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miracles & memories

Spring 2022



Give Kids
The World
Village



In 1986, Henri Landwirth created a whimsical Village imagined from the pages of a fairy tale; and for 36 years, families from around the globe have written their own unique chapters into the chronicles of Give Kids The World. Every star in the Castle of Miracles has a story, and this is the story of how Gabby Schweigert's star came to be placed among the beautiful galaxy of miracles and memories.

Ever since meeting in high school, Cody and Stephanie Schweigert dreamt of starting a family together. Five years later, their happily-ever-after began with a joyful wedding – but their storybook ending was years in the making. A lengthy battle with infertility brought heartache and disappointment as they endured multiple miscarriages, surgeries and invasive therapies. After each new pregnancy, they added to the nursery, waiting for a child to love.

Just as the Schweigerts' optimism began to wane, fate intervened. A conversation at work about foster care sparked an epiphany: Cody and Stephanie were destined to provide a loving home for a child in need. They transformed the nursery into an older child's bedroom, and began the exhaustive process of becoming licensed for foster care. They studied, trained and interviewed, and within a year had completed certification. And then they waited...and waited.

"I had married the man of my dreams, and we had a safe and loving home available," says Stephanie. "Waiting for the phone to ring was excruciating, but we knew in our hearts there was a plan for us. We were meant to be parents."

At last, the foster agency called; nine-year-old Jasmine needed a temporary home. Stephanie was on the phone and missed the call, and by the time she called back just five minutes later, Jasmine had already been placed. The couple was distraught until destiny once again stepped in. Jasmine's placement had not worked out, and she urgently needed a home. The Schweigerts were ecstatic as they welcomed Jasmine into the family, and Jasmine was overjoyed. Everything seemed to have fallen into place.

"The day of the adoption was the best day of our lives," says Stephanie. "Second best was our unforgettable week at Give Kids The World, which marked the beginning of our lives as a forever family. We were blown away by how welcoming and caring everyone was, and how inclusive and accessible the Village is; it was nothing but laughter, healing and joy. All of us were treated like royalty, and Gabby was treated like just a kid-not a kid with a critical illness. We will never forget our life-changing experience."

One night, Stephanie overheard Jasmine praying. She was surprised to learn that Jasmine had two sisters in foster care, including a twin with a critical illness. Jasmine prayed to one day be reunited. The Schweigerts were heartbroken to hear about the girls' separation, and profoundly moved when the agency described the trauma the sisters had suffered: physical and emotional abuse, severe neglect and homelessness. Cody and Stephanie wondered if they were capable of giving three children the care and attention they needed...but they knew they had to try. They arranged for a sleepover with all three girls, and by the end of the evening it was clear the girls needed to stay together.

A week later, Jasmine's dream came true when her twin and spina bifida warrior, Izabelle, and younger sister, Ella, moved in with the Schweigerts. The couple's truck was exchanged for a minivan, and garage sale excursions helped prepare their home for a growing family. Bliss quickly set in. However, the agency cautioned Cody and Stephanie not to get too attached to the girls. As members of the Tlingit and Haida indigenous tribes of Alaska, the sisters were protected by the Indian Child Welfare Act, making adoption by non-tribal parents nearly impossible.

"Even knowing this, we wanted to share our home, love and support with the girls for however long they needed it," says Stephanie.

Over the next several months, the Schweigerts' lives were filled with doctors' appointments and treatments for Izabelle; trauma-focused therapy for all three girls; and a litany of visits with social workers, attorneys and therapists to ensure the sisters were getting the best care and support possible. As time went on, the girls thrived; Izabelle advanced from crawling to walker and then crutches. The girls excelled in their new schools. And the Schweigerts became a family determined to stay together.

With a team of social workers, doctors, teachers and lawyers advocating on their behalf, the Schweigerts petitioned for adoption as the tribes searched for a Native American foster family. After two years of court dates and legal battles, an impassioned letter from the Schweigerts promising to honor the girls' indigenous heritage led tribal leaders to grant their consent; and on August 18, 2020, all three girls were legally adopted. As part of the adoption process, each of the girls chose a new first name, as their old names held



so much trauma. Jasmine became Jazalyn; Ella became Elsa; and Izabelle became Gabriella (Gabby.) Soon after the adoption, Gabby learned that her wish to visit Give Kids The World would be granted through the nonprofit Wishes & More of Minnesota.

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On their last day at the Village, the Schweigerts enjoyed one more treat at Henri's Starlite Scoops and visited Gabby's star in the Castle of Miracles. As they prepared to leave, it occurred to Cody and Stephanie that the magic didn't have to end; Give Kids The World was where they were meant to be. A few months after arriving back home in Minnesota, the Schweigerts packed up and moved to Central Florida so they can volunteer helping other families create unforgettable memories at the Village.

"We will always be grateful to the Village for providing our family with such happiness – and for helping us discover the possibilities of what a grand move to Florida could look like, close to a place that means so much to all of us," says Cody. "Give Kids The World really is the stuff that dreams are made of."





A Moving Connection

Give Kids The World Founder Henri Landwirth was humble and selfless; but when it came to securing support for the Village, he was unapologetically dogmatic. Jason Fontaine, president of Central Moving & Storage (CMS) – interstate agent for Wheaton World Wide Moving, laughs when he recounts Henri’s power of persuasion.

“Henri called my father, CMS Owner Jim Fontaine, in the early ‘90s asking for help with some villa installations. Jim took some information and promised to get back to him with pricing. Henri kindly explained that he was not looking for a price, but rather someone to donate their time and expertise to a cause that impacts countless families in need,” says Jason. After researching the Village, Jim and CMS enthusiastically came on board as one of the Village’s Founding Partners – and have been moving mountains in support of wish families ever since.

Together, Wheaton | Bekins and its network of independently owned moving companies have supported Give Kids The World Village in innumerable ways, including providing complimentary storage space and delivery services, such as the annual delivery of goodies from the Sweets & Snacks Expo; raising funds through the annual Wheaton | Bekins silent auction, employee giving, and fundraising events such as the 2021 Truck Pull in Nashville; engaging employees to volunteer; and helping to orchestrate programs like Extreme Village Makeover.

Nowhere is Wheaton| Bekins’ impact more visible at the Village than Give Kids The World’s accessible horseback riding venue, Keaton’s Korral, which was built by Wheaton | Bekins and named after a wish child who made an unforgettable connection with the van line’s team members throughout the organization.

During the 2003 Wheaton | Bekins Partnership Conference in Indianapolis, 12-year-old Keaton White delivered a powerful speech about facing his third battle with bone cancer in two years and the tremendous impact staying at Give Kids The World Village had on him and his family. “Some of us who are sick may never grow up and become old,” Keaton said. “But for just this one special week out of our lives, the world is given to us. Give Kids The World was one of the happiest times of my life; everywhere you go, you get a chance to see what life is like when you are important. It is not, pity me because I am sick, but because I count. My life counts and it does matter that I am here and alive. I hope other wish families have the chance to experience the love we were given at the Village.”

Wheaton | Bekins Chairman of the Board Stephen F. Burns was among those at the conference deeply moved by Keaton’s remarks. “Hearing Keaton speak, it touched your soul to know how much he’d been through and what Give Kids The World Village meant to him and his family,” he said. Shortly after his speech, Keaton lost his battle with cancer. Inspired by Keaton’s courage, optimism and passion for Give Kids The World, in

“It is remarkable to see so many people in the Wheaton | Bekins network devote their resources to supporting Give Kids The World and the precious families it serves.”

2004 Wheaton | Bekins built a therapeutic horseback riding venue at the Village and named it Keaton’s Korral in honor of this special young man whose short but meaningful life impacted so many. True to Keaton’s wish, countless families facing unimaginable challenges due to childhood illness will have the chance to experience the love and magic of the Village thanks to the generosity of Wheaton | Bekins, Central Moving & Storage, and other caring partners.



“It is remarkable to see so many people in the Wheaton | Bekins network devote their resources to supporting Give Kids The World and the precious families it serves,” says Wheaton | Bekins Director of Marketing Communications Jaymie Shook, who spearheads the organization’s charitable efforts on behalf of the Village. “At its core, Wheaton | Bekins is about family. From the very first connection Henri Landwirth made with Jim Fontaine, to the breadth of ways our agents have embraced this important cause, our goal remains to make a meaningful impact on families – and we are very proud to partner with Give Kids The World to do just that.”

For more information about Wheaton | Bekins, visit wheatonworldwide.com or bekins.com. For information about Central Moving & Storage, visit www.cms-orlando.com.



“As a fourth-generation family business, we understand the importance of giving back and making a difference. We cannot think of a better cause in our community than Give Kids The World.”

– CMS Sales Manager Tammie Fontaine

Going The Extra Smile

Diagnosed with dilated cardiomyopathy at just 70 days old, five-year-old Taehee Yoon visited Give Kids The World with her family from Hoboken, NJ, recently with support from Make-A-Wish New Jersey. “Our visit still feels like a dream,” says Taehee’s dad, Hee Seung (Josh) Yoon. “It was mesmerizing how perfect everything was at the Village... from the greeters at the airport, being welcomed “home” each time we arrived at the gate, the rides, the top quality food, and the magical parties, to the volunteers – who were not just caring and helpful, but went the extra mile to help us make great memories. We saw true acts of altruism everywhere. Beyond how magical the experience was, the cleanliness of the facilities was absolutely superb; we have not felt that safe in years. This was the very first stress-free trip we’ve ever had, and will remember our visit forever.”



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.

GIVE KIDS THE WORLD SUMMER ROAD TRIP

Taking place June 9-19 at many of the country's top theme parks and attractions, Give Kids The World Village's 2022 Summer Road Trip will deliver the magic and wonder of the Village to GKTW alumni wish families in 11 cities nationwide. Each Summer Road Trip stop will provide alumni wish families with exclusive early theme park access and a variety of fun-filled activities that bring the Village wish experience to life – including a DJ dance party, games, crafts, whimsical Village photo opps, and more. The event is designed to help GKTW alumni wish families relive treasured moments from their wish trips; promote camaraderie and support among wish families; and spread the mission of the Village to new audiences.

For more information, visit www.gktw.org/roadtrip/



A MAGICAL HOMECOMING

Diagnosed with stage 4 high-risk neuroblastoma, five-year-old Pryce Redmon and his family enjoyed a Welcome Back Family visit recently to create new memories following Pryce's wish trip in 2021. "It was amazing to be back and just spend time having fun with each other away from the worry of cancer," says mom, Katie. "Everyone made us feel just as special as our original wish trip; it was magical from the moment we arrived!"

To learn more about GKTW's Welcome Back Family program for alumni, visit www.gktw.org.



THE GIFT OF HOPE

After spending the majority of 2021 in and out of hospital stays, Aurora (Rory) Lewis was granted a wish by the High Hopes Foundation of New Hampshire. "We are grateful to everyone who made our trip possible and gave Rory the gift of hope," says Rory's mom, Melissa. "We began to see a transformation in Rory; Give Kids The World Village inspired her positive journey into recovery. She was given support that focused on not what was wrong with her, but everything she had done to get to that point and all she had accomplished. She had survived her trauma, and was valued and loved in this world. It was our trip to the Village that helped shine the light forward."

MAYOR CLAYTON'S WONDERLAB

Thanks to the generosity of GHP/Garner Holt Education Through Imagination, Give Kids The World's new Mayor Clayton's WonderLab STEAM education center – scheduled for completion in November – will feature Florida's first-ever AniMakerspace. Garner Holt donated the state-of-the-art space, which will feature 3D printers, a vacuum former, storytelling center, and more. The wheelchair accessible space will enable kids to program advanced SPARK-E animatronics and experience digital design, rapid prototyping, animation, electronics, programming, and other aspects of robotic creation.



EXTREME VILLAGE MAKEOVER II

Give Kids The World Village is more magical than ever, thanks to a recently completed renovation project. As part of Extreme Village Makeover II, 142 villas were updated with a vibrant new color scheme and décor inspired by the excitement of traveling the world. Upgrades also include new furniture, fixtures, electronics, cabinetry and other enhancements for the comfort and enjoyment of wish families. A remarkable team of partners contributed their time and talent to the project, including Holiday Inn Club Vacations; Rollis Construction; Central Moving & Storage; Hilldrup; Urban Art; Extreme Graphics; Kellex; Regency Furniture; Samuelson; Ashley Lighting; Simmons; Marlin Designs; Read Products; Peerless; Office Depot; and HD Supply.



CHILDLIKE WONDER

After surgery to remove a stage IV medulloblastoma Sonic Hedgehog brain tumor, five-year-old Nolan Wince was diagnosed with another rare cancer disorder, Li-Fraumeni syndrome. Following high dose chemo with bone marrow transplants, Nolan and his family visited Give Kids The World from Dublin, Ohio, with support from A Special Wish Foundation. "Our experience was phenomenal," says mom Jill. "Our family was able to relax and enjoy each other for the first time in nearly a year. Everything was magical: the ice cream, the carousel, the amazing volunteers, and Jersey Jaxson's LEGO Playroom, which became our sanctuary. We are forever grateful to Give Kids The World for letting our kids be kids!"

PASSION, PURPOSE & JOY

Give Kids The World has a special place in the heart of volunteer Joann Russo, whose daughter, Justine, passed away in 2019 following a battle with Ewing sarcoma – and whose six-year-old grandson will be visiting the Village on his wish trip next October after treatment for leukemia. "Volunteering at the Village has been life-changing and by far the greatest thing I have ever been a part of; I have laughed, shed a few tears, but I am also reminded how precious our time on earth is," says Joann, who travels to Give Kids The World Village four times a year from Ohio to volunteer. "My motto is, find JOY! And that is exactly what the Village provides. Being able to see these kids smile is priceless."

To learn more about volunteer opportunities, visit www.gktw.org/volunteer/.



DIS CON 2022

Scheduled to take place September 30 – October 1 at Walt Disney World's Disney's Coronado Springs Resort, DIS Con 2022 is a one-of-a-kind expo celebrating all facets of the wonderful world of Disney – from Disney, Marvel and Pixar animation to film, television, theme parks, music and memorabilia. Proceeds from the event will help make wishes come true for critically ill children and their families. Presenters and panels at this star-studded, fan-centric event will include an Encanto Reunion with Mauro Castillo and Adassa; Aladdin 30th Anniversary Reunion featuring Paige Larkin and Jonathan Freeman; iconic Wheel of Fortune host Pat Sajak; Walt Disney Imagineer Tony Baxter; and more. An exclusive After Hours Party sponsored by Yogibo will also be held at EPCOT® on October 1, EPCOT's 40th anniversary.

For tickets and more information, visit www.gktw.org/discon/.