



Aloha

From Our House to Yours

www.RonaldHouseHawaii.org

July 2011

Newsletter of Ronald McDonald House Charities® of Hawaii

Our Amazing Grace

When three-year-old Grace Alana was stricken with scarlet fever and a flesh eating bacterial infection at the same time, her doctors on Kauai knew they were in a race against time, and needed to get her to Oahu by air ambulance for urgent treatment. Her immune system was in distress and once on Oahu, Grace seemed to face one crisis after another. She came extremely close to having her foot amputated, as the bacteria coursed through her foot and threatened to work its way up her tiny body.

But Grace would survive intact and, in fact, what began as a frightening and critical situation back in

the first week of February, ended with plenty of smiles and joy as they left for home on March 25. There were even some other positive outcomes they had never imagined.

But we're getting ahead of the story.

Grace's mother Melissa vividly remembers the day things seemed to suddenly start going terribly wrong with her youngest daughter. Grace had been experiencing a fever, rash, and a stuffy nose for a few days. Since it had been raining heavily, it was easy for Melissa to keep Grace

wrapped up indoors during that time, treating her stuffiness and fever with over-the-counter children's medicines. When the Lihue weather finally turned clear, Melissa had a day off from her job at the Kauai Marriott and decided that a soothing dip in the ocean would help Grace feel renewed, as it had many times before. But that night, her fever was intense and her rash was as bad as ever. Now something else was wrong too.

"She was crying and squeezing her foot and saying 'my owie hurts'," recalled Melissa. "I had bought Grace a new pair of slippers and she had worked up a small blister from them, and I thought that was what was hurting her. When I turned on the light, I saw that the whole top of her foot was covered in blisters and my heart just stopped. I knew we had to get to the ER immediately."

The doctors at the emergency room said she had scarlet fever. But they said that might be only

part of her problem. Further tests determined that she had a form of flesh-eating bacteria too, that she most likely picked up at the beach. Kauai doctors administered intra-

venous antibiotics and performed surgery to try and remove as much infection as they could before transporting her to Oahu. It was a sudden and frightening experience that left Melissa reeling. "When they told me that if we didn't get her there in time she would lose her foot, I just cried because I just thought about how her life would

change. She just got her first bicycle for Christmas. Grace was in so much pain, and I couldn't stop it. I couldn't help her. I couldn't make it better."

On her way to Honolulu, Melissa tried to sort out what had just taken

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Her foot healing, Grace and mom Melissa can smile again.

Wish List

Gift Cards

- Wal-Mart
- Costco
- K-Mart
- Target
- Sam's Club
- Longs Drugs Supermarkets
- Gasoline gift cards
- Prepaid phone cards
- Movie Tickets

Household Items

- Non-stick pots & pans cookware
- Paper towels
- Ziplock bags—gallon
- Garbage bags (yard & kitchen)

Food Items

- Sugar
- Cooking oil
- Fresh fruits & vegetables
- Frozen meals (microwave)
- Individually wrapped snacks
- Assorted canned goods

Miscellaneous

- Rolls/sheets of "Forever" postage stamps
- Xerox paper (8.5 x 11)
- Office supplies



Hiilani, Grace's 13-year-old sister was a tremendous help to their mom Melissa.

A Message from our President



Jerri Chong

A lot can be learned about Ronald McDonald House by understanding our programs, taking a look at our fundraising efforts, and reviewing our statistics. But to actually feel what The House That Love Built is all about, one must understand what it really means to the children and parents that come to us for assistance.

In this issue of our newsletter there are stories about three neighbor island families who have recently stayed at the Ronald McDonald House. One family lives on Maui and the other two are from Kauai. The Ronald McDonald House served or is still serving as their Oahu home-away-from-home and support system during their children's medical emergencies. Through their own words, I think you can sense how emotional their journeys have been and how the House's nurturing atmosphere made such an important impact on their experience.

The House provides the setting and the physical support families need, but another powerful dynamic in play is having other families living under the same roof who are going through many of the same things they are. Many times families staying here become an important

source of strength and inspiration for one another. Bonds are formed between families and with the RMHC-HI staff too.

Since so many people are interested in being a part of the RMHC-HI community, we are really excited to announce the launching of our new Facebook page. It will give everyone a chance to interact with each other and get information before anyone else. That means our guest families, volunteers, supporters, staff, and Board of Directors can all have a regular place to check in. People who are just curious about what we do can visit our page and get a great feel for what happens at our two Ronald McDonald Houses and our Family Room at Kapiolani Medical Center.

Right now on Facebook we are featuring photos from our recent Sam Choy's Breakfast Lunch & Crab event, as well as interesting photos of our facilities. You can even leave your comments on our "Wall". If you want to check it out this instant and you have a QR Code-enabled Smartphone, just use the QR Code on the opposite page to visit us on Facebook. If you "Like" us, you will be helping us share our story with more people than ever before! The bottom line is, the more vibrant and motivated our extended RMHC-HI community is, the better for the families and seriously ill children needing our assistance. Thank You for your support!

Amazing Grace continued from page 1

place. Many thoughts flooded her mind: Grace's sniffles and fever; the trip to the beach after days of heavy rain; the little blister on her foot from her new slippers; and the frightening infection threatening to overtake the youngster. How ironic it seemed that just a couple of weeks earlier, their family had participated in an event called "No One Likes a Dirty Beach," promoting clean beaches on Kauai.

They were met on Oahu by a special medical team. First, Grace had a spinal tap to make sure the infection hadn't spread to her bones. "Then, there were multiple surgeries, massive antibiotics, and back-to-back medical procedures," said Melissa. "It was so hard on her."

Finally, Grace was well enough to be released but needed to be closely monitored every single day and have her physical therapy. "At that point, the Ronald McDonald House was just perfect for us," Melissa

said.

Grace and her mom spent the last two-and-a-half weeks of their six weeks in Honolulu, staying at the Ronald McDonald House. It was here that Grace regained more than just her health and strength; she added many loving and caring friends, and a strong network of support, to her Ohana. "When we first got here, Grace kept saying she wanted to go back home to Kauai," said Melissa. "Now, when the time to return is so near, she's saying 'I don't want to go home. Mommy, I want to stay here. What about my room and all my friends?' That's how much she loves it here at the Ronald McDonald House. She knows and she feels how much everyone cares."

This House has really helped me too. It has taken a real load off of my shoulders. The other families that we have met were so wonderful: "We prayed together. We all just kind of leaned on each other



Grace's sash reads: "No One Likes a Dirty Beach." Soon after this photo was taken, she would be stricken by flesh-eating bacteria contracted at the beach.

emotionally. It was awesome. It was like: we're all in this together, we will get through it together."

AROUND THE HOUSE



RMHC-HI is now on Facebook!!
Visit our page right now on your
Smartphone using this QR Code:

RMHC-HI friends, Atu Latu and Fredrick Daufa stand near the new sidewalk they installed leading from the children's playground to the Bar-B-Q garden. Atu's company, V. Eng Construction, donated all of the labor and some materials. Bottom, Fredrick puts some finishing touches on the project.



Happy Mothers Day!

Families staying at both Ronald McDonald Houses celebrated Mothers Day together at the Oahu Avenue House on Sunday, May 8. RMHC-HI's Michael Ahakuelo, with the help of the Rezentes family, provided brunch for everyone. The menu included fried rice, fruit, teriyaki meatballs, muffins, chips and salsa.

The event served to bring families together, giving them the opportunity to get to know one another. The moms all received a Mothers Day gift from the House too.

This Kia Borrego is one of two cars that professional golfer Michelle Wie and Kia Motors donated to RMHC-HI. The other car, a Kia Soul, helped the charity raise needed funds when it was used as a prize in a drawing at last November's RMHC-HI Gala.



Mahalo!

Kona 4-H Federation steps forward for RMHC-HI

The generous folks at the Kona 4-H Federation presented RMHC-HI with a donation of \$626 on May 25, from a fundraiser they held.



Accepting the check on behalf of RMHC-HI was Kathy Leopoldino from McDonald's Restaurants in Kailua-Kona (in yellow). Representatives from First Hawaiian Bank and Food Basket were also on hand for the presentation.



FOREVER OHANA



Back in 2009, May was struggling with her cancer treatments. Judd Hillside House Manager Kanoe Paauhau dropped by Kapiolani Hospital to help cheer her up.



This is how May looked on her recent visit back to the Ronald McDonald House.

May Toa, came all the way from her home in American Samoa in May for follow-up tests after earlier battling leukemia for two years in Hawaii. She was the subject of a March 2009 RMHC-HI newsletter story along with the friend she made while staying at the Ronald McDonald House, Ruthie Mersburgh. See the photo at the bottom of this page featuring the two of them together two-and-a-half years ago.

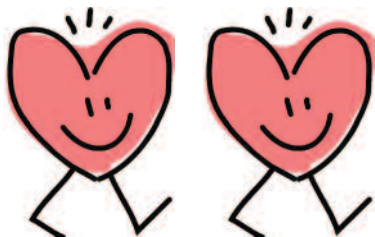
10-year-old May, her sister Seeseei, and mom Miliama surprised the staff with a visit to the House. May tested clean of cancer and it was a joyful reunion.

The same day as May's visit, Charlene Mersburgh sent us some current pictures of Ruthie from their home in Kailua-Kona. Ruthie, now nine-years-old, is a survivor of neuroblastoma, a very serious form of childhood cancer.

Since staying at the House, Ruthie, Charlene and the whole Mersburgh family have become informal ambassadors for RMHC-HI, spreading the word and appearing in two of our television PSAs.



Above, Ruthie during her treatments in 2006. Eventually, she received a form of stem cell therapy and has been able to keep her cancer at bay. Right, Ruthie today, a thriving, precocious young lady.



Ruthie and May became good friends after meeting at the Ronald McDonald House, inspiring each other to complete their treatments and stay happy.

The photo right shows them having fun together at a 2009 cancer camp.



"My mother is amazing!"

Twenty-three-year-old Ashley Benz of Kihei, Maui wasn't supposed to be able to conceive children because of her bout with cervical cancer some six years earlier, so when she found out she was pregnant with twins, it was a total surprise. "I guess they didn't think I had an adequate cervix," Ashley said, displaying her wry sense of humor. "Needless to say, they were wrong."

Her pregnancy was not typical either. She lost 20 pounds the first four months and became diabetic in the process. Then her babies came nine weeks early, weighing less than four pounds each. They had barely made it to Oahu in time for the delivery, and both infant boys had typical



David and Jase.

preemie issues requiring weeks of intensive treatment.

All through her pregnancy Ashley felt that she was communicating with her unborn babies. "We got along fine, and they made it as easy as it could be for me. They filled me with so much joy and energy that nothing could faze me."

When she arrived at the hospital on Maui, she had begun having contractions and within an hour, she was sent by air ambulance to Honolulu.

"So two hours after being admitted to the hospital on Maui, I was admitted at Kaiser Moanalua on Oahu. Within 15 hours of my first contraction David was out. Jase came out screaming a few minutes later."

The boys needed to feel their mommy's touch, hear her voice and feel her presence, as they struggled to gain strength. That was made possible because when she was discharged, Ashley stayed nearby at the Oahu Avenue Ronald McDonald House with her own mom, Kathleen, along to help. When the first twin, David, was released, they relocated to the Judd Hillside Ronald McDonald House, and Grandma would look after him at the House, while Ashley spent long hours attending to David's brother, Jase,



Ashley (left) and Kathleen snuggle with both twins after Jase was finally released from the hospital.

who needed a little longer to develop.

"My mother is amazing and I appreciate her so much. I just can't imagine what I would have done without her," Ashley said with admiration. "And if it weren't for the Ronald McDonald House, I would have been lost. Coming here is like walking into your own home. There's such a warm feeling."

Kathleen said that the new friends they have made, and the caring and sharing at the House has meant a lot. "This House is filled with angels," she explained. "And I know our lives are enriched because of the experience. This has probably been one of the best experiences of our lives."

2011 RMHC-HI Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon

More than 120 people gathered at The Willows Restaurant on Monday afternoon, May 23 to honor RMHC-HI volunteers. Everyone walked away with huge smiles on their faces.

Staff and board members hosted our volunteers and presented them with certificates of appreciation.

A wonderful lunch was served up, mellow music provided by Kaleo del Sol and the entire room was filled with warmth and aloha.

The group also enjoyed watching the new RMHC-HI video, which featured some of the volunteers in attendance.



Many of the volunteers attending the event stayed for a group photo.

Engaged in our Community

2011 Visitor Industry Charity Walk

RMHC-HI staff members Kasha Curek-Rhodes, Michelle Takahashi, Candace Asam-Lopez, Gene Davis, and Linda Ishikawa were joined by volunteer Pam Kimura to hand out water to the 6,500 walkers participating in this year's Oahu Visitor Industry Charity Walk on Saturday, May 21. RMHC-HI partnered with McDonald's Restaurants of Hawaii and Outrigger Enterprises to manage a checkpoint on Beachwalk.



IOLANI SCHOOL GIRL SCOUTS



Linda visited Girl Scout Troop 002, Iolani School second graders, on May 11 to accept a check for \$350. The girls decided to give RMHC-HI a portion of the proceeds from their cookie sale!

The check was signed by all the kids. Linda let the scouts know how their donation will help children and families, and also gave out RMHC-HI luggage tags to the excited girls.

Sam Choy's Breakfast, Lunch & Crab's 14th anniversary celebration—a benefit for RMHC-HI



Well over 300 people gathered on June 20 at Sam Choy's Breakfast, Lunch and Crab to Celebrate the restaurant's 14th anniversary and help RMHC-HI raise funds for its programs.

The lively group was treated to delicious food and outstanding entertainment by Sean Tiwanak and Roland Cazimero; Kamakakehau and friends; and Kona.

Guests called it a "perfect evening," and RMHC-HI raised nearly \$20,000 to help seriously ill children and their families.



Guests streamed into the event.



This prime rib speaks for itself.



Na Hoku award-winning Kona performed.



RMHC-HI's president Jerrri Chong and Richard Rand, board chair, presented BLC's Managing Partner James Lee with a token of gratitude.

Happy baby Jaedyn is a fighter too

Little Jaedyn Chikahiro breaks into a huge smile without much prompting. She has a sweet disposition that draws people to her. The baby girl, who celebrated her first birthday at the Ronald McDonald House on May 17 with family and RMHC-HI staff, is "from" Kauai although she hasn't had the chance to set foot there yet in her life.



Jaedyn Chikahiro at the Ronald McDonald House

Born with omphalocele, which means that her intestines were outside of her body but still in a sac, Jaedyn has been in Kapiolani hospital or nearby, since birth, while doctors performed the surgeries and therapies she has needed to survive.

She was finally released from the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit after eight months and moved into the Carter Unit. Three months later, she was able to be treated on an outpatient basis, and she and her mother Jenna were joined by her grandmother Holly and great grandmother Lyndel at the Ronald McDonald House. So for a time there were four generations all staying together at the House.

Jaedyn still has two tubes protruding from her little body. One is a port for doctors to quickly access her bloodstream to administer medication if necessary. The other is a feeding tube giving her gradual nourishment around the clock. She is starting to try solid food, but having never tasted it

before the textures and flavors need getting used to.

Mom Jenna is going on 20, looks younger, but in life experiences she is very much an adult. "I was about three months pregnant when we found out something was wrong. At first the doctors thought it was a cyst, but as the months went on it grew and they were able to identify the condition."

Jaedyn was full term and when it was time for her to be born, doctors at Kapiolani knew what to expect and were ready. Jenna recounted what happened when she arrived on Oahu, and gave birth: "When Jaedyn was born, the doctors covered her intestines with a plastic mesh to keep it moist. Later, they cut the sac open and her intestines actually fit back inside her body nicely, but they discovered that her large and small intestines were not connected. That complication meant they had to cut a hole in her side to allow her waste to



Jaedyn has had much family support. Here are great grandmother Lyndel, grandmother Holly and mom Jenna together with baby at the Ronald McDonald House.

drain. After a month they were able to reconnect the two intestines and she's been doing great since then."

The family still doesn't know when they will be able to head home. Jenna said that she hopes when they get Jaedyn off of her I.V. they can finally take her home. "The feeding tube thing will take longer." Jaedyn will still need physical therapy for a while because she spent so long in the NICU crib that she never had the chance to move around.

Jenna is thankful for all the support she has received from her and boyfriend Jase's families, and the new friends she has made while staying at the Ronald McDonald House.

"Family members have taken a lot of stress off me, and it's meant a lot. Staying here with other families has been comforting too. You're not alone; you get to know each other and share experiences. It's good. Staying at the Ronald McDonald House has been really helpful, and we will remember our time here always."



Proud parents! Jaedyn is feeling the love from dad Jase and mom Jenna.



Volunteer Spotlight



by Michael Ahakuelo, Volunteer Services Manager

We shine the volunteer spotlight on a bon voyage journey for four extraordinary women who entered the Ronald McDonald House Volunteer Program as roommates in 2009. While volunteering, the young ladies were also students at the University of Hawaii Manoa, seeking their bachelor degrees. On May 14, 2011 all four graduated at the Stan Sheriff Arena. Ronald McDonald House commends them for their hard work in academic achievement along with their support and commitment to the organization. Here is where the girls are off to in the next chapter of their lives:

(Left to right in photo, taken while the ladies were volunteering at last year's RMHC-HI Gala.)

Jessica Gray received her degree in Travel Industry Management. Jessica is staying in Honolulu and is

currently looking for a job in the hospitality business. She's hoping to work at a hotel in Waikiki. Jessica was recently engaged and is planning a summer wedding in 2012.

Judith Stalter received her degree in Women's Studies. She is traveling to Costa Rica for a few weeks in the month of July to celebrate graduation. She is currently working at 24 Hour Fitness Kapiolani and she will be starting her services with the Peace Corps in January of 2012 in Latin America.

Amanda Castaldo received her degree in Travel Industry Management. Amanda is working as a Manager in Training at the Four Seasons Hualalai on the Big Island. After a year of training at the Big Island Four Seasons Amanda will be a manager and will either manage at the Hualalai location or at one of the



Jessica, Judith, Amanda and Keili

other Four Seasons around the world.

Keili Geller received her degree in Communications. She is staying in Honolulu for the summer and then is backpacking through Europe for 2-3 months in the fall. She is unsure where she will move to after her trip to Europe. She's looking for jobs in the media industry and will most likely move to L.A., Atlanta or Sydney or she may even decide to stay in paradise and find a job in Hawaii.

Ronald McDonald House Charities of Hawaii would also like to wish all of our other "senior" volunteers graduating this year the very best.



Mahalo for your support!
www.RonaldHouseHawaii.org

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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