

# OPEN HOME, OPEN HEART

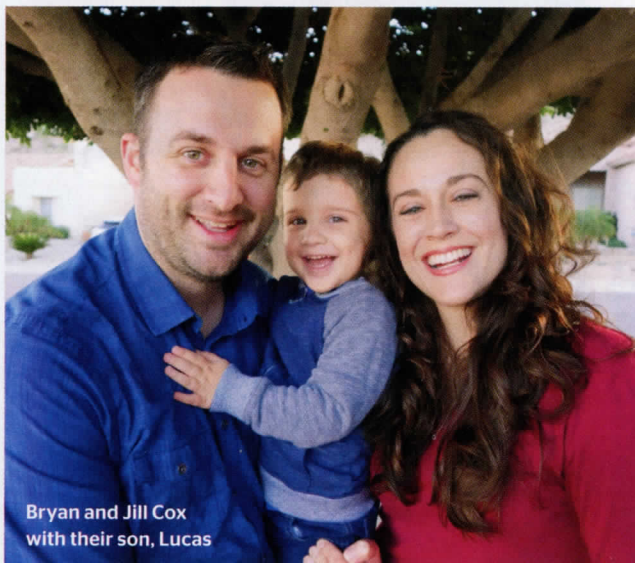
**When the Cox family traveled to Boston for their son's treatment—nearly 2,600 miles from friends and family—one woman's house became their healing haven.**

Jill and Bryan Cox couldn't wait for the gender reveal at Jill's 20-week ultrasound. But with the exciting news came another discovery: Their son, Lucas, had a trachea disorder and esophageal atresia, a rare congenital condition that makes breathing and feeding difficult.

By the time he was 10 months old, Lucas had undergone 11 surgeries at a local Phoenix hospital. When the hospital couldn't do any more for their son, Jill and Bryan took Lucas's case to medical centers nationwide. Many doctors felt a risky surgery was the only option. Boston Children's Hospital offered another procedure, but the family would have to stay in a strange city for weeks at a time, potentially racking up tens of thousands in hotel bills on top of medical costs.

Enter Anu Advani, a divorced mom in Brookline, MA, with space—and kindness—to spare. The Cox family stayed with her during Lucas's treatment, camping out in a spare room. Anu, a math instructor with two sons, wasn't a relative. She wasn't even a friend—not at first. In fact, she didn't know them at all.

Anu is a volunteer with Hospitality Homes, a Boston-based nonprofit that arranges free housing for relatives of patients who are receiving treatment at one of the city's hospitals. In her six years as a volunteer, Anu has opened her home to 67 families. She got involved in



Bryan and Jill Cox with their son, Lucas

the program to teach her boys empathy and make use of her home. "Guests come here and are so thankful, but I tell them they're doing me a favor," Anu says. "I'm grateful that my house is useful to so many people."

For Jill and Bryan, Anu's home and friendship were a comfort. "It's wonderful to have a place with a backyard where your child can play before surgery; you want him to have normal experiences," Jill says. "It was like staying at a friend's house." The families often bonded over snacks and tea—but Anu also respected their need for privacy. "She did a great job of giving us space and making us feel like the room was all ours," says Jill.

At 3, Lucas is now thriving, thanks in part to Anu and Hospitality Homes. "They were key pieces to the puzzle," Bryan says. The family doesn't spend much time in Boston anymore—once a year for an annual procedure—but when they go back, they visit Anu. "When our minds need a break from medical issues and we want to feel normal, we turn to her," Jill says.

In Anu's view, the families help her just as much as she helps them. Sure, guests have offered gardening advice and fixed her washing machine, but it's more about courage—theirs and hers. "I'm out of my comfort zone, meeting so many new people, but look at my guests," she says. "They're coming into a strange city, staying in a stranger's home, and dealing with life-threatening situations. They're the brave ones."

## 3 Ways to Give Patients What They Need

### 1. HIT THE ROAD

A car, a valid driver's license, and a good driving record let you help patients get to doc appointments through the American Cancer Society's Road to Recovery program.

### 2. GET CRAFTY

Flex your creative muscles by knitting, crocheting, or sewing blankets or making motivational cards, for charities like Project Linus and Cards for Hospitalized Kids.

### 3. GO LOCAL

For ways to give back in your area, visit [allforgood.org](http://allforgood.org), the volunteer website for the international nonprofit organization Points of Light.



On November 21, 2016, Points of Light recognized Anu Advani with a Daily Point of Light award to highlight her work with Hospitality Homes.