

# *miracles &* memories

*Winter 2023*



Give Kids  
The World  
Village



# A Blessing in Disguise

Oscar Wilde said, "what seems to us as bitter trials are often blessings in disguise." In the case of the Pecqueur family from Charlotte, NC, that adage could not have been more true.

Like many couples, Wendy and Alex Pecqueur struggled to get pregnant. After a year of blood work, ultrasounds and fertility treatments, Wesley was conceived, only to be born prematurely at 25 weeks. For 103 days, the Pecqueurs traveled in an endless loop between home, work and visiting Wesley in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) – where extensive blood work revealed that Wesley's neutrophil counts were very low. On the day Wesley was discharged – coincidentally on his actual due date, Wesley was referred to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital's hematology clinic for further testing. After months of blood draws and bone marrow biopsies, Wesley was diagnosed with severe congenital neutropenia, a very rare disease in which the body stops producing infection-fighting white blood cells; his immune system was broken.

"Wesley's condition is difficult to detect, with a 70% mortality rate in the first year of life without medical intervention. If not for the constant blood work in the NICU, doctors likely would have missed the irregular pattern in his blood counts. We could never have imagined that being born prematurely most likely saved his life," says Wendy.

Early detection enabled Wesley to begin injections three times a week with a very expensive medication typically administered to cancer patients following chemotherapy to help build the immune system. After a year of treatment, however, the medication stopped working; a bone marrow transplant would be needed. If a donor match could be found, Wesley would become the first child at his hospital to receive a transplant for congenital neutropenia.

Because Wendy and Alex were not good enough matches, Wesley went into the bone marrow donor database. Relatively quickly, a perfect match was found. However, three weeks before Wesley was to begin his pre-op regimen, the donor backed out. By then, Wesley's condition had worsened, causing frequent bacterial infections. Their luck changed a few weeks later when an English teacher from Germany flew to the U.S. for the surgery. The Pecqueurs each took a leave of absence from work to move to their transplant city for four months, and Wesley began aggressive chemotherapy to prepare for the procedure. On July 2, 2019, just one month before his second birthday, Wesley received a life-saving bone marrow transplant.

"The transplant process was very difficult to watch as a parent; we had never felt so helpless in our lives," says Wendy. "There was nothing we could do but comfort Wesley and trust that the doctors were doing the right thing."

After six weeks of living in the hospital as Wesley endured aggressive follow-up chemo, Wendy and Alex received training on how to care for Wesley's central lines and administer IV's, and the family moved into the Ronald McDonald House. After nine months of treatment and isolation due to the transplant, the family's restrictions ended in February 2020...only for the pandemic to hit a few weeks later, sending the family back into isolation for 14 more months.

In May 2021, Wesley was well enough to attend pre-school; and in January 2023, he and his parents took the trip of a lifetime to Give Kids The World Village as part of Wesley's wish to visit Walt Disney World. "These kids lose a big piece of their childhoods when they live in hospitals and doctors' offices for portions of their lives; our stay at Give Kids The World Village gave him a little of that back," says Wendy. "The Village is truly a child's paradise, and Wesley loved every minute – from the rides, parties and horseback riding to eating more ice cream than any one human should probably consume in a week! The moment I will always remember was seeing Wesley's star placed in the castle where it will live forever. It was very emotional to be able to close that chapter of our lives with a child who not only survived his disease but is currently thriving."



*"Our family is eternally grateful to the Village for their kindness and generosity," says Alex. "Give Kids The World made our son's wildest dreams come true and treated us to a truly amazing experience, beyond our expectations. The resort itself is stunning, a genuine wonderland for kids. The staff and volunteers were amazing human beings, who went above and beyond to make you feel right at home and cared for at all times. It was a week that our family will cherish forever. Thank you, GKTW!"*

To make life-changing experiences like the Pecqueur family's possible, please visit [www.gktw.org](http://www.gktw.org) to make a donation, sign up to volunteer, or purchase items in the online Memory Market, with all proceeds donated to make dreams come true for wish families.



# Crops of Luv

## Brings Memories To Life

A love for crafting, unbreakable friendships and a passion for giving back are the glue that binds the amazing women behind Crops of Luv: an Arizona-based nonprofit that creates stunning custom scrapbooks for wish families who visit the Village. Operating on a shoe-string budget, the all-volunteer group gathers at homes and crafting retreats to weave each family's memories into priceless keepsakes, all at no cost to the family. This unique labor of love began with a wish child's dream of having a tea party with princesses at Disney World. After her wish trip, a group of crafters led by Jody McNelis created a one-of-a-kind scrapbook to help her remember the visit. The family was overwhelmed with joy...and Crops of Luv was born.

With a motto of "a life preserved is a life remembered," Crops of Luv offers every Give Kids The World wish family the opportunity to receive a scrapbook no matter how long ago their wish trip was. Since 2008, the nonprofit has created more than 4,000 beautifully designed scrapbooks for families from around the world.

*"Crops of Luv was created to transform happy memories into something that can be seen, touched and cherished forever. Scrapbooks promote healing, inspire hope, and give wish families a respite from the stress and worry of what life has tossed at them," says Jody. "I am grateful to the devoted crafters, vendors and donors who make our efforts possible."*

**To learn more about Crops of Luv, visit [www.cropsofluv.org](http://www.cropsofluv.org).**



## Paying It Forward

Volunteering on behalf of critically ill children is very close to the hearts of the Noorlander family. After surviving a stage 4 Wilms tumor at the age of two, 19-year-old Amanda – a sophomore at Florida Atlantic University – now has thyroid cancer, with surgery planned for November. Four years ago at the age of 11, Amanda's brother, Paul, and their mother, RoxAnne, moved to Philadelphia for one year as he received a bone marrow transplant from a then-unknown donor, who has since become part of the family. In 2021, the Noorlanders invited the donor and his family to join them at Night of a Million Lights, and the passion they felt for the mission was instantaneous; the entire family signed up to volunteer. Since then, the family has devoted hundreds of hours giving back and inspiring wish families with their



own stories of survival. Paul has volunteered more than 155 hours in the past two years; while Amanda, who is fluent in American Sign Language, loves to use her skills signing the star experience for wish families in the Castle of Miracles.

"Volunteering at Give Kids The World has helped me heal," says RoxAnne. "As someone who has been there twice and now a third time with my daughter's cancer, I have unique insight into what wish families are going through; being able to comfort them when they need it means so much to me and my family. Give Kids The World taught all of us the true meaning of giving back." In addition to volunteering their time, the Noorlanders collect books for the on-site lending libraries at the Village.

To learn more about rewarding volunteer opportunities in The Place Where Happiness Inspires Hope, visit [www.gktw.org/volunteer/](http://www.gktw.org/volunteer/).

## It Takes A Village

For 37 years, Give Kids The World Village has fulfilled its mission to create happiness, renew optimism and ignite an enduring sense of hope in the hearts of nearly 200,000 critically ill children and their families from around the world during magical week-long wish vacations in our whimsical nonprofit resort...but we haven't done it alone.

Thousands of volunteers, corporate partners, community groups and donors have contributed their time, resources and compassion to make it possible for us to provide wish families with an opportunity to spend priceless time together making unforgettable memories away from the worry of illness.

Please use the QR code below to make a donation or become one of our treasured monthly donors. Contributions in any amount will be greatly appreciated; we simply could not fulfill our mission without you.

**It takes a Village to spark a smile... to create happiness...to inspire hope.**



# Village News

## COMING TOGETHER TO CREATE HAPPINESS AND HOPE

*Give Kids The World is made possible by the support of countless generous donors, corporate sponsors and volunteers.*

### Celebrate The Season

Taking place on select nights throughout December, Give Kids The World's new Holiday VIP Tours enable guests to experience the Village decked out with millions of lights. Groups can enjoy escorted access to select venues on the Avenue of Angels; view a dazzling tree trail; explore holiday vignettes; and take festive photos. Tickets can be purchased by visiting [www.gktw.org/holidays/](http://www.gktw.org/holidays/). In addition, Give Kids The World's Holiday Dessert Parties help guests take their seasonal celebrations to the next level. Groups of up to 30 guests can enjoy a festive gathering in one of the Towne Hall balconies, offering stunning panoramic views. Perfect for office parties, friends and family events, marriage proposals and other special occasions, each party includes an assortment of delicious holiday treats and sparkling beverages, along with a private tour of The Avenue. Dessert Parties can be booked for \$60 per person by contacting [events@gktw.org](mailto:events@gktw.org).



### Miracle Warrior

"Our stay at Give Kids The World Village was magical. We were in awe of the love and attention to detail that was put into every aspect of our stay," says Jaleesa Russell, whose seven-year-old "miracle warrior" Cameron has battled cancer twice, received a liver transplant, and undergone more than 30 surgeries. "Coming back to Give Kids The World after a long day at the theme parks felt like a home away from home. The best feeling in the world was seeing Cameron happy and healthy. This experience brought us immeasurable joy. This was truly a memory we will never forget!"

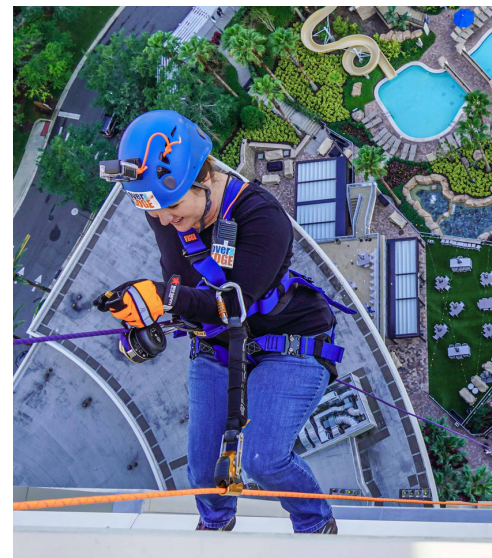
### Gracelyn's Story

After a year-long battle with Ewing's sarcoma, Gracelyn Moon and her family escaped the ice and snow of Utah to embark on an unforgettable adventure at the Village. "Being able to have a magical vacation at Give Kids The World was amazing," says mom Tamra. "There were so many fun things to do at the Village, and everyone really goes above and beyond to make the kids feel special and important. It was priceless to see Gracelyn make her star; it is now shining bright in the galaxy, and is such a special part of everything. We are so grateful for that week of much-needed fun, relaxation, and cherished memories."



### Heart-Pounding Exhilaration

Registration is now open for Over The Edge: Give Kids The World's most thrilling fundraiser ever! On Friday, February 23, and Saturday, February 24, participants will muster their courage to make dreams come true for wish children by rappelling down the side of the 32-story Hyatt Regency Orlando. To register for this pulse-pounding adrenaline rush, visit [gktw.org/overtheedge](http://gktw.org/overtheedge)



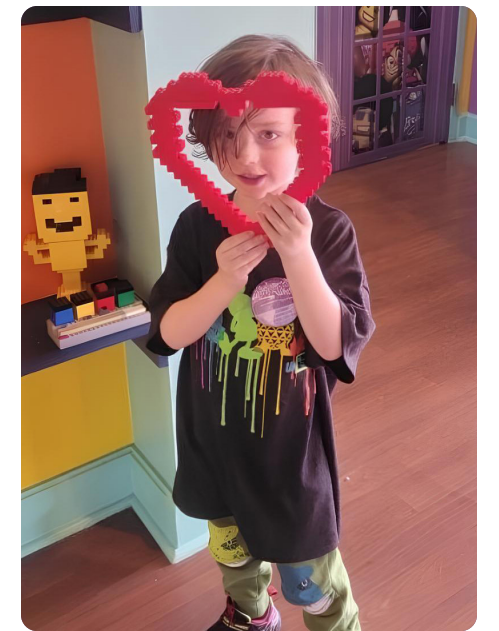
### A Dose Of Happiness

Diagnosed with blood cancer at just two and a half years old, Amelia Saunders completed 803 days of chemotherapy before ringing the bell two days before her fifth birthday. In July, Amelia and her family traveled from Newfoundland, Canada, to their new happy place. "We were blown away by the Village and the kindness of volunteers and staff," says Amelia's mom, Veronica. "Everything was beautiful; we loved just walking around and visiting the koi pond, the Carousel and the pool – which was Amelia's favorite. Seeing her star and all the others in the Castle of Miracles was magical...we will never forget our trip of a lifetime and plan on returning to volunteer."



### Treasured Moments

Following aggressive chemotherapy treatment for non-Hodgkins lymphoma, high grade B cell at Southampton Children's Hospital in England, Henry Roberts was declared cancer-free – and celebrated with an unforgettable visit to the Village with his parents and four sisters over the holidays. "We didn't truly know what to expect; but upon arrival, it was clear that Give Kids The World is the most magical place you could ever visit!" says Henry's mom, Stephanie. "From the unlimited ice cream and waffles, riding the rollercoasters at the theme parks and enjoying the evening parties to seeing Henry's star in the Castle of Miracles – which was emotional yet beautiful, our week was stress-free and filled with happiness. We were blown away by the kindness and generosity of the volunteers; we can't thank you enough!"



### Jackson's Journey

"Heaven on earth" is how wish mom Audrey describes Give Kids The World Village, which provided a home-away-from-home for the Johnsons during five-year-old son Jackson Journey Shell's wish visit. The trip was a celebration of Jackson's superhero strength and courage following four open heart surgeries to repair a congenital heart defect called hypoplastic left heart syndrome, which is universally fatal without surgery. "We worried Jackson would never have the chance to experience anything but hospital visits in his short life; but for the first time ever, he was able to just be a kid at the Village. He was treated so special and did so many firsts: swimming, horseback riding...and he absolutely loved the ice cream! As a family, we made so many precious memories that we will carry with us forever. It makes me cry every time I think about his star in the Castle of Miracles because a part of him will always get to stay at the Village while the Village stays with us in our hearts."

### JOIN THE CLUB

Families who have experienced the magic of the Village first-hand are invited to join the new Give Kids The World Alumni Club, an exclusive group designed to help members share camaraderie, spread awareness for our mission, and help raise funds for the Village. There is no charge to join, and members can participate as much or as little as they'd like.

To learn more and register, visit [www.gktw.org/alumniclub/](http://www.gktw.org/alumniclub/).



### Maggie's Dream Week

Heather and Paul Dwyer's world was turned upside down in October 2019 when five-year-old Maggie was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL). Immediately admitted to Tufts Floating Hospital, Maggie spent the next three years enduring port pokes, lumbar punctures, chemo, steroids and innumerable procedures amidst the chaos and uncertainty of the pandemic. With big sister "Kate The Great" by her side, Maggie finished treatment in December 2022 and celebrated with a visit to GKTW. "Our hearts are full from our visit to the Village; it's hard to put into words how we felt staying in that extraordinary community," said Heather. "We felt a connection with the other wish families just by being together. There was an unsaid understanding and bond that cannot be described. We were so touched by the generosity of the volunteers...they are angels on earth. That one week made all of Maggie's worries disappear. She felt like she was living a dream!"

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## Purchase with a Purpose

### Give Kids The World Village Logo Hooded Sweatshirt

Cozy up in our Village Logo Hooded Sweatshirt while showing your support for our mission! Featuring our signature color and most popular logo, the sweatshirt is made of 50/50 soft spun cotton/polyester with a pouch pocket. The purchase of these and other high-quality items in our Memory Market will make dreams come true for critically ill children and their families from around the world.

To shop online, visit [www.gktw.org/shop](http://www.gktw.org/shop).



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