

miracles & memories

Winter 2024



Give Kids
The World
Village



An Enduring Love

“He made a masterpiece out of a mess,” says Ben Doyle of his son, Zachary, whose fierce determination and larger-than-life personality made a profound impact on everyone privileged to know him.

Zachary defied the odds from the beginning; but his story began long before faith, love and destiny brought him into the lives of the Doyles. On her very first date with Ben, Susan Doyle let it slip that she would be adopting one day. It wasn’t until 2014, with two beautiful children at home and Ben deployed overseas, that the couple began having similar experiences. On two sides of the world, every radio station, TV commercial and conversation seemed to be about adoption. “The Lord was working in both our hearts,” says Susan. “We felt he was calling us to adopt.”

When Ben arrived home, they attended their first adoption meeting – where they learned that 90% of those interested in adoption don’t follow through due to finances. Susan’s heart sank when they heard the cost of a domestic infant adoption: \$20,000 to \$30,000. When they got in the car, Ben looked at Susan and said, “I guess we’ll have to come up with \$20,000!”

For one year, they prayed, had yard sales, and made payments to the adoption agency. Then, on June 26, they received a call that would change their lives forever. A sweet four-pound, six-week-old baby in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) needed a family. There had been no prenatal care as well as intrauterine drug and alcohol exposure. The baby was born at an estimated 34 weeks’ gestation and was resuscitated and intubated at birth. He was immediately diagnosed with myelomeningocele and underwent his first surgery the following day. He was then diagnosed with hydrocephalus and had a VP shunt placed. He would spend the next six weeks recovering in the NICU.

Ben and Susan had asked their children, Madison and Ethan, to come up with a name; and four days after the call, the family traveled to Fredericksburg, VA for a special placement ceremony, where Zachary was placed in their arms. As they began the three-hour drive back home to Hampton Roads, Susan noticed that something didn’t look right. She didn’t know if what she was seeing was normal for such a frail child, or if something was wrong. She decided to drop off Ben and the kids with family and take Zachary to the ER. Within minutes of arriving, it was clear that Zachary was seriously ill.

Susan and Zachary were sent by ambulance to Children’s Hospital of Richmond, where he was found to be in late-stage shunt failure. As Zachary coded and alarms blared, Susan was escorted out of the room to wait alone. “I had never cried or prayed as hard as I did in that little ER hallway in the wee hours of the morning,” says Susan. “We had learned in our adoption training that often bonding or connecting with your adopted child can take time or be difficult. Due to the circumstances and the need to protect and advocate, we bypassed those struggles and Zachary was instantly our son. It was a deep connection, as if he had been with us all along.”

“Zachary’s wish trip was truly the most magical week. He came alive at the Village, and it was a joy to watch him shine.”

The next day, Zachary underwent another life-saving surgery. It would be the second of 40 brain and spine surgeries over the next seven years as Zachary was treated for a multitude of critical conditions: tethered spinal cord syndrome, failed shunts, syringomyelia, stint placements and failures, Arnold Chiari II malformation, craniosynostosis, schizencephaly, and neurogenic bowel and bladder. Few outside the Doyle family knew of Zachary’s daily struggles... the heart-wrenching pain, vomiting, nausea and fatigue compounded by frustration over limited mobility.

“Through it all, Madison and Ethan were absolute heroes to Zachary,” says Ben. “They willingly jumped in to help with unthinkable messes, provide comfort and distraction during intense pain, and modified their own activities allowing Zachary to participate. They sacrificed so much and gave more than they were ever asked to give. It wasn’t without heartache, but they gave and gave without ever asking for anything in return. They agonized over seeing him uncomfortable and walked with Susan and me every step of the way. If ugliness and beauty could coexist, it was in those moments that it did.”

Despite his physical challenges, Zachary's cognitive ability, sense of humor and joy for life were miraculous. He loved to joke and be sneaky, loved his family intensely, and never met a stranger. His belly-laughs were infectious and his adventurous nature unstoppable; he could often be caught flying down steep hills in his wheelchair, laughing hysterically and oblivious to danger. He amazed everyone with his courage and determination. After lengthy surgeries requiring hours of anesthesia, when most people would still be sleeping, Zachary was wide awake talking to his medical team.

"Zachary had a remarkable ability to captivate people and invite them into his little world," says Ben. "He could be having his absolute worst day imaginable, but most people would never know when they talked to him. He allowed only a few people to see him in his hard times. During hospital visits, after undergoing major surgeries, Zachary rallied for the nurses, the doctors, the cafeteria staff, the cleaning staff, and even other patients and their families."

Like the rest of his family, Zachary was deeply spiritual. He loved worship music and found tremendous comfort in prayer. Even as a toddler, Ben and Susan would often find Zachary in their bed or the bathtub with his arms lifted toward heaven, eyes closed, praying. "The purity of it was breathtaking," says Ben.

Zachary fell in love with many therapy dogs during his innumerable hospitalizations, where he earned a reputation as the most-visited patient. He also garnered many local accolades; he was named honorary dispatcher for the Virginia State Police; served as a spokesperson and face for the 94.9 CHKD annual radiothon; was the face of the Richmond Ronald McDonald House; and after moving to Lynchburg, he quickly became the Flames' #1 fan, leading to unique opportunities with Liberty Athletics. In 2023, he helped found the lemonade business Bro & Co with his brother and sister. Zachary preferred his lemonade to be "on the house," and considered each customer a win.

Among all of these titles, Zachary considered his crowning achievements to be brother and son. "There is no way I could adequately capture the joy and life Zachary has brought to our family and the lives of others," says Susan.

In August 2023, with Zachary's health declining, Ben and Susan made the painful decision to transition him to hospice care. While there, the Doyles learned that Zachary was eligible for a rush wish, including a stay at Give Kids The World Village. Zachary's wish to meet Woody from Toy Story was quickly granted, and the family embarked on a memorable visit to The Place Where Happiness Inspires Hope.

"Zachary's wish trip was truly the most magical week. He came alive at the Village, and it was a joy to watch him shine," says Susan. Zachary's mischievous smile, quick wit and sweet disposition melted the hearts of everyone he met at the Village, including Give Kids The World Chief of Staff John Flaschner (Flash) and President and CEO Pamela Landwirth – who formed an unbreakable bond with the precocious young guest. After a few days experiencing the nonprofit behind the scenes, Zachary announced that his new wish was to work for the Village. With a resounding "YES!", Zachary was invited to sit in on a new-employee orientation session, where he was issued his official Storyteller bunny ears.

Throughout the rest of the week, Zachary delighted in zooming around the Village in his wheelchair, engaging with other wish families and putting people in timeout. His official employment began a few weeks later when the Doyles were welcomed back...but not before Zachary was presented with an offer letter and job title to add to his growing list of accomplishments: assistant mayor of Give Kids The World Village. His first direct report was Flash...whom he promptly put in timeout.

For the next several days, Zachary gave local firefighters and new volunteers tours of the Village, ending every tour with an invitation for ice cream in Henri's Starlite Scoops. He also sat in on a call with Tractor Beverage CEO Kevin Sherman, who later named Zachary Tractor Beverage CEO for the day.

In November, the Doyles returned to the Village one last time as guests of the Holiday Soiree, where Zachary's beautiful artwork raised thousands of dollars to

grant wishes for other children. During the visit, Zachary was presented with his very own Give Kids The World business cards, which he handed out to everyone he encountered with the quip that would become his signature: "Call me if you need anything!" The phrase beautifully captured Zachary's lifelong passion for serving others. Having debated attending due to Zachary's faltering health, Ben and Susan assumed they would need to leave early; but as the night continued, Zachary rallied – gathering enough strength to stay until the very end. With staff and volunteers lining the sidewalk as the Doyles drove away, Zachary rolled down his window, waved, and screamed repeatedly, "I love you all!"

Even as Zachary moved toward becoming unresponsive, his personality remained intact. He asked Ben and Susan to make video messages for his siblings, grandparents and special friends, including Pam and Flash. He also enjoyed watching videos and reminiscing about his visits to the Village. On December 10, 2023, Zachary passed away peacefully at home, surrounded by his family.

"There is a tremendous void in our home now. There is no preparing for such a loss. And yet, amid the pain and tears, our family can often be found cuddled together on the couch looking at pictures and watching videos of our beloved Zachary. While he may not be physically present, we cherish every moment and every memory enjoyed with him," says Susan.



"There is no question that Zachary lived his life to the fullest," says Ben. "He experienced more in eight years than what most people experience in a lifetime. God gave our family the ultimate privilege of being able to witness it first-hand as we walked faithfully alongside him."

To memorialize Zachary's sweet, enduring legacy at Give Kids The World Village, a new venue has been created in his honor. A nod to Zachary's glee at putting friends in timeout, Zach's TimeOut is a versatile, immersive focal point inside the Gingerbread House offering fun cooking classes and other hands-on activities that help children and their families bond, connect and create memories together.

"Zach's TimeOut will be a lasting reminder of Zachary's passion for life, enabling families to create memorable experiences in an incredible environment. We are deeply honored that the memory of our sweet son will live on at the Village, a place he treasured, for many years to come, and are grateful for the generous gifts that have made this project possible," says Susan.

To make a donation to the Village in support of Zach's TimeOut and other Village programs and services that directly impact wish families, please visit www.gktw.org/donate.



Sharing Wonder

Fourteen-year-old Dash Green's love for technology and passion for giving back blend seamlessly at Give Kids The World Village, where Dash devotes his time volunteering in Mayor Clayton's WonderLab: a STEAM activity center designed to inspire curiosity and spread childlike wonder and hope to children with critical illnesses and their families during their once-in-a-lifetime wish vacations at the Village. A ninth grader at Monteverde Academy who aspires to become a mechanical engineer, Dash loves leveraging his favorite hobbies – LEGO building, coding, video games and JDM cars – to help young guests learn new skills and discover the joy of science and making. During activities including animatronic programming, 3D printing, hydraulic machine building and magnetic marble runs, Dash appreciates the chance to hone his teaching skills while experiencing first-hand the impact volunteering at the Village has on wish families.

"Volunteering at Give Kids The World is fun and rewarding," says Dash. "It has enabled me to meet new people from around the world and improve my public speaking, team building and communication skills while earning community service hours. Since I am a younger volunteer, I can connect with the kids more than the adults because I can relate to them on another level. I am so happy to be part of the Give Kids The World community and know my volunteer experiences there will continue to positively impact me throughout my life."

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Dash's volunteer efforts were recognized recently when he was included in Orlando Family Magazine's annual Super Kids feature article highlighting young people who go above and beyond giving back in the community. Give Kids The World Manager of Experiential Education Christie Miga said, "Dash has been an incredible help in the WonderLab! He helps on any activity that needs him and has a talent for encouraging the kids. He just shines. Generally, kids love learning from other kids, so we are really fortunate to have a great teacher like Dash."



SolaJet Gives Back

Purpose and compassion have driven former police officer Tom Abbamonte and his wife, Deb, to volunteer at the Village making wishes come true for children with critical illnesses and their families; and after four years of dedicated service, the Abbamontes' compassion was returned by Give Kids The World partner SolaJet.

In 1985, Tom's police cruiser struck a tree head-on at more than 70 miles per hour during a high-speed pursuit. The impact sent Tom through the windshield, crushing his spinal cord. Since then, he has lived with debilitating, unrelenting back and neck pain which five spinal surgeries and innumerable treatments have been unsuccessful in alleviating. That is, until Tom tried out one of the Dry Hydrotherapy tables donated by SolaJet inside Olivia's Oasis while waiting for his wife's volunteer shift to end. After just 12 minutes, Tom's pain was reduced from a 10 to a two, which lasted several days. "It was the best I'd felt in 39 years," says Tom. "It was truly miraculous."

Upon returning home to Maryland, Tom wrote to SolaJet Technology Founder Todd Howe expressing his astonishment. Todd was so moved by Tom's story that he arranged for one of the Dry Hydrotherapy tables to be gifted to the Abbamontes. Since then, Tom has used the table up to six times a day, which has enabled him to significantly reduce his medication usage. "Todd and SolaJet have been absolute godsend."

Todd said, "We constantly receive feedback from SolaJet users sharing amazing results; however, Thomas's testimonial is truly remarkable. We are very blessed to have learned of Thomas's condition and to have played a part in helping him."

We are grateful to SolaJet for its generous support for the Village, and to the Abbamontes for their volunteer service.

A One-In-A-Million Volunteer

Seventeen-year-old Daniel Sharkey is grateful to be alive – and credits his volunteer experience at Give Kids The World Village with giving him the good karma to survive a lightning strike. In July, Daniel was doing yard work for a neighbor in Altamonte Springs, FL, when he was side-struck by a bolt of lightning that lifted him into the air and knocked him unconscious. "The last thing I remember is string trimming, and then I woke up face down in a puddle on the ground. I was trying to scream, but I couldn't," Daniel said just hours after the incident. "My chest hurts quite a bit and everything feels off...but I am thankful to be alive."

Doctors at Orlando Regional Medical Center, where Daniel spent just two days recovering, believe a nearby tree saved Daniel's life by absorbing most of the shock. They noted that the odds of getting struck by lightning are one in a million, with even greater odds of experiencing "just" pain and Lichtenburg scars on his arms and shoulders. His story has been featured on Good Morning America and in newspapers nationwide.

"Daniel's survival is nothing short of a miracle. He's definitely got some angels with him for sure," said Angie, the neighbor whose lawn Daniel cares for every week and the one who called 911...adding that his good luck likely stems from the countless hours Daniel spends giving back in the community. In addition to volunteering for Second Harvest Food Bank, Florida State Park Services and other causes, Daniel began volunteering at the Village alongside his mom, longtime supporter Kelly Green, at the age of six as part of the Adopt-A-Villa program. Since then, Daniel, his father, Matt, and Kelly have volunteered during fundraising events, holiday lighting programs, landscaping and tree decorating.

"It doesn't escape us how fortunate we are to have the chance to spend part of our lives in a place that inspires such hope," says Kelly. "Daniel surviving and thriving after a lightning strike just confirms to us that we have to make every moment count."

To learn more about rewarding volunteer experiences helping to create the happiness that inspires hope for wish families, visit www.gktw.org/volunteer.



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.

Adalynn's Wish

"We absolutely loved our time at Give Kids The World Village; it was so much more than we ever expected or dreamed of," says Haley Amerin, whose daughter, Adalynn, was diagnosed with hepatoblastoma, liver cancer, after a screening test. Following a liver resection at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Missouri, intubation and two rounds of chemo, Adalynn enjoyed a memorable visit to The Place Where Happiness Inspires Hope with her family. "Everyone we encountered went above to make our visit special. Adalynn loved all of the different activities including horseback riding, meeting Mickey Mouse, riding the carousel and the evening activities. We are so grateful!" Today, Adalynn is a happy and healthy five-year-old in kindergarten who enjoys gymnastics.



Indelible Memories

"Our family's stay at Give Kids The World was far beyond anything we expected...truly a magical and wonderful experience," says wish dad Austin Furgason. "This was the greatest trip of our lives as we celebrated our six-year-old son, Jack, wrapping up two and a half years of chemo for cancer. When I think of the Village, I think about those early morning walks together to get breakfast; the rides and carousel surrounded by glowing buildings and rooftops; trying to catch lizards with the boys; the train set at Amberville; the activities in Towne Hall; talking with volunteers; the night light vibes, the music and getting ice cream in Henri's Starlite Scoops; and the surprises at dinner with Mayor Clayton. I think the greatest memory was our Star Experience in the Castle; it makes me cry just to think about the way employees interacted with Stellar and the Sharpie marks all around the star from all of the kids who had drawn their names before Jack; it was just so profound and magical. Which leads me to think about what "magical" really means. That look a kid gets on Christmas morning: the smile with the sparkle in the eye that kids get when they are filled with joy and wonder at something. Give Kids The World was able to produce that in my son multiple times every single day and we just want to say thank you."

Grateful Hearts

"Give Kids The World gives the feeling of arriving at a family summer camp: excitement for the week to come, coupled with the immediate sense of belonging," says Renee Labriola, who stayed at the Village in September with her family during son, Marco's wish trip as he battles cancer. "What I expected was having a nice place to stay with some fun activities for the kids. What I didn't expect was the Village restoring my faith in humanity. We were able to get a glimpse into the lives of some of the other wish families, many of whom have not been as fortunate as we have been thus far in our journey with Marco's cancer. This week provided reflection and contemplation for us as we were shown such generosity and care. The level of detail Give Kids The World goes through to ensure wish families don't have to worry about a single thing except enjoying time with our children was staggering. It's hard to put into words our immense gratitude. What really struck a chord was seeing the countless volunteers who are doing this out of the goodness of their hearts. We came across several volunteers who were wish parents themselves, some of whom have suffered the loss of all losses. To give their time to families with sick children so they may experience joy even though their own children are no longer with them is an endeavor so noble I can't think of a greater one. To say these volunteers are inspiring would be a dramatic understatement. 'Thank you' will never be enough."





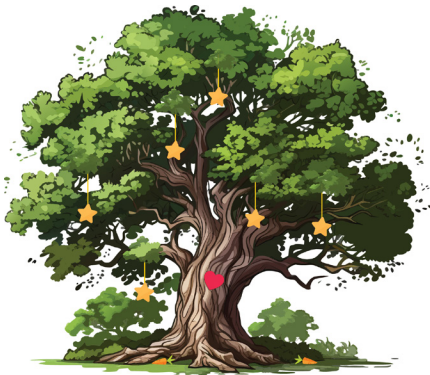
WCI Gives Back

For the 11th year, the Workers' Compensation Institute (WCI) leveraged the passion and commitment of its members to raise funds and give back to Give Kids The World Village. The nation's largest nonprofit educational organization which serves as a comprehensive resource to all workers' compensation stakeholders, WCI's efforts coincided with the annual Workers' Compensation Educational Conference in Orlando. During WCI's 2024 Service Day, 643 volunteers from 120 companies converged on the Village to complete an array of impactful projects throughout the property – completing three months' worth of work in just two and a half hours. In addition, during WCI's superhero-themed annual gala and silent auction, more than 700 attendees and 68 sponsors raised \$200,000 to make wishes and hope possible. Troy Smith, assistant vice president, claims with Arch Insurance, said, "This industry is truly a family where we cross paths with people off and on over the course of our careers. This industry has also given so much to me and my family for which I am forever grateful. Give Kids The World has given me a unique opportunity to pay it forward and help my workers' compensation family while also impacting the lives of so many other families. As an added benefit, it allows me to do this with my actual family, my wife and kids. I am so blessed and am so thankful for WCI and GKTW." To learn more about purpose-driven corporate or group volunteer opportunities, contact Micayla Rowe at MicaylaR@gktw.org.



Home Away From Home

Six-year-old Leland Moccia from West Springfield, Massachusetts, defines bravery. Diagnosed with pediatric ependymoma – a rare brain tumor – at the age of 17 months old, Leland endured a 10 and a half hour brain surgery, four months of gastric intubation and multiple rounds of chemo and radiation. Two years later, a recurrence of the tumor prompted another brain surgery and additional radiation. Leland will require scans the rest of his life for his unique type of cancer. Once he was able to travel, Leland and his family enjoyed a magical stay at the Village made possible by the Marty Lyons Foundation wish-granting organization. "The Village is truly a dream come true that makes the worries in the world slip away with ease," says his mom, Elizabeth Theriaque. "The entire staff was welcoming and polite, all of our stress was alleviated by having meals provided all day long, and there was so much to do – even on rainy days. During our stay we felt completely at home and didn't want to leave!"



ROOTS of HOPE

Roots of Hope

Monthly donations play an invaluable role in providing Give Kids The World with a steady, predictable stream of revenue that helps us more effectively, strategically and responsibly plan and budget for the future. Members of our Roots of Hope monthly donor program not only help us maintain our prominence as one of less than 1% of all U.S. charities to receive Charity Navigator's highest rating 18 years in a row, but also enjoy exclusive perks and appreciation opportunities throughout the year. To learn more about Roots of Hope and help us grow support for our mission, please visit www.gktw.org/roots.



Ho-Ho-Hope For The Holidays

Give Kids The World Village will come alive with the sights, sounds and spirit of the holidays during a season-long series of fundraising events designed to spread cheer while making wishes possible. Festivities kicked off with our 2024 Holiday Soiree on November 9, where guests enjoyed a gala-style evening with a vintage holiday twist featuring dinner, live entertainment and live and silent auctions. On Saturday, November 23, fundraisers of all ages and abilities can run, roll or stroll a 5K or one-mile family fun run throughout the Village as part of the 2024 Gingerbread Run: Under The Lights, taking place for the first time ever under the holiday lights. Participants can also participate virtually. Registration is now open at www.gktw.org/gingerbreadrun. Taking place on select nights in December, GKTW's Holiday VIP Tours will give guests a peek at select Village venues with storytelling along with access to a dessert party. For a truly unique experience, guests can take part in a History and the Holidays Tour hosted by Give Kids The World President & CEO Pamela Landwirth, including an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour, a dessert party on a balcony overlooking the illuminated Village and other special perks. And new this year, on December 7, 8, 12, 14, 21 and 22 from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm, families can join Kris Kringle along with Mayor Clayton and other Village friends at Ice Cream For Breakfast with Santa. For tickets and more information about all of GKTW's holiday activities, visit www.gktw.org/holidays.

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Purchase with a Purpose

Created by Give Kids The World wish kids, our beautiful holiday ornaments – including this stunning Northern Lights-inspired ornament designed by 10-year-old Charlotte – help bring the magic of the Village to your holiday décor. Each 2 3/4 inch round ceramic ornament comes in a fabric pouch suitable for gift giving. The purchase of these and other high-quality items in our Memory Market will make dreams come true for children with critical illnesses and their families from around the world.

To shop online, visit www.gktw.org/shop.



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