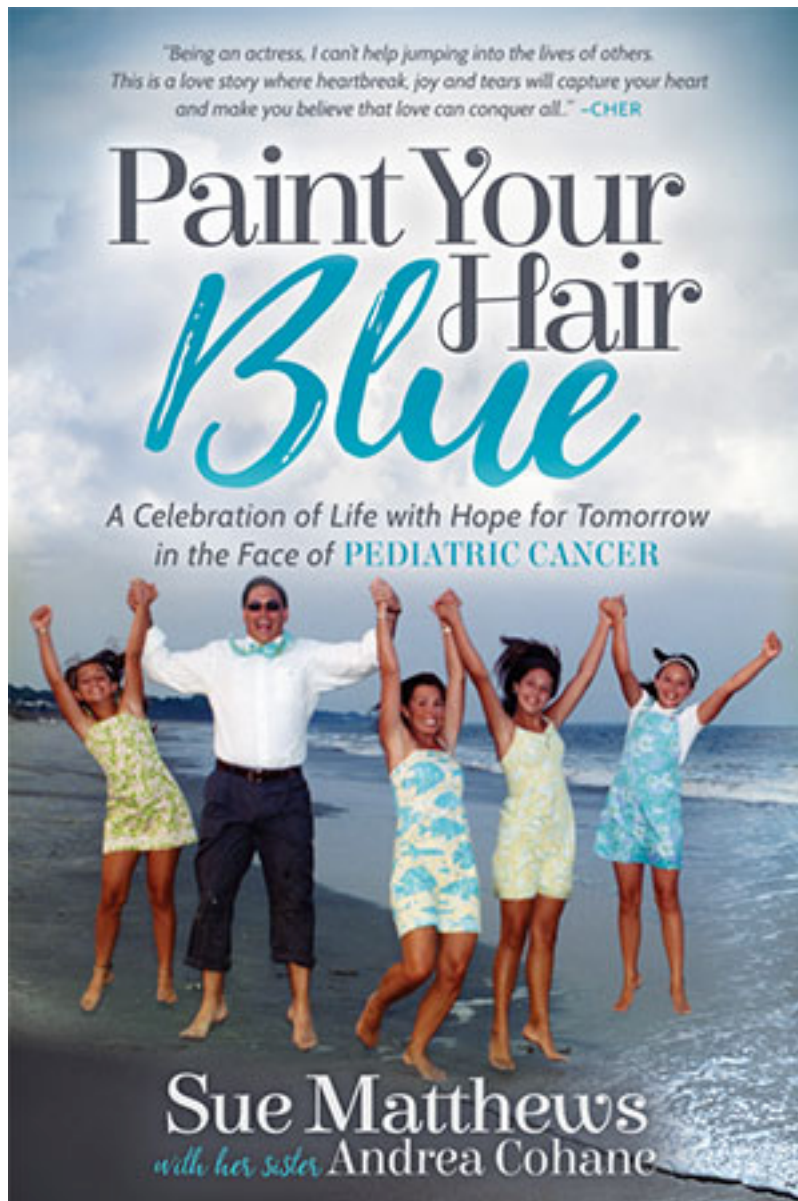




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Sample Chapter

Mischief on 68th Street

It was still August; the weather was warm, and the city was quiet. Sun washed the floor in her hospital room at the end of the day. Taylor was exhausted and irritable about being cooped up. Every twenty minutes or so, the nurses would pop in, saying, "Remember, Taylor; you owe us one more walk." Taylor would listen, wave them off, and turn her head.

On the last attempt, the senior nurse came to push Taylor—and push her hard. She played the integrity card: "Taylor, you promised one more walk

today." The nurse tried to make the walk sound appealing by suggesting that Taylor walk outside for some fresh air. Taylor was uncharacteristically immune to the nurse's appeal. She was done with demands and pushing. She turned away again. The nurse looked to Bob for an assist. He told the nurse, "Leave it to me." He knew his audience.

Bob very gently put his hand on Taylor's head, and as she turned toward him, he said, "Tales, you know this is part of getting back on your feet and getting home. You promised one more walk. I know you have had it with the pain and the pushy people. But I think you're missing an opportunity." Her eyes searched his for a hint.

"Tales," he said, "they want a walk? Let's give them a walk they'll never forget." She was intrigued. He had her attention now and could see her impish grin. "They think we should go outside? Let's go outside!" Taylor began giggling, knowing she was part of a scheme created by Bob. "Tales," he said, "let's go get some ice cream!" Tales was as energized and as upbeat as she had been in a while.

Since I wasn't there at the time, Bob told me all about it later. "She fidgeted, while suppressing her giggles and excitement as they mundanely moved the IV lines, disconnected the wires, and set up the mobile IV pole." The nurses couldn't believe her change in enthusiasm. They waved and called out, "You go, girl! Take your time and walk as much as you like!" Tales didn't hear a word. She was laboring, tired, and in pain, but she was giddy. She was on a mission.

When the elevator opened on the ground floor, Tales headed for the main entrance onto York Avenue. Bob remembers the smell of cigarette smoke filling his nose as they passed a pack of hospital patients getting some air—most of them, unbelievably, smoking. Taylor never noticed or flinched. She skillfully kept walking, turning left at the corner of 68th Street and heading uphill toward First Avenue. This was one heck of a walk!

Tales was still in her hospital gown, a thin gray smock with the back wide open, exposing blood seeping through the bandages. Her underwear was like a flag waving in the back as she pushed her IV pole laden with three bags. She looked to any passersby like an escapee from a mental institution, and Bob remembers thinking that they wouldn't have been completely wrong. But this was New York City, home of the good, the bad, and the ugly, and a half-naked insane person strutting down the street wasn't that shocking.

She should have been afraid of the uphill walk and the physical effort, but instead she was delighted at calling the shots and once more poking her finger in the eye of the giant. People on the street stopped, stared, and then applauded. Cabs tooted their horns, maybe thinking she was a nut or maybe congratulating her. Passengers opened windows to cheer her. They all laughed like it was a publicity stunt. She walked all the way up that hill, huffing and puffing, turned right onto First Avenue, and kept walking. First Avenue is far busier than York

Avenue, so there was even more commotion. Taylor was clearly tired but elated and felt in control.

The truth is, neither Bob nor Taylor knew exactly where the ice cream store was, and there was no such thing as Siri in 2003. Bob asked Taylor, "Do we turn left or right?" They weren't sure how far they had to go, but really, this wasn't about the ice cream. They were taking a walk, Taylor style.

Bob watched as sweat accumulated on Taylor's brow and she began to look a little pale. Her little body was asking for a break. He could see that her steps were slowing, and she was leaning on the pole, which he was now pushing. The point was made. The ice cream seemed to get farther away with each step. She was still smiling and enjoying the street attention, but she was ready to go back to her bed for some care and monitoring. Bob said, "This was the plan all along—take the walk, make a point, and return triumphantly, demonstrating who was in control." Adventure over. Taylor, 1; hospital, 0.

Downhill was obviously easier, and I'm sure she felt more secure knowing she was on the way back toward comfort and care. What Bob didn't know was that the nursing staff had begun to panic. After all, a post-surgical patient can only walk so far. The nurses started asking the patients on the street, "Did you see a young girl passing by?" I guess someone recalled her "turning left a while ago." Now they really hit the panic button. Security was called, and a search was initiated. They were missing a very sick patient who was under their care.

Around that time, I received a call on my cell phone and heard a very angry voice ask me, "Do you know where your daughter is? She has been off the floor for a significant amount of time, and, Mrs. Matthews, you do understand how sick she is!" I asked, "Who are you?" The person on the other end declared, in an arrogant and aggressive tone, "This is security!" I replied, calmly and perhaps a little smugly, "Yes, I understand she is very ill, but if she is with her dad, I am sure all is well." Of course, this only infuriated them more.

In the meantime, Bob and Tales were gliding downhill toward York Avenue when suddenly they saw two very angry security guards trudging up the hill. Laughing, Bob said, "These guys weren't exactly physical specimens, so the hill was no bargain for them. They were sweating more than Tales was. And they were clearly out of breath."

Watching two very perturbed and portly security guards running uphill looking for her was the perfect end to the walk. The more she laughed, the angrier the guards got, until they finally reached her. By now, anyone could look at the scene and put some of this together. Those watching whooped or gave her a thumbs-up. The guards chuckled, too. It was hard not to laugh along with Bob and Taylor. Bob remembers Tales being in her glory as she strolled past the security guards with her head held high.

Two very pissed-off nurses were waiting when they got back to her hospital floor. Tales tried not to antagonize them and painstakingly held in her laughter, but both she and Bob looked like the proverbial "cats who ate the canary," sporting huge grins. Neither of them spoke a word as Bob tried not to

look at the nurses. He knew at whom they were really mad. The head nurse blurted out, "Where have you been?" and that was all Tales could take. The giggles took over, and all she could get out was "ice cream." She kept walking. Bob kept walking. The nurses trailed behind, clearly feeling dismissed. As they glared at Bob, looking for an explanation, he just held his hands up with a shrug, saying, "She took a walk, just like you asked." Uncharacteristically, Tales said nothing. She was triumphant but clearly running on fumes.

Moving her to the bed and re-establishing all of her wires and tubes was done with a constant drone of criticism for taking such risks and worrying everyone. Sometimes it was directed at Bob and sometimes at Taylor. Tales just smiled, but the nurses were starting to hit a nerve. She glanced at them with her "you're boring me" look and said, "I'm sorry you were so worried, but my dad was with me. You told me I could walk as much as I wanted, and you told me I could go outside. So, I did." She turned away and closed her eyes, as she reached for Bob's hand.

Instantly Bob felt warm all over, as emotion and pride rose up and pulsed throughout his veins. As she held his hand, he knew how much she appreciated him taking her on their adventure and that she was glad he was staying with her that night. But he couldn't help but think that by not letting his hand go, she was also protecting him from the nurses who were anxious to have a private word with him. She was fast asleep in minutes, clearly wiped out and exhausted. But she never let go.

Bob tells me that sometimes when he closes his eyes, he can still feel her.

A portion of the net proceeds of Paint Your Hair Blue will be donated to the Taylor Matthews Foundation, which is dedicated to raising awareness and funding pediatric cancer research. www.taylormatthewsfoundation.org

Paint your Hair Blue was written by Sue Matthews with her sister, Andrea Cohane

Sue Matthews:

Sue is President of the Taylor Matthews Foundation, a tay-bandz organization which is a 501 C-3 organization founded by her then 11-year-old daughter Taylor, who lost her battle with pediatric cancer at age 16.

TMF funds innovative research and treatments that can reach sick children today, not months or years from now, to improve outcomes and reduce the long-term survivorship side effects associated with pediatric cancer.

Sue is a member of the Children's Council at Columbia Medical University Center, the National Association of Professional Women, the NYS Society of Certified Public Accountants, and the American Institute of Public Accountants. She holds a B.A. in Accounting from Franklin and Marshall College and is a CPA and former Senior Manager at Deloitte.

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Andrea, sister to Sue, is a Board Member, advocate and advisor of the Taylor Matthews Foundation. She holds a B.S. in Economics from Cornell University and a Juris Doctorate from Fordham University School of Law. Andrea was a business litigator at Clifford Chance, LLP in NYC and practiced at Womble, Carlyle, Sandridge & Rice in Charlotte, NC. She worked in the Westchester County District Attorney's office in their Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Department.