

## Give families hope this holiday season



Katrina Breemersch was diagnosed with a brain tumour shortly after her third birthday. Her condition was discovered after her parents, Kristen and Brian, started noticing regressions in her behaviour. She wasn't able to feed or dress herself, was losing mobility and experienced constant body shaking. Katrina's parents knew her condition was becoming worse when they handed her a sippy cup and she was unable to grasp it. Concerned by the drastic change in their daughter, they decided to seek immediate medical attention.

An MRI appointment in Brandon revealed an inoperable brain tumour in Katrina's hypothalamus. This part of the brain controls essential body functions such as temperature, hunger, thirst, fatigue and sleep. It's the central hub telling your body how to function. Katrina would need to undergo tests and chemotherapy in Winnipeg to treat the serious condition.

At the beginning of her treatment, Katrina's family stayed in the hospital whenever possible to support her. Her mother remained by her side, often sleeping in the chair beside her. "As her mom, I knew she needed to be with me and I needed to be with her", says Kristen. Every week, Katrina's family drove three hours, back and forth from outside of Brandon, Manitoba to Winnipeg's Health Sciences Centre. If there was a storm, they'd have to stay in a hotel, which got very expensive.



*"It's a truly comforting place that gives you light and hope that tomorrow will be a better day."*

After undergoing chemo, Katrina's condition stabilized slightly. But two years ago, her family felt shattered when Katrina was diagnosed with a second inoperable brain tumour, leaving her blind in her left eye and with low vision in her right. This was when Kristen and Brian got in touch with Ronald McDonald House Charities® Manitoba (RMHC Manitoba) after hearing about the organization from doctors and Katrina's nurse. After the first day of being welcomed to the Ronald McDonald House®, they felt supported by staff and volunteers, and comforted at how much it felt like home. The Breemersch family called the House their 'home away from home' for three months as Katrina received radiation therapy for her second tumour.

During this time, the Breemersch family also made visits to the Ronald McDonald Family Room®, within the walls of HSC Children's Hospital, while they waited for Katrina to finish tests or treatments. Here, they were once again welcomed and supported. The family could relax, have a cup of coffee or freshly-baked snack and spend quality time together in a haven within the hospital.

One of the biggest reliefs Ronald McDonald House provided Katrina's family was eliminating the expense of a hotel. Paying over \$100 per night for a room, parking fees and restaurant meals was causing their savings to



dwindle away. In addition to costing only \$10 per night, the House helped Katrina and her family know they could feel better and strong enough to face a new day. As her mother says, "It certainly helps on a journey that has devastated us. It's a truly comforting place that gives you light and hope that tomorrow will be a better day."

The holiday season is Katrina and her family's favourite time of year. During this treasured time, they remember making memories and healing together at RMHC Manitoba. Kristen explains, "It's a very festive time for us. Our rec room is where we place the real tree we buy every year. We let the kids pick it out and decorate it themselves. All the special decorations we've made at Ronald McDonald House are on that tree."

It's been 11 years since Katrina received her first diagnosis. Recently, Katrina has experienced more vision loss and continues to stay at Ronald McDonald House with her family as tests or treatments are needed, but that hasn't dampened her spirits. Throughout it all, Katrina's family considers her their strength — "She's always been our bubbly, happy-go-lucky girl, never complaining and always hopeful for the future."

The Breemersch family knows they'll be on this journey with Katrina for her whole life, a reality for many RMHC Manitoba families in Winnipeg and across Manitoba. RMHC Manitoba needs supporters like you to help us keep families close. When families are faced with childhood illness or injury, there is only one place they need to be, and that's *together*.

Last year, RMHC Manitoba provided care, accommodations and meaningful programming to over 650 families. We ask you to keep the Breemersch family and all RMHC Manitoba families in your heart this holiday season. Please donate what you can during this season of giving so all our families stay hopeful and close throughout their child's journey of healing.



*Your generous donations help give hope to my family and others needing to stay at Ronald McDonald House. Thank you in advance for your kindness. May you have a special holiday season spent with those closest to you, making memories to last a lifetime.*

*— Kristen Breemersch*

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