

A Glimpse Inside the Journey for a Lifetime of Kelsey, Emily, Ethan, Emma & Cheyanne

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“When I was asked to write a reflection about my trip the first thing I thought was how exactly I would manage to fit it all in a reasonable amount of space...”

“When you return from this journey and your family asks you to tell them about what you did each day you can’t really put it into short words because each day so much was accomplished for ourselves and for others. It is now that I understand the meaning of speechless because that’s what I was when I was first asked what I did...”



“This trip changed me so much because I have now seen what it is like to live with a terminal illness. I have seen the effects it has on the families and I have seen how they have to live. I have also come to understand the power of love and determination when families sell everything they own just to pay for the treatment that their son or daughter needs to stay alive just a little longer...”



“I have seen the power of friendship and I have learned that a smile and gestures are all you need to communicate with a child who doesn’t speak the same language as you...”

“When you’re playing drums or playing with My Little Ponies there is no such thing as a language barrier. I have also learned that it is possible to build a playground with someone who doesn’t speak the same language as you - all you need to do is pass them the screws and nails with a smile...”

“On the day of our very first wish I don’t think I’ve ever been so nervous...”

“After being welcomed in the morning at the Canadian Embassy in Warsaw we then drove 200km to the children's cancer hospital in Kielce...”

“We took various gifts such as toys, scooters, puzzles, books and arts and crafts to the children and then Emilka, one of the hospital's many little patients, immediately began demonstrating her creative side. Her final product was not a typical picture expected from a child but a representation of herself - a long haired brunette wearing a floor length red dress and sporting the most beautiful angel wings...”



“Even at a young age she understands the challenges faced by those with cancer and ultimately has accepted her possible fate of one day becoming that angel of perfection she so effortlessly drew. An introduction to the life of a seven year old battling leukemia was just the beginning of our mission to grant the first wish...”



“Our first wish was granted to Michal, a thirteen year old boy from Debowa, Sowie. Michal is currently fighting an aggressive form of leukemia and is very weak. He was diagnosed this past December and since this time Michal and his mom have spent only two weeks at their home. This commitment has taken its toll not only on Michal but on his mom who has left two children at home with her husband and family friends. Michael and his mom have also been continuously moved from hospital to hospital where medical care and environmental conditions range from very poor to fairly good. The hospital in Kielce has been an absolute relief for both Michal and his mom - it is a great environment with wonderful staff...”



“Michal's dream was to own a professional camera and that is exactly the wish he was granted. He first opened games, books and an mp3 player amongst other trinkets. His camera was the magical finale...”

“I cannot describe the feelings and heightened emotions as he ripped open the wrapping and tore open the box. I have never experienced such a level of satisfaction as well as confirmation that I was exactly where I needed to be. I was able to share in the gratefulness with Michael's mom as well as the excitement felt by the happiest thirteen year old in the world. His smile will forever warm my heart as he photographed the other ten children who greeted us, the nurses, as well as any individual who strolled the halls of the cancer ward...”

“After that first moment when you see the smile of a kid who doesn't have a lot open their first present you know this is what you've worked so hard to do and you never want it to end...”

“It is a moment that will be secured within my heart for an eternity and an experience that has changed my life in every way. Today I witnessed a miracle - a child receiving his greatest wish who may not see many tomorrow's. Even if this is true, I witnessed one of the greatest moments life has to offer and have been absolutely privileged to have met such a strong and inspirational individual who has braved the most horrific storm. A true hero indeed, who unfortunately may not have the time to make his everlasting mark on the world...”

“Since meeting Michal the day before, we had been filled with an indescribable joy and zest for life. However, the emotional challenges we would soon face were quickly realized. We would no longer be within the comfort of a hospital environment but experiencing the first-hand reality of home and family life of our Polish youth...”



“Our second wish of the journey was granted to Piotr, a very energetic and thoughtful five-year-old from Promnik, Poland. Piotr is fighting against acute lymphoblastic leukemia as well as a form of dwarfism. Such a diagnoses not only implies that Piotr and his small stature will remain around it's current size for the remainder of his life but also limits his chances of survival if he is required to undergo more chemotherapy treatment...”

“His family and friends have already considered Piotr to be a miracle but they have realized that such a miracle can only last so long. Piotr's family is left wondering, day-to-day, if the illness will return and whether their miracle child will be able to overcome such challenges one more time...”

“Piotr and his mom not only face the challenges brought forth by his illness but the challenge of being a single parent raising a severely ill son. Piotr's father could not handle the stress of having an ill-stricken son and resorted to alcohol as his comfort. The father became an alcoholic and provides just one hundred dollars a month as child support. Such little support forced Piotr and his mom to move into a relative's home. She is unable to work due to Piotr's condition and therefore has to rely on the financial assistance provided by the five other adults living within the home...”

“Living in such hardships would make any five-year-old ask for a playground set and a trampoline as their ultimate wish. Piotr also received books, toy racing cars with a racing track and many other cars-themed items...”



“Following the opening of the presents, we spent the morning and most of the afternoon building the playground and putting together the trampoline. Piotr impatiently watched the lengthy process and provided assistance from time-to-time. Instead of spending his day playing with his two cousins, he tended to our every need and provided us with endless snacks...”



“While he received chemotherapy treatment at the hospital, Piotr was known as the giver. He managed to always find something to share with every child who also resided on the cancer ward. Most times this gesture included sharing his supper that was brought from home...”

“It was so overwhelming to witness a child look past his illnesses and place all of his energy in making others comfortable and to ensure no one did without. It was difficult to fathom how a child living with so little could effortlessly disperse his riches to absolute strangers...”

“Piotr is a prime example of the purity that remains in this world. He will remain a role model to all of those who have witnessed his warming smile as he presents his gifts of love and generosity...”

“An energetic busy-body no longer described Rafal, the eighteen-year-old from Wlonice fighting against bone cancer. Rafal had wished for a bicycle and bicycle accessories since a young age. Unfortunately much has changed since he first dreamt of the bike but it was a bike he still wanted... Rafal had his feet amputated as well as some of his leg. He will soon be returning to the hospital to have his entire leg taken off. In addition to such tragedy, Rafal has refused chemotherapy and has decided to carry out the remainder of his life within his living room which also functions as a bedroom for seven...”



“Rafal has been raised in a single-parent home due to the passing of his father. His mom is raising five children and caring for a grandmother in a two-room home. They are living in severely poor conditions and without a bathroom. The mom has applied for financial assistance from the government to build a bathroom but has yet to hear feedback...”



“Since the fathers' passing, the family has been living off the land. The mother tends to a vegetable garden as well as the limited number of farm animals that reside on the property. Rafal provided food for the family when he was well and able through his favorite past time, fishing. He would wake up everyday at five in the morning and catch enough to feed his family. With all of these limitations and refusals in the back of his mind, Rafal has grown severely depressed and appoints himself as the reason for his family's downfall...”

“He has lost the will to live and believes death will answer his family’s prayers. It is certainly heart-wrenching to see and feel the emotions and thoughts of an eighteen-year-old who wants to end his life and his family’s suffering. No person should feel such guilt and be so willing to give up their right to live. There should be so many experiences and opportunities available for Rafal at such a young age. It is nothing less than devastating to know that he may not even experience his wish of a bike ride...”

“My wish for Rafal is the wish for hope. I hope our visit has regained his faith in the world and has provided him with the motivation and will to live. I will probably never know the impact we had on Rafal's life but I hope the number of smiles that graced his face that day will remain a fond memory throughout his journey of life. His selflessness will never be forgotten and his compassion towards his family will be forever treasured...”

And that was just the first 2 days ...

And so the trip continued, visiting 10 other beautiful children - each with their own story to tell - delivering Furniture, a Bed, 2 Cell Phones, a Drum Set, a “Soccer Room”, 4 Televisions, Toys, Lego, Racing Car Sets, My Little Pony, 2 Bikes, a Barbie Doll, a Doll’s Stroller and a Princess Dress.



“We paid a solemn visit to the Majdanek Concentration and Extermination Camp. So much of the camp is intact and you could almost see what atrocities had been committed...”

“It was just 68 years ago that hundreds of thousands of innocent people stood in the same place...”

“It was impossible to describe our feelings when we learned that on November 3, 1943, 18,000 men, women and children were shot here in one day...”



“If ever we needed reminding about the reality of these children’s lives it came to us when we went to visit Damian to bring him his wish - a cell phone. The night before our visit Damian and his family were chatting to the Foundation on Facebook - so happy we were coming and they couldn’t wait to see us... When we arrived we were greeted by a neighbour who told us that Damian had suddenly, and so unexpectedly, passed away just 2 hours before...”



“Damian was 17 years old and was suffering from bone cancer. He was always full of hope, always thinking he would win the fight. It was very a hard experience for everybody...”

“My Journeys for a Lifetime trip has inspired me to live my life to the fullest. Even though most of the kids we visited looked happy and healthy when we were there, in reality we knew that they had maybe spent half their lives in hospital undergoing harsh treatments and they and their families are living with the constant worry of a relapse. I can only imagine the toll this is taking on them and their ability to live each and every day with this fear and be strong through the bad times is truly remarkable. I believe my life and way of living has changed and I know I have also gained important life skills...”



“This trip has changed me for the better and I have learned so much from the children and families we visited. I owe many thanks to what they have taught me - it was truly a journey for a lifetime...”



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