“Altru’s Hospice absolutely exceeded my expectations. They were all very kind and very caring,” explained Sara Mutzenberger from Altru’s Diabetes Center.

At the time Sara’s sister, Kristi Lowe, was put on hospice care, she was still very active. “Kristi was just a lot of fun. She liked sports. She was great with kids. She just really loved life.”

Kristi worked in Altru’s Pharmacy and battled breast cancer. For months she received treatment, but the disease was too aggressive. When she was told that nothing further could be done with treatment and that she should look into receiving care from Altru’s Hospice, she accepted the opportunity, but she did not want to let it stop her.

**Kristi’s Journey**

When Kristi was first put on hospice care, she said that she would really like to do something fun. She asked one of the nurses at Altru Cancer Center if there was a “Make a Wish” program for adults. “Although we all kind of giggled at her request. We thought it was a really good idea and we all started to planning,” Sara added.

Kristi was a huge fan of the Chicago Bears, so she really wanted to go to a professional football game before she died. In response to her wish, Altru’s Hospice, the pharmacy staff, and Kristi’s family teamed up to make her wish become reality.

On October 4, their family attended a Chicago Bears game. They were able to visit with some of the players and even meet Brian Urlacher, which was Kristi’s favorite. “It was really fun,” Sara recalls. “And, it was so nice, because we were all thinking about the trip, and not so much about the cancer.”

There was already so much intrusion in their lives because of the illness. “You are just constantly reminded of the sickness: trips to the Cancer Center, going to get blood or receive fluids, and the many doctor visits,” explained Sara. "The hospice team did so much for Kristi just to keep her functioning, and make it so that she was able attend the football game that she really wanted to go to.”
During the time of planning and implementation, Kristi’s focus turned away from the disease and was concentrated on her dream of attending the Chicago Bears’ game. It filled her and her family’s last few weeks with joy and excitement instead of a constant focus on the disease and the dying process.

Shortly after they returned home from the football game, Kristi’s health began to fail. “It was in the last few days when I really needed help, and Altru’s Hospice was there; they brought in everything,” continued Sara. “As soon as I told them what we needed, it was there within hours. I didn’t have to call back or even think about it again; it was just there.”

A Mission for Positive Memories
Altru’s Hospice services focus on maintaining the highest quality of life for the patient and their family members, so the last stage of a patient’s life can include positive memories. Sentimental Journey was created for this exact purpose.

Considering the lyrics from the first verse of the classic song, “Sentimental Journey”, sung by Doris Day in her 1944 recording:

Gonna take a Sentimental Journey,
Gonna set my heart at ease.
Gonna make a Sentimental Journey,
to renew old memories.

The goal of Altru’s Hospice Sentimental Journey program is to provide our hospice patients with one last special wish for themselves or an experience with their family, which creates positive memories.

In fact, this program was created in direct response to Kristi’s experience with Altru’s Hospice.

Extremely moved by the program Sara added, “I am really excited about this new program. It helps when people get away from the illness aspect of things and enjoy one last hoorah, whatever that might be. Not everyone has the capability to just pack up and go on vacation, so it is really very special that this program makes the opportunity available.”

Looking back on the whole experience, Sara shared that it meant a lot to Kristi; all of it. “She was very touched by the hospice staff, the Cancer Center staff, and all of our co-workers.”

Trying to control her emotions, Sara shared, “The whole Altru family made our family feel very special. I know that if Kristi was here today, she would say, ‘I can’t believe how much they all care.’”