

Bike Loud

BY DAVID MARGOLIES



In the fall of 2014, seven boy scouts and six leaders from Troop 845 of Chapel Hill/Carrboro, North Carolina, decided that the next summer we were going to accomplish our long-standing, ambitious goal of cycling across the United States—without vehicle support. While the ride has been a troop tradition for more than a decade, it's more than just a custom. The ride has always been completed on behalf of a cause that makes the 4,000 miles of hard pedaling worthwhile! Our group believed that there was no better cause than the *Be Loud! Sophie Foundation* (beloudsophie.org) to represent and promote as we made our way from Florence, Oregon, to Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina, in the summer of 2015.

Meet Sophie

Be Loud! Sophie Foundation is a non-profit inspired by Sophie Steiner who at the age of 14 was diagnosed with a rare form of germ cell cancer. While undergoing intensive treatment at UNC Health Care, Sophie remained incredibly positive and brave. In and out of the hospital, Sophie and her parents made great efforts to maintain a sense of normalcy and not let Sophie's condition impede her participation in the activities she loved so much. The Steiner family spent weekends at the beach, arranged for Sophie to meet her favorite band (The Avett Brothers), made sure she could attend her big sister's high school graduation, and much more. Sophie even took the strength and initiative to walk the length of a marathon by doing 700 laps within the halls of the bone-marrow unit at UNC Hospitals.

Despite treatments and the best efforts of everyone involved, Sophie Steiner passed away in the summer of 2013. Before she died, however, Sophie expressed a desire to help adolescents and young adults diagnosed with cancer and their families. She specifically wanted to help young cancer patients stay true to their authentic selves in the face of overwhelming illness. Too often, teen and young adult cancer patients are treated in pediatric hospitals designed with young children in mind, or in adult hospitals alongside elderly cancer patients. These patients often feel like they are receiving treatment in a “no man's land” where their particular needs are not supported. *Be Loud! Sophie Foundation* was created to address this need.

Meet Lauren

The Steiners decided that the best way to make Sophie's dream a reality was to have a person at the hospital entirely dedicated to meeting the unique needs of adolescent and young adult cancer patients, helping them to maintain their identity, to keep in touch with their friends, and to be treated as the emerging adults they are. Through the efforts of the Steiner family and many supporters, UNC Hospitals hired a full-time teen and young adult liaison. Lauren Lux, MSW, is a licensed, experienced social worker who firmly believes in the cause she is working for. Together with Don Rosenstein, MD, the director of UNC's Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Support Program, and Stuart Gold, MD, chief of Pediatric Oncology at UNC Children's Hospital, Lauren is building a research-

based support program designed to advance our national understanding of how best to meet the unique needs of patients in this diverse age group.

Bike Loud!

As we biked our way across the continent, many of the people we encountered asked the simple question: “Why?” Why would seven boys want to spend their summer away from home on the back roads and in the small towns of America? Out on the road there was no shortage of time for each of us to contemplate the underlying reasons behind our motivation for getting up and biking in the heat, wind, and rain, going to sleep, and doing it all again the next day. As the initial excitement of being out on the road faded, the true colors of “Bike Loud” began to emerge. Despite not knowing Sophie well, our crew members felt that a part of her was ingrained in each one of us. For example, we knew that in seventh grade, Sophie wrote a poem that read in part:

“...*Be loud*
And move with grace
Explode with light
Have no fear...”

Sophie's poem matched her personality. She was fearless, funny, direct, soulful, compassionate, adventurous, creative, headstrong, and, most of all, brave. Sophie wanted to create a lasting legacy to help others, and helping that cause was the unifying factor and motivation behind our “Bike Loud” trip. In short, the trip was for Sophie.

The Sophie Effect

As we stopped in small towns across the country for food, rest, or both, our team fielded many questions about what we were doing—most likely because of our bright yellow shirts. When we explained our trip, the mission of the *Be Loud! Sophie Foundation*, and our goal to raise \$100,000 for the foundation, incredible things happened. People would randomly give donations to the Foundation in cash, pick up our tab at a restaurant, or even let us stay in their home. The *Be Loud! Sophie Foundation* had a very powerful effect on people. The cause touched the hearts of almost everyone we met and prompted so much generosity. Our bike trip helped spread the message of the *Be Loud! Sophie Foundation* across America and create a newfound sense of awareness about adolescent cancer, and what can be done to reduce the toll it takes on patients and their families.

It is often said that the brightest flames burn quickest, and Sophie Steiner was one of those flames. Although her life was short, she inspired the creation of an extremely meaningful charity that will continue to help adolescent and young adult cancer patients for years to come. Myself (David Margolies), Will Owen, Brian Richardson, Max Morgan, Sam Billings, Andrew De Figueiredo, and Alex Broz, and our leaders, Ed Billings, Dean Broz, Karl Murphy, John De Figueiredo, David Hardy, and Steve Rothwell, are honored to be fortunate enough to be a part of this incredible cause. To date, we have raised more than \$40,000. To help us reach our goal of \$100,000, and to read more about our “Bike Loud” trip please visit us at bikeloud.org. 

David Margolies is 16 years old and attends East Chapel Hill High School in Chapel Hill, N.C. He plans to continue cycling and will pursue studies in business at college.

