
heartstrings

Fall/Winter 2020



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- House operations during COVID
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"I want to name him Immanuel because God is with us."

-- Jennifer

To listen to the 911 call go to: <https://rmhcsoutherncolorado.org/911call/>

Even before the worldwide pandemic, Alex and Jennifer were intimately acquainted with the unexpected. Happily expecting their first child, their journey took a wild turn.

Everything had been going well with their pregnancy. They were healthy and strong and excited to become a family. Then, one night, Jennifer was awakened. She got up to "walk off" the Braxton Hicks contractions. Feeling sick, she headed to the bathroom. A strong pain took her to her knees. Jennifer called out, "Alex, I think we need to go to the hospital." Getting up to walk a few more steps, she felt a pop. "We need to call an ambulance!" She said. "My water just broke."

Alex ran to her as he dialed 911.

With an operator on the line, Alex and Jennifer prayed the first responders would arrive in time to get them to the hospital, hoping they could stave off labor. They were only 29 weeks along.

Alex: *"My wife is pregnant...she's in a lot of pain and to the point where she can't walk right now...we don't know if her water broke or what"*

911: *"Are you with the patient now? How many weeks pregnant is she?"* **Alex:** *"She's 29 weeks."*

Typically, babies are born at 40 weeks' gestation. Alex and Jennifer still had 11 more weeks to go. Jennifer was experiencing active and ongoing labor, with contractions just two minutes apart.

911: *"Do not try to prevent the birth. Allow your wife to assume the most comfortable position and have her take deep breaths between contractions."*

At that point, Jennifer can be heard asking, ***"Is the ambulance coming?"***

Jennifer was worried. She knew it was too soon – her baby's lungs weren't yet mature enough. She knew a home birth for a 29-week old baby carried risks.

Alex; *"I see the baby. I see the baby!"* He paused. *"It's not the head. It's breach. It's starting to come out though. It's not the head, though. I know. Its shoulder is stuck. Its arm is stuck."* Alex went on, *"I see the legs, I see the butt, I see one arm."*

911: *"Ok, this could be a difficult delivery."*

While still on the phone with 911, Alex grabbed a second cell phone and called their neighbor, Donna, a nurse, saying only, *"We need you. We need you!"*

Alex hoped Donna would be able to provide the life-saving measures their premature son would require. Typically, Donna and her husband turn in early each night, silencing their phones and keeping them in another room, altogether, to ensure a good night's rest. HOWEVER, THIS NIGHT, both Donna and her husband had fallen asleep on the couch. Awakening in the middle of the night, Donna went to brush her teeth. Glancing down at just the right time, she saw her silenced cell phone light up. It was Alex. Answering, she overheard him on the phone with the 911 operator.

Alex: "I've got him, I've got him. Yep, I've got him right now. Everything is out except for the head." A moment later, he said, "There. I've got him...I've got him"

911: "Is the baby completely out?" Met with silence, He asked again, "Is the baby crying or breathing?"

Time stood still.

Alex: "He's not crying or breathing I don't know...the baby is not crying or breathing!"

With his tiny son clutched in his arms, Alex ran down the stairs to let Donna in. Quickly assessing the situation, Donna prayed a quiet prayer. Her mind raced; throughout her nursing career, Donna had worked with adults.

She quickly recalled that oxygen was in the placenta. Raising it, Donna also remembered that too much air would be harmful for a premature baby's lungs. It was then that Donna heard an audible voice that simply said, "**Breathe.**" She felt a sense of peace as she gently rubbed the baby's chest and, from centimeters away, began to slowly and gently breathe into his mouth.

It seemed like an eternity. Alex, Jennifer and Donna were getting increasingly anxious, praying the baby would take his first breath. Rather than fall into despair, Jennifer recalls crying out, "**Please God, be with our family. Please God, be with us right now.**"

And, then it happened. The most joyous sound!

Alex: "Oh! He's crying!" The 911 operator said, "He is crying?", followed by, "Ok, gently wipe off the baby's mouth and nose and dry the baby with a clean towel." Alex repeated the instruction, "Ok, wipe him off and gently wipe the baby's mouth and nose." The 911 operator said, "Dry baby off with a clean towel then wrap the baby in another clean dry towel...let me know when you did that" Alex said, "Yes, sir!"

911: "Awesome! Congratulations!"

A jubilant Alex said, "Thank you, sir!" The operator finished the call with, "You're welcome."

Jennifer looked at Alex, saying, "**I want to name him Immanuel because God is with us.**"

When the EMT's arrived, they put a little mask near Immanuel's face for oxygen. Alex cut the cord. Immanuel and Jennifer were taken to the waiting ambulance.

Holding her baby on her chest, Jennifer was thrilled when she heard her son making crying noises. In the hospital room, she breathed a sigh of relief, watching as a team of doctors worked on their tiny son. Seeing Immanuel kicking his legs, she thought, "His legs work. He can kick."

The strong and feisty Immanuel, born weighing just 2 pounds, 15 ounces began to thrive! Ultrasound revealed no brain bleeds and no developmental issues..



"Staying at the Ronald McDonald House was a lifesaver." Alex said. "Being so close meant we could be present with Immanuel in a way we couldn't have, otherwise." Jennifer echoed her husband, "Being in such close proximity was a gift. You let us be with Immanuel at every step... being in the NICU was stressful. Your team was incredibly kind, with true servants' hearts."

Alex agrees. "Your team showed real empathy and altruism. You all genuinely cared for us and for Immanuel." He added, "You serve a population that needs A LOT. And, you do so with such kind hearts."

"I don't know that people realize what families go through when they have someone they love in the hospital." Alex said. Jennifer added, "Your care was profound. I never felt any judgement or expectation. Everybody was there to support us, even when we were having some really dark days."

"Every day, it was as if your staff was saying, 'I'm here to support you.', and, 'I want to help you.' The atmosphere at the House and in the Family Rooms was patient and kind. Everyone wanted to support everything we needed."

And, it's true. After all, we believe in the miraculous.

Even during a pandemic. Do you, too? If so, please consider helping us support critically ill children by keeping their families just a heartbeat away.



ways you have helped



Kids & Clays



**Golf
Tourney**



3rd Party Fundraisers



Volunteers

In a year filled with much uncertainty, our Ronald McDonald House has been abundantly blessed by individuals, families, groups and organizations who've given of their time, talent and treasure in support of families staying at our House. After juggling multiple dates, (and sometimes venues), RMHCSC successfully conducted two fundraising events, the annual Sporting Clays Shoot and the Cameron Memorial Golf Tourney. Together, these events helped raise over \$140,000, in support of families with severely ill or injured children. We are also grateful for third party fundraisers held at Dutch Bros., Dillard's and the RAZZ Golf Tournament. Lastly, so much of what we do is thanks, in part, to the countless volunteers who serve families staying at the House by cooking, cleaning, working in the office and helping with events. To learn more about our charity, go to: <https://rmhcsoutherncolorado.org/>



our House

during COVID

We've all heard it. Perhaps we've even been the ones to say it. 2020 has been a bizarre, weird, strange, difficult and unsettling year. And as hard as this year is for each of us, imagine navigating those COVID waters while seeking the vital care your severely ill or injured child requires, in a city that is far from the place you call home.

While COVID-19 has brought challenges to the delivery of our mission and our services, our team has met all of those challenges, head on. Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southern Colorado's (RMHCSC's) commitment and resolve of **keeping families close** during times of medical crisis has only grown stronger.

With the health, safety and well-being of the children and families we serve being our highest priority, RMHCSC staff and volunteers have been working diligently, keeping in step as COVID-19 continues to unfold. House Operations Director, Moyra Hower said, "We've taken extra precautions to make sure everything in the House is sanitized to keep our families safe and healthy. We proactively stay one step ahead to make sure our families can see their children!"

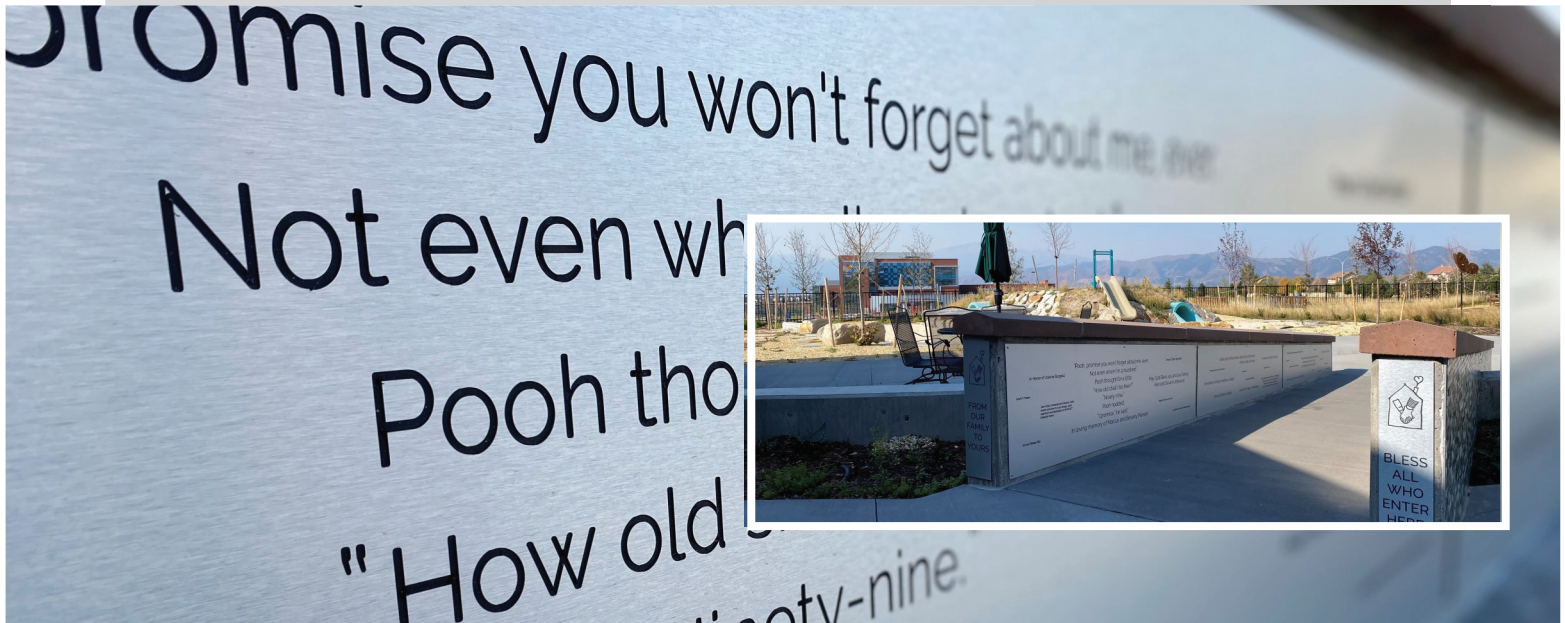
Following the most updated mandates and guidelines, the RMHCSC team has adapted their daily routine. Heather Gannaway, House Manager, explained, "When COVID hit, everything came to a complete stop. We had to go with the information we had at that moment -- we had to adjust how we provided our meals and how volunteers could come into the House. Virtually every facet of House life was impacted. The hard part for me was that people wanted to come in; they wanted to help. We wanted to give them that opportunity but there were times when the situation didn't allow it." Heather added, "At first, we planned week by week, then month by month, guided by the best information. We are looking forward with optimism and hope, keeping in mind that things could again change."

As summer turned to fall, RMHCSC has been able to return to many of the original aspects of House life.

For the Ronald McDonald Family Rooms, the decision to suspend services was dictated by the hospitals they serve. When those hospitals temporarily curtailed all volunteer activity, limiting contact within the hospitals, the Family Rooms followed suit. RMHCSC's Tina Dewar, Family Room/Special Projects explains, "Despite being closed, we were able to repurpose one of our Family Rooms to become a retreat for hospital staff, which was great because they needed a place to grab a moment to destress in a very difficult time!"

As we look ahead to winter two things are certain. The health, safety and well-being of the children and families we serve, our volunteers and staff remains our highest priority. Secondly, RMHCSC's commitment and resolve to keeping families close during times of medical crisis will remain steadfast!

a message of Thanks!



Having been open for just over a year, our Ronald McDonald House has served nearly 900 families. Being only a heartbeat away from their hospitalized child has been an incredible gift for those in need.

"When our baby was born 6 weeks early, we had no idea how we were going to survive the NICU stay. We live an hour away and didn't know how we could stay close to her. The room has been a Godsend for the last three weeks. Thank you for giving us the peace and sanctuary that this House has provided. Nobody here wants to be here, but EVERYBODY here is grateful for this House."

"In the middle of difficult times, being away from home and struggling to cope with the grim word 'cancer' and all that entails, every space in this HOUSE was a place of peace and rest. THANK YOU!!! You are all amazing for doing this. And, we are grateful."

"To know that each day there were healthy, nutritious meals that my family and I could rely on was a gift. The kitchen is amazing and sharing a meal in the dining room with other families felt supportive. Thank you."

Hearing from many who have expressed a desire to find a meaningful way to help provide support for these children and families, RMHCSC has a new opportunity with the Donor Recognition Wall.

With a gift of \$250, \$500 or \$1,000, your name and/or a message of hope will forever remain on a panel near the outdoor patio.

Should you want to join other individuals, families, groups and/or businesses who have chosen to participate in this unique opportunity, please reach out to sam@rmhcsoutherncolorado.org.

become a sustainer

Donated by:

The Jarecke family

219

•••••

Bedroom

Sustained by:

The Jarecke family

Perhaps from your own experiences, and/or, from reading Alex, Jennifer and Immanuel's story, you understand the plight faced by families who are experiencing medical crisis.

For more than 30 years, our Ronald McDonald House has proudly been caring for these children and their families. There is now a new opportunity, providing another way you can help.

Should you be interested in becoming a Room Sustainer, your support will help sustain a room (or a space) at the new Ronald McDonald House. This financial gift will help defray costs of ongoing repair, maintenance and upkeep at our House that Love Built.

Sustainers support ensures families in need have a safe place to land, when they need it most.

Ranging from \$500 to \$2,500 annually, please consider placing your name on a space, letting families in crisis know they are being supported and cared for.

cornerstone programs

Our **Ronald McDonald House®** offers a warm, safe, clean, nurturing environment for families of seriously ill and injured children. Many families travel far from home to get specialized care, and our House serves as a home base for families whose children are receiving critical treatment at nearby medical facilities. Parents can better communicate with their child's medical team, remain close to their children and keep up with complicated treatment plans. Staying close by allows them to focus on the health and well-being of their child, at little or no cost.

When a family enters a **Ronald McDonald Family Room®**, they forget they're in a medical setting. Moments away from a child's bedside, the rooms are designed as a refuge for families to rest and recharge, keeping them strong for their children. These comfortable spaces provide a variety of homelike amenities, and can be found in Children's Hospital Colorado, Colorado Springs and at St. Francis Medical Center.





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volunteer opportunities

We are always in need of great volunteers! There are so many ways individuals and groups can get involved to make a difference at our charity, Let us know your areas of interest, your availability and we'll place you in a job which will provide a sense of accomplishment and have a direct impact on the families we serve. Our volunteers truly are the lifeblood of our organization!

We have volunteer opportunities at the Ronald McDonald House, Children's Hospital Colorado, Colorado Springs, Ronald McDonald Family Room and the St. Francis Medical Center, Ronald McDonald Family Room.

Interested in becoming a volunteer?

To learn more and fill out an application visit our website:
rmhcsoutherncolorado.org

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