

The House That Builds Love

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You might have heard that Ronald McDonald House is "the house that love built". I believe that's true, they would not exist without the loving donations of millions of people like you but what you may not have heard is that RMH is also the house that builds love. To be clear we have never stayed at a Ronald McDonald house. When my son Nicholas has had surgery we have stayed at a place called Hackerman Patz house (aka HP). It is right across the street from Sinai of Baltimore where he has had 13 surgeries on his right leg for a birth defect called fibular hemimelia. When HP has been full we have tried to stay at RMH but it has always been full as well. Hotel rates when you are facing stressful and expensive surgery for your child are not easy to pay but we have, and many families do, every day.

I know we are fortunate to have lived within two hours of our son's surgeon. With Nick's biggest surgery we were members of this congregation and came home to you and received so many meals and so much support. I can't express how meaningful and helpful that was to us. We were so lucky to be able to bring Nick home to our community. So many families can't go home and still get their child the care they need. They move into these community homes tired and scared but soon learn they are not alone. Places like HP and RMH turn strangers into family. Sometimes very quickly. As fortunate as we are not to have needed to stay long-term at HP, I know we missed out on the bonding and connection that comes from living with families going through the same type of things you are. Communal meals, movie nights with popcorn, support, celebrations, and yes surgery, treatments, and sometimes loss but always love.

We do go to HP a few times a year to meet up with friends and meet new families who have children with orthopedic conditions. Meeting and connecting with families that know exactly what you are going through is so powerful. These connections offer inspiration, healing and so much compassion. Places like HP and RMH house all of that.

For the last two years we have gone down to HP for mother's day to bring the families there a home cooked meal. This has been really special way to spend mother's day. This year there was a mom there with 5 children, on her own. Some of you know that I am the mother of four (so I think moms of 5 or more are like crazy super hero's) and other than daily appointments I have never had to bring all my kids with me when Nick needed surgery. This mom was amazing. They were already there for months and not heading home soon. For families like hers without places like RMH and HP her child might not have been able to have the surgery needed to keep her leg. When you need specialized care the likelihood of finding it close to home is rare.

One of the reasons we chose to move to central PA was its proximity to Baltimore. Most families can't move for medical care. We built our life around Nick's needs. We were so

lucky to be able to do that. When you have a child with special needs or a medical condition or an orthopedic condition you end up in places your never imagined but you also end up feeling love you never imagined. I am so grateful for the love that builds RMH's and places like them and even more so for the love that these houses build.