



Building a Supportive Community One Family at a Time

“It shook my whole world for a full nine months. Nothing about me could accept it and get over it. Somehow, I didn’t ever know that children had cancer. I didn’t feel like my son would survive this.”

Melissa Gess admits her tears flow freely today as she recalls the devastation of her son’s cancer diagnosis. Charlie was one year old when they heard “neuroblastoma”—a cancer that forms in certain types of nerve tissue. Melissa remembers, “The only person I wanted to talk to was a cousin who had a little girl with spina bifida. It just eased my heart to talk to someone who could totally get having their child’s life on the line.”

Melissa describes how helpless she felt as the treatment took a toll on Charlie’s body. He was skinny and sickly. She wrestled with the uncertainty that, “Day-to-day, we don’t know what’s going to happen.”

It’s been over 11 years since Charlie was diagnosed. Today Melissa dwells in a place of gratitude much more than fear. But she has deep compassion for others who are fearful: she recognizes it almost instinctively. At a chance—

or perhaps providential—encounter, she saw much of herself in the eyes of another mom.

Mark and Jenny Nickell were excited about the HopeKids party and bowling event. Since their son Drew was diagnosed with neuroblastoma this past June, they hadn’t been out much, and bowling happened to be a favorite activity. Mark describes how a casual conversation with Josh Taylor, HopeKids president, led to meeting the Gess family. “I must have shaken Brandon’s hand 15 times,” Mark said. Brandon is Charlie’s dad.

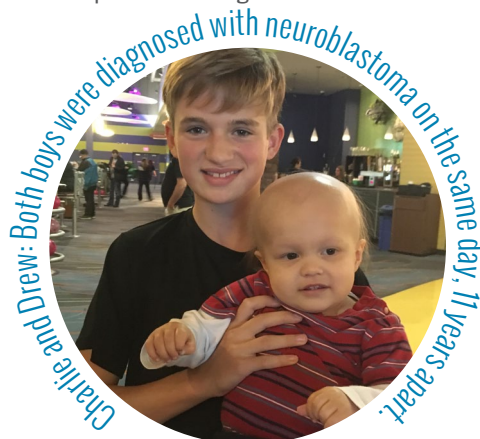
“I looked at Charlie’s parents and siblings, and I could tell that they had been through something,” Mark says. “And when we talked to the family—just the look on Melissa’s face, she could tell that [we] were in pain. But in her face we also saw hope, and sincerity, and [a belief] that we can [get through Drew’s cancer].”

Both Melissa and Jenny used the same word about their meeting: “Chills”. Jenny describes the tremendous hope of hearing how well Charlie has managed since his treatment. The story got more chilling when they discovered that Charlie and Drew were both just barely a year old when

they shared the same diagnosis date of June 2nd, 11 years apart. And then the moment came when someone suggested Charlie hold Drew for a photo. Jenny and Mark tried to warn everyone that it probably wouldn’t go well. Being poked and prodded through treatment has made Drew much more anxious. To Mark’s astonishment, “For some reason Drew liked being held by Charlie. It was so amazing.”

“Just to know that they’re there, and to know that we got connected through HopeKids is just really special,” Jenny says. “I hope that someday we are someone else’s inspiration.”

Mark adds, “I think that if this sort of thing can happen for one or two families, everything that [HopeKids] is doing—it’s worth it.



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- Allied Denver
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- Colorado College
- Colorado National Speedway
- Colorado Rapids

- Colorado Rockies
- Colorado Symphony
- Extreme Monster Truck Nationals
- FELD Entertainment
- Fort Westenaire
- Game Day Memories

- GameWorks
- Kroenke Sports & Entertainment
- Little Money Bizness - Colorado Springs
- Mills Entertainment
- TopGolf
- University of Denver Athletics



COLORADO HOPE DAY PROGRAM

Cameron, age 5, poses with his mom at family portrait day; Kolton, age 6, enjoys the circus; Zipporah, age 8, packs meals for Feed My Starving Children; Carter, age 7, cheers on the Colorado Avalanche with his family; Gavin, age 13, and his family dress the part for the *Trolls* movie screening; HopeKids families at the Monster Trucks Winter Nationals VIP experience.



WHAT IS YOUR CHRISTMAS WISH?

“My Christmas miracle wish is for a cure for childhood cancer that doesn’t require years of chemo, radiation, surgeries, and for the child to lose out on being a child. I wish kids didn’t have to fight this disease, and that they didn’t have to deal with the long term effects of the treatments.”

“A cure for cancer!!”

“My Christmas miracle was that my 13-year-old son was told he was in complete remission on November 3, 2015. He was diagnosed with grade III anaplastic astrocytoma brain tumors and went through 34 radiation treatments and 15 months of several different chemo infusions and his chances of survival were very minimal at best. I wish that miracle for every parent of a child that is dealing with cancer. I am one of the lucky parents that will get more time with their child. Chances of the tumor coming back into my son are higher than normal, but at least we have him this Christmas, cancer-free.”

“My Christmas Miracle Wish is for no child to suffer.”

“My greatest Christmas Miracle Wish is that all families can seek comfort in finding hope, and knowing you are never alone through some of the most darkest of times that you may be facing. To have remembrance of faith in all things possible, and to cherish and create memories with all the time we may have together. To soak in all the joy of the journey, and to turn your pain into great purpose.”

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