

heartstrings

Spring/Summer 2021

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Ronald McDonald
House Charities®
of Southern Colorado



Eric's Story

You know what a kid with cancer wants?

To be a kid.

To have their family with them.

To feel safe and protected while they are receiving life-saving care.

Wise beyond his years, nine-year old Eric said, "I'm not afraid of 'cancer'." He paused and then went on, "I know I have it... And, *I know I'm going to get rid of it.*" Eric's mom, Cassy, added, "Many in our extended family have shared Eric's diagnosis."

"Eric's positive attitude gives our whole family hope."

Cassy said, "And, the doctors feel pretty confident that Eric is going to beat this."

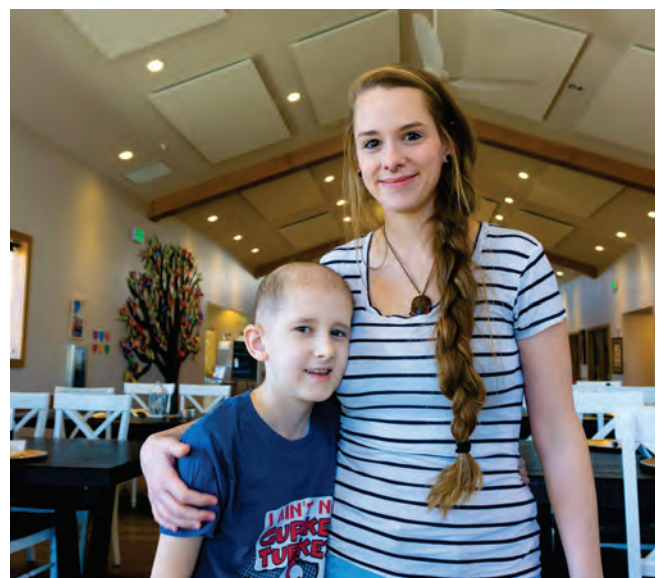
They looked at each other and smiled.

Back to that being a kid stuff.

"What's the temperature, mom?" Eric asked. At 34 degrees, it was still chilly out. Eric's mom shared that when something has piqued her sons interest, he goes all in. Today that meant he wanted to ride his new bicycle in the back yard at the Ronald McDonald House. When his mom said it wasn't yet warm enough, Eric decided he could wait. Given time for conversation, Eric pondered as he nibbled on a kiwi. He turned to his mom and asked, "Well, then... can I have a snake?" Cassy's eyes grew wide, as did her smile. Spending time with these two is like that. Their care for one another is apparent.

The cancer diagnosis and all that entails have taken a minute for their family to adjust to.

Eric is taking it mostly in stride, working through his treatments and time away from their home in Trinidad. He misses his friends, his sister, Liz, Ryan's cooking and his pets.





"Ryan is a better cook than my mom!" Eric exclaimed. Cassy nodded in agreement.

It was a chilly September night when the family of four was seated around their table, sharing a warm meal. Cassy spotted a weird, swollen area on Eric's neck. She asked him to quit chewing. He did. She watched. Then she asked that he swallow. He did. When the area didn't change, Cassy made an appointment. After an assessment, it was determined that she and Eric would travel to Colorado Springs to begin treatment for T-Cell Leukemia.

Being seen at Children's Hospital Colorado, Colorado Springs, their family is thankful for the Ronald McDonald House. "**Here, we can stay together,**" Cassy said. Eric chimed in, "I like it here!" He added, "It's like a hotel!"

Recalling some of his favorite meals, Eric said, "The meat lasagna was amazing!" His mom nodded. "It's true. It was." She said. Eric went on, "Everyone at the House is so nice. I love being here. The employees care and they help me with things." Like all those we serve, Eric and his mom are fast favorites of staff, volunteers and other families.

Since last year, ongoing treatments have had this family splitting their time (and sometimes their family) between the Ronald McDonald House and Trinidad. Some weekends, Ryan and Liz come up to join Eric and Cassy.

Thus far, Eric is handling his treatments well. "I don't mind the LP's." He said. His mom added, "He's a crazy kid. I mean, who likes a lumbar puncture?" Eric shared that his anesthesiologist is great. "He tells me jokes when I'm falling asleep."

Examples of what Eric *doesn't like* include getting the wrong flavored chap stick. *THAT was no bueno.*

And, he's also not crazy about the steroid treatments, although those, too, he took in stride. "I remember one day, I was crying because I was craving a hot dog." Cassy shared that the steroid treatments caused Eric to feel both emotional and also become ravenously hungry -- often for super salty foods like hot dogs, pepperonis and chips. "The staff brought me anything I needed." Eric said.



He then turned to his mom and joked. "Remember when we were sitting on the bench in the Healing Garden, looking at the hospital and Pikes Peak?" "I remember." Cassy said. "Remember when someone took our picture from behind, and I said, 'Liz and Ryan are going to be wondering if you're hanging out with some old, bald, fat man?'" They both laughed at the memory. As long as they can be together, this young family will find a way to go through anything. Cassy said, **"You helped us stay together. We simply can't thank you enough."**



Eric goes back to considering other things. "When I'm older", he said, "I want to volunteer here, to help other kids." He shared that he specifically wanted to make meals. A budding pescatarian, Eric would make healthy foods that would help sick kids feel better. We all thought this was a great idea. He further pondered. "When I grow up, I might want to be a vet or do something with animals." Another great idea, we all agreed. He then looked at his mom with a mischievous grin and said, "Well, then... about that snake..." They laughed and Cassy gave her son a knowing hug. Eric's positive attitude and a grateful heart have helped this momma and their family to celebrate, even during the hard days.

Our Ronald McDonald House keeps families close during ongoing treatments and care. Thank you for your support that ensures families like Eric's remain within eyesight and walking distance when they need it most. Eric will need treatments over the next two years, bringing him and his family back to stay with us. We'll be waiting, with open arms!

And, we'll keep you posted on that snake.

ways you have helped

You've helped our guest families through heartfelt donations - be it recycling a car, giving of your personal treasure, shopping for needed items, sustaining a room or by participating in a fun event! No matter how you've helped, we thank you!



To view our annual report visit: <https://rmhcsoutherncolorado.org/about-us/annual-reports-financials>

A Message From Beth Alessio

Executive Director, Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southern Colorado

As a mom of two teen boys, I have tried to prepare my sons for the world they will soon go out into when they are living independently - much as my parents did for me.

I hope I have set them up for success – that they have learned the importance of being responsible and how to live well and love well. I want for them to believe in themselves. I want for them to be able to move through failures, keeping their eyes on their targets, their goals and their dreams.

Questioning myself often, I wonder: Have I done all I can to prepare them? Will they be ready? Will they build a life that they are proud to live – one that is filled with confidence and compassion? Will they continue to challenge themselves to keep growing and keep building on the skills they have? We learn the answers to these questions only after we let them fly. I pray that my husband and I have prepared them well.

Such is the heart of a mom. From the moment our children enter the world we are filled with such emotion, hope, dreams and desire for our children. The truth is we will do anything for them as *they have given us the greatest gift we will ever receive - that of understanding unconditional love.*

Every day at the Ronald McDonald House, we interact with moms who have the same hopes, dreams and desires. These moms would do anything in their power to give their critically ill child a chance for their best life. *Our moms have grit*; they have no other choice but to. Often, moms will be the sole caretakers during the week when dad is back home working and holding down the fort. Sometimes these moms have their other children with them, too. Looking after and caring for their families while experiencing medical crisis is a struggle. They juggle it all, but it is not easy.

We strive to provide every bit of support possible that allows these moms to rest, to rejuvenate and to care deeply for their children. Without worry of where they will sleep, what will they eat, and how they will be able to remain by their child's side, moms find comfort and support at our House.

Many moms stay with us for weeks, and some for months. We get to know them well. Celebrating milestones together, we cry together and we hold faith together. Walking alongside these moms during the most difficult parts of their journey is an honor, and one we take very seriously.

Please consider helping us support our moms with a gift in honor of a lovely woman who has also been a most wonderful mom, letting her know she makes the world a better place - just by being her.

This Heartstrings publication is dedicated to moms. Our Ronald McDonald House moms, our own moms, and those of us who are blessed to be moms. Wishing you and those special women in your life a memorable and lovely Mother's Day in celebration of the gifts they endowed to each of us!



Gifts From Our Moms



From **Heather, Kelley** and her three siblings grew up in Upstate New York. Her fondest childhood memory of her mom, Carolyn, were the summer trips they'd take to the Adirondack Mountains. Her family would rent a cabin by a lake for two weeks and relatives and friends would come visit during those summer time adventures.

birthday for my sister. We have shared many fun experiences together from travels and parties to concerts and costuming for Mardi Gras and Sci-Fi conventions. Of course, we have also shared life's struggles as many families do. These caring, smart, creative, organized, resilient women have shown me the love of family and friendship. I am really looking forward to the day when we can all be together again!"



From **Dan**, "Stella was the second of thirteen children, the oldest daughter born to Polish immigrants

in N.E. Minneapolis. Stella had a real love for life, she enjoyed people, adventure, food, the outdoors and entertaining but her strongest affection was for me, my father and her brothers and sisters. When mom's parents passed Stella & Wally moved into her family's homestead to look after her younger siblings. Imagine, a young, recently married couple, moving into a smaller four-bedroom two story home with eight kids varying in age from late teens to mid-twenties, all sharing one bathtub, two closet sized kitchens and a joy for being together... most of the time! As this polish family grew from 13 to 26 to 40+ they still always found time to be together. Stella gave me so many gifts; she shared her depth of faith, examples of courtesy and respect, lessons in cooking, ironing and gardening. But her greatest gift was her appreciation for the richness of family and dear friends. Decades later, when our house is bursting with people, the loudness of excited conversation and laughter, we smile and think of Stella!"



Jamie said, "When I was growing up my mother had the most beautiful garden in our backyard. The smells, sights and colors were

truly remarkable, everything seemed to always be in bloom. You could find her outside most days, digging, tending and continually creating a treasured space for our whole family. One of my fondest memories was when she and I would create bouquets for my elementary school teachers on special occasions. We would go out in the garden, spend time searching for the best selections in bloom, then would perfectly cut and arrange them. Often the bouquets were almost as big as me when finished. I was one proud five-year-old walking into school to hand one off to an often unsuspecting educator. Oh the smiles and bright eyes those flowers would bring! I will always cherish this memory with my mother. I hope to make this a tradition with my daughters as well."



Sam wrote, "With my mom I learned much...about gratitude, patience, faith and more. She

taught me how to be thankful, both in seasons of want and in bounty. From her love of nature I learned the simple serenity of wetting a line. I saw how the act of being still can bring peace to your mind, your body and your spirit. She taught me that when life gets tangled - much like fishing line is prone to do - there are hands bigger than mine that I can lean into for support. The memories of those long, sunny days spent at the shoreline with the two of us sharing stories, secrets and sandwiches, laughing and listening as the water lapped at our feet are some of my favorite, even still. I learned that LOVE always wins. And also, how to properly land a fish. She was a gift, my mom."

Tracy wrote, "Growing up my parents made sure that my sisters and I always wondered who would be sitting around the table for breakfast or dinner. Everyone was welcome, anytime. When I got married, my husband and our children felt the same way, coining the phrase, 'Our house has elastic walls and revolving doors.' Any and all are welcome. We always find the room and a meal. Maybe that is why I feel so at home in the Ronald McDonald House. The faces change from day to day but the philosophy is the same. We are all family! Remembering all the amazing people we were blessed to have around our dinner table is an amazing gift that both my parents gave us daily."

On Target For Fun!

3rd Annual Kids & Clays Sporting Clays Shoot, June 11th at the Pikes Peak Gun Club!

This exciting day with fellow sports enthusiasts includes EVERYTHING! Lunch, an afternoon shoot, targets, ammo, gift bag, hearing & eye protection, silent and live auctions, awards and snacks & beverages after the shoot. Sponsorship & playing packages range from \$250-\$5,000. Contact Sam Milam to become a sponsor at sam@rmhcsoutherncolorado.org



two days fore fun! The Cameron Memorial Golf Tourney June 29th & October 4th Play in one or both events!

Join us for this GREAT annual event TWICE in 2021! Tuesday, June 29th at Flying Horse North and again Monday, October 4th at Perry Park. Your day includes breakfast, lunch & golf. Sponsorship & playing packages range from \$300-\$10,000. Come as a single or as a group and play one or both days! For sponsorship opportunities contact Beth Alessio at beth@rmhcsoutherncolorado.org.

Sponsored in part by



register at: <https://rmhcsoutherncolorado.org/2021-ronald-mcdonald-house-events/>

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. Our House serves as a home base for families whose children are receiving critical treatment at nearby medical facilities. Parents can remain close to their children, better communicate with their child's medical team and keep up with complicated treatment plans. Staying close by allows parents to focus on the health and well-being of their child, at no cost to them.



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 in Children's Hospital Colorado, Colorado Springs and St. Francis Medical Center provide a variety of homelike amenities.



we would love to hear from you!

To all the families that have stayed with us and all the volunteers who have supported us over the past 34 years, we'd love to hear from you! Please send us a family update and a photo or two to let us know how you and your family have been, have grown and thrived.



We look forward to hearing from you! Send your notes and photos to Captain Dan at captaindan@rmhcsoutherncolorado.org



volunteer opportunities

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

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

If interested in becoming a volunteer, please fill out an application by visiting our website: rmhcsoutherncolorado.org