

Hope Kids offers a modern fairy tale for children with illnesses

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LAYTON — Once upon a time, in a land not so far away, there lived a princess named Cinderella. One day Cinderella — or Linsey Holley — went to visit a little girl in the hospital. The little girl named Jessenia died of leukemia four months later.

"She's the princess, not me," Cinderella said.

Cinderella was so touched by the girl's plight that as she was leaving Jessenia's bed she talked to Amy Oldham, an executive director of the Utah chapter of Hope Kids. The organization, which helps children with life-threatening illnesses, had called Princess Parties, the company Cinderella works for. So she scoured the land to find sponsors for the party.

Donations came from friends and family she found on Facebook. The Castle let Hope Kids and Princess Parties use their facilities and staff for free while the cake was also donated by Parsons Bakery.

Then and there Cinderella decided to throw a wonderful party for the families of all the other princesses and princes in the land who are under the wing of Hope Kids.

"It's in honor of her and all the little kids who Hope Kids help," Cinderella said.

It was a party like none other. Princes and princesses traveled from far and wide to the land of Layton, just to walk over the bridge into The Castle.

"The whole thing is just magical," said one of the volunteers.

The sound of strings filled the air. The atmosphere was complete with sword fights and magic wands, tuxedos and ball gowns, princess cakes and real doves. Diamonds and balloons littered tables all marked reserved. Little princesses got their makeup done, then sat in the king's throne to get their pictures taken with their favorite Disney princesses.

One princess of the night was Whitnee Stoddar. At 14 months she was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy. For most of her 4 years of life she's been in and out of hospitals. The Stoddars have been a Hope Kid family for almost a year now.

"It's been hard but we've just learned to grow with it," said her mother, Hanna Stoddar. "We take it day-by-day and minute-by-minute. But it has made us stronger."

Her 12 year-old sister Kortenee Stoddar, her grandmother Julie Ward, and her mother were there to party with her.

"We don't usually get out a lot so this is our time to get out," said Kortenee.

Even though she is in a wheelchair. Whitnee was enjoying it all. Her sister showed her the doves and then took her out of her wheelchair to dance by the French doors.

"This is kind of like our Disneyland," Whitnee's mother Hanna said while watching her daughters. "We can't take her, 'cause it's too far away and there's too many people."

This party has given not just the Stoddars, but all these families a much needed break from the monotony of dealing with a deadly disease.

"It is amazing," said Hanna. "It gives us, as a family, a chance to go and participate in events together that we wouldn't normally be able to do."

Halfway through feasting, Cinderella called all the children together to tell them the story of the Castlebrook Kingdom. The story was of a magical fairy family who built the castle and told the king and queen that they must be kind to children.

"Guess what, this castle that you are in is the magic castle," Cinderella said. "The castle of Castlebrook Kingdom! We're inside of it! On very special occasions like tonight, some guests have seen the fairy magic."

She pulled out an old, worn-looking piece of brown paper. "Chant some magical words while waving a wand high and low. If you are a true prince or princess, the magic will start to flow."

As they waved their wands and chanted the ancient words "bibbity-bopitty-boo" the fountain behind Cinderella magically came to life. Some of the children gasped.

Cinderella then announced that the king and queen would soon arrive.

Not wanting royalty to be unprepared when meeting their hosts, Cinderella then taught the princes how to properly bow, and the princesses how to properly curtsy.

Then trumpets sounded!

"Hear ye, hear ye!" the heralds announced. "Presenting the royal family of Castlebrook Kingdom! Queen Kendalyn Carol Amber Deanne Margerette Lizzy hope Treu the fourth, and King Lyle Williams Kent Marcus Keith Burch Parsons the 30th. And presenting Princess Grace!"

Down the spiral staircase came the royal family. As the crowd parted, the little princes and princesses bowed and curtsied. Once they reached their thrones the royal family nodded then took their seats.

"Your royal highnesses, we present to you, your most honored and royal guests," the heralds then called out the name of each family and their names with their royal titles. Trumpets rang out for each family as they stood in front of the king and queen and made the proper genuflection.

"Let the feasting continue!" the heralds cried once the last name had been called.

As royalty dined the court jester, aka professional comedian Marcus Wilson, dazzled the crowd with some amazing juggling tricks.

After the feast, the queen and princess returned to their chambers and the dancing began while the royal guests were given autograph books so they could get John Hancocks from their favorite princesses.

At the conclusion of the night, the princes and princesses were given party favors and their pictures.

"This was an amazing success story. This is very touching for me because, this is something I would have loved to have brought my daughter to," Oldham said through tears. "It touches my heart to know there are people here who are willing to go out of their way to bring joy to families."

"They're just so sweet and so special to see a little sparkle in everybody's eyes," Ariel, aka Ellie Tucker, said. "If you didn't know (these kids are sick), you wouldn't know the difference. These little kids love to play like anybody else."

May they all live happily ever after. The End.

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