocates for all these moments, even when it is far from simple.

CHC wants to make sure we can make quality of life a reality for each and every patient and their loved ones. If CHC can help a patient travel to Nashville to a Trisha Yearwood concert, we can make other moments happen too. Because seeing a coffee can full of daisies can bring tears of joy.

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