Ashley Davis, daughter of the late Lisa Davis

Jamestown, Tenn.

Cooking and nutrition instructor at The University of Tennessee Extension

"I've never been rich, but God gave me the best parents he had. We were best friends. She was really crafty-that was her thing. She always volunteered at our school. One year, she came to my classroom and taught us how to wood burn. It was just great. We had a page from a coloring book, and we wood burned it onto the board and then colored it. She helped us make mini Christmas trees in sixth grade. She wanted to be a teacher when she was younger, so that was her way of being able to do that.

(But) she always had health issues. That was something we dealt with a lot growing up. Access was a big issue all through my childhood. I remember having problems getting to doctor's appointments. We did have a hospital for a while. It was very expensive to go. Dad worked his tail off. Mom worked (as a substitute teacher) when we were older and she was able to, and even when we were younger, she babysat. We've always tried. My dad would drive to Cookeville or wherever he had to go (to get healthcare.) But you get those big bills. Even when Mom needed to go, she would refuse.

The earliest I can remember where she refused to go to the hospital, I was a teenager and she was really sick. It was the middle of the night, and Dad sleeps like a log, so he couldn't hear. She started hollering for help. I woke up and ran downstairs, and she was bleeding everywhere. We think she might have had a miscarriage. She was soaking bathroom towels (with blood.) We were begging her (to go to the hospital.) She said, 'No, we can't afford the bill.' (Growing up,) I watched her and my dad wean themselves off medicines because the insurance they had didn't cover (the medications) or quit covering (the drugs.)"

When it got really bad, though, was when our hospital in Jamestown closed. We've had people die in ambulances trying to get to some help. We did get a Fast Pace (Urgent Care) that helped with some of the minor things, like broken arms. But in real emergencies, they couldn't do anything. There were some people who were just going to the ambulance service instead of trying to call an ambulance first and pay for a ride.

For Mom, it started to get really bad when she had long COVID. The hospitals were absolutely swamped. We took her to the Crossville hospital, and we waited for eight hours in the emergency room. It was the time when we couldn't go in with her. They finally did admit her. She was in ICU for 30 days. She did rehab, and it's a miracle she came home.

The week before Christmas 2022, we found out she had cancer and it was very aggressive. By the time (specialists) found it, it had already metastasized and was everywhere. We'd had to call 911 several times. There was one day that she fell. I couldn't get her up by myself. I had to call for help. It wasn't (the EMTs') fault. They had to go to all kinds of other hospitals, and we're an hour away from everything. But she was lying in the floor, and it took them 45 minutes to get here. I just got her a pillow and a blanket. I said, 'We'll just sit in the floor until they get here.' I sat down with her and held her hand, and she cried. It was just pitiful.

She had some knots on the back of her head, and we kept telling the doctors, 'This is weird. Can you please look at this?' They'd look at it, and just dismiss it. That went on for a long time. The last time we called 911, she didn't even know who I was. I looked the ambulance driver in the face and I said, 'Listen. We have told six or seven doctors about this mass on her head. We are not leaving the hospital until they scan her head and find out what that is, because she does not know who I am.'

The terror of having to follow an ambulance for an hour and a half, praying that the person you love gets there, you can't imagine until you've done it. I still have nightmares about trying to get her medical help. I was the one who took care of her during that time. I will dream I am driving around, trying to get her to a doctor. It's awful. Then, you wake up and she's gone. You spent the whole night trying to save her.

There were moments. There's this one moment that still bothers me a lot. She looked at me. She probably wasn't in her right mind, but I was trying my best. She just looked at me and said, 'Help me.' And there was nothing I could do. (Lisa Davis died at 55 years old. Ashley Davis is 38.)

I would like to see more (freestanding) ERs. The University of Tennessee put ours back in Jamestown. That's a good avenue to get specialists who come in once a week or once a month. I don't think privatized hospitals are a good model at all. I think we need more not-for-profit work. When you have privatized hospitals in poor, rural areas where people don't have good insurance and don't have a lot of money to pay, they're going to go under eventually.

I think it would help me to know nobody else has to deal with this. It's so painful. We couldn't do anything for Mom. We just let her go."