Fair Oaks LIVING

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From Crisis to Connection:

KRISTEN HEWITT'S YEAR OF LOVE, SACRIFICE AND LETTING THE SMALL THINGS GO

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From Crisis to Connection:

Kristen Hewitt's Year of Love, Sacrifice and Letting the Small Things Go

BY LAURA I. WINN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ISABEL OLLINGER AND PHOTOS COURTESY OF KRISTEN HEWITT

FROM MORNINGS GOLFING with friends to afternoons paddleboarding under the Rainbow Bridge and evenings watching live music in the Village, 55-year-old Kristen Hewitt was living a vibrant, independent single life in 2025. Her time was entirely hers alone — until one winter day, she recalled, "life changed at the speed of light."

As Christmas approached, Kristen's mom, Denise, and stepdad, Matt, arrived to stay in her guest room for a few weeks of family togetherness. But just as the year was coming to a close, Matt felt a lump in his throat. In January 2026, his doctor delivered a devastating diagnosis: squamous cell carcinoma, a cancer of the throat. Facing a rocky road ahead, Kristen asked her parents to stay. They would fight the battle together in Kristen's Fair Oaks home, just a mile and a half from the home where they first became a family so many years ago.

"The need for families to come together in times of crisis, grief and healing is immeasurable," Kristen explained. "We were so fortunate to have each other in this situation."

As a fifth-generation Sacramentan and descendant of frontiersmen Kit Carson and Daniel Boone, Kristen had always felt



deeply rooted in the bonds of her community, home and family. Still, living with her parents full-time was a new level of commitment for the mortgage broker who had become so comfortable on her own.

With her two grown daughters living out of state with wonderful husbands and young children of their own, Kristen was accustomed to pulling into her quiet cul-de-sac in Phoenix Field and being greeted only by Indie the labradoodle and Rocky the goldendoodle. Now, Kristen had a third doodle —her parents' dog Charlie — added to the welcoming pack, while a host of nurses, visitors and medical equipment flowed through her doors, filling her once-personal space.

Admitting that the sudden change to a multigenerational household could feel "cramped," Kristen said it was a sacrifice worth making. "You're thrown into a different situation, sharing your time, your home and everything that comes along with it," she said. "There's one living room, so we're often all watching the same TV show."

Beyond space and control over the remote, there were dynamics from decades past to renavigate, like the awkwardness of a date coming to the door and Kristen wondering if she should introduce him to her parents. But Kristen soon found that her situation wasn't so unusual.

Through her community connections — volunteering with the Orangevale-Fair Oaks Food Bank, attending concerts on Sutter Street and playing a weekly East Portal Bocce Club game with her biological father, Larry — she discovered many others could relate.

In fact, a 2025 Pew Research study found that 22% of adults ages 65 and older lived in a multigenerational family household, and 10% of all U.S. adults acted as caregivers for a parent aged 65 or older. In Kristen's case, her 77-year-old mom carried the heaviest load.

"Watching my stepdad and my mom go through this together was nothing short of amazing. Mom made every appointment, managed the medications and



Kristen and her granddaughters

"The need for families to come together in times of crisis, grief and healing is immeasurable."



Visiting her beloved grandchildren

ensured he would eat enough," Kristen said. "It took a toll on us all, but Mom was the rock."

Following months of chemotherapy and radiation, the family gathered for the latest PET-scan results in July. The oncologist announced that Matt's body was cancer-free. "Tears of joy came over the three of us," Kristen said.

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"He still had quite a journey ahead to recovery, but it's amazing how an 83-year-old man can beat cancer and work his way back to health," Kristen said. "It's a miracle and a testament to his strong will to live."

After everything they had been through together, Kristen decided to turn eight months into a year. With so much to be thankful for and celebrate, Kristen invited her parents to stay through the coming holidays before moving on to their next home.

And while still valuing her independence, Kristen came to appreciate the perks of her mom's helping hand around the house — preparing home-cooked meals and carefully watering her plants.

Denise also became the de facto pet sitter for the doodles, affording Kristen the freedom to frequently travel to her beloved grandbabies and take an occasional boating day for herself, soaking in the calm and peace of the water — an activity she called "second nature" thanks to a childhood spent boating on the river.

More recently, as Matt's strength improved, Kristen and her family appreciated the small but memorable moments of life — hosting parties with loved ones, swimming on warm days and walking their dogs down to Phoenix Park. Sometimes the



trio simply enjoyed the nearby action of a Fair Oaks Orangevale Little League game, which Kristen sponsored in years past. "On weekends, we can hear the sounds of cheering and refs' whistles from all the sports," Kristen said. "It's such a sense of community, and one of the reasons why I love it here."

Reflecting on the rollercoaster of the past year, Kristen pointed only to the upside. "Having my parents here has taught me more about unconditional love, sacrifice, patience and letting the small things go," she said. "We took a devastating situation, made the best of it and are coming out of it stronger." ■



