



“Everything that happens, I’m loving Auburn and everything that it does,” Piper said. “I think our story shows the power of Auburn as family, the power of the degree that gives you confidence to do anything you set your mind to, and the love of lifelong friends from Auburn who supported us both through difficult times.”

- AMANDA PIPER

When Taylor was 14, she was diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer. Piper’s nonprofit event management career was put on hold, and she focused on being her daughter’s full-time caretaker.

For six months, Piper stayed with her daughter in Children’s Hospital of Colorado while Taylor underwent chemotherapy and recovery. Unable to work in a corporate setting, Piper began to plan birthday parties to pay the bills without compromising care of her daughter.

“I’m sitting there in the hospital, thinking to myself, ‘What in the world am I going to do that is going to both keep me busy and pay the bills?’” Piper said.

“And so, I thought, ‘Well, all right, I can sit here in the hospital with her, and I can plan some birthday parties and that will help out.’ I never had envisioned that I was going to have this big, huge company by myself. That was never my thing.”

Piper had a wealth of event management experience to draw on. For as long as she could remember, she planned events – from planning carnivals for her neighborhood at 10 years old to raising more than \$11 million for nonprofit organizations during her career.





Taylor, her daughter, graduated high school with a swim team letter and awards in public speaking. She received her acceptance letter from Auburn days after her last post-cancer surgery and joined the College of Human Sciences' hospitality management program this fall.

When Taylor decided Auburn was the place for her, Piper was overjoyed. They visited campus without notice and were immediately welcomed for a tour. It reminded Piper of her first visit, when she was a military daughter who struggled to find a home at college until School of Communication and Journalism founder Jack Simms welcomed her to the College of Liberal Arts, a small place to call her own.

"It was my experience all over again, 35 years later. 'We're family, come on in, we're going to talk to you and we're going to take you in,'" Piper said. "I promise you, that is a huge part of what absolutely sold it for both of us, that Auburn hasn't changed. It is still family. It is still a wonderful place full of people that are going to take care of you."

Piper said Auburn taught her a lot about being a good person, a strong person and being kind to others, and there's nothing like seeing her daughter learn to love Auburn.

Even though she and her daughter have endured so much, Piper is confident Taylor is where she belongs.

"Having a daughter that went through almost dying from ovarian cancer, which does not have a good success rate, I became probably the most overprotective parent in all of America," Piper said. "You would think that I would not be okay sending my daughter 2,000 miles away, but this absolutely does not bother me at all. She's in a safe place. She's in the best place she could possibly be, and that's Auburn."

Still, Piper said she didn't have an entrepreneurial spirit. She began with small birthday parties, then started planning weddings at low costs to break into the industry. Slowly, her business began to grow, and hasn't stopped.

As Taylor recovered, Piper learned more about the industry and found a balance between caring for her daughter and supporting the family financially. Even after Taylor left the hospital, Piper said the flexibility of owning her own business allowed her to be the mom and nurse she needed to be.

"I loved it, not because I was able to get her through cancer and chemotherapy, but I loved it because I could be there after school, I could go to the swim meets, I could still be the mom that I think is so important to be and have my career and my business and make it all work and juggle it all," Piper said. "She's at Auburn now and I could probably go back to corporate America, and nobody would miss me around the house, but I don't want to. I love what I do. At this point, there's no turning back."

Today, Piper's business, The Event Troupe, averages 25 weddings a year in Colorado's booming wedding industry. The company has been named to The Knot's "Best of Weddings" list and received Wedding Wire's "Couple's Choice" award. It's a small, six-figure business that offers a variety of packages, hosts weddings across Colorado and takes clients from across the country.

