

Ronald McDonald House® Helps Family Through Their Darkest Days

By Jill Sterling

On a summer night in 2008, parents Lisa and Mark Fusello received a call that would change their family's lives forever. Their young daughter, Jamie, who was entering her senior year in high school, was a passenger in a motor vehicle that had caught fire. Jamie had suffered severe burns and had been airlifted to a burn unit in a Grand Rapids Michigan hospital.

Lisa and Mark rushed from their home in Lake Forest to be with their daughter. When they arrived, they were told that Jamie had second and third degree burns

to both of her legs, arms, hands, feet, face and neck. Jamie stayed in the hospital in Michigan for three days until she was stable enough to be transferred to Loyola University Medical Center. Jamie began receiving treatment in the Burn Intensive Care Unit.

Lisa recalls those first days as the darkest days of their lives. "We had such a helpless feeling watching her suffer. We went into this ordeal not knowing what the future held," Lisa said.

Thankfully, the Ronald McDonald House near Loyola University Medical Center was there for the family and became their home base for the

next four weeks. Given the precarious nature of Jamie's condition, Mark and Lisa appreciated the closeness of the House to the hospital.

Lisa's life fell into a routine that allowed her a brief respite from the frantic and frightening environment of the burn unit. Every day she would return to the House for a nap, a shower and to wash and dry her clothes. She appreciated the volunteers that brought food and coffee and the staff that took care of her needs. "The House took the worry out of everything so I could stay strong and close to my child," Lisa said.



Over the next 12 days, Jamie underwent three skin graft surgeries. A skin graft is the replacement of healthy skin onto an area where the skin has been damaged. Healthy skin is harvested from a donor site and transplanted to the recipient site. While undergoing these surgeries and fighting to get well, Jamie didn't want to see anyone except her parents. "I was so scared I needed to have my family by my side," Jamie said.

Lisa and Mark took comfort in the kindness they felt at the House. "The staff was great and always asked how Jamie was doing. We wouldn't have been able to manage without the House," Lisa said. "Staying at the House wasn't due to any

financial constraints. We needed it and it was there for us," Mark said.

Once Jamie was well enough to be released from Loyola, she spent every day at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago where she received physical therapy. Although her progress was slow, she grew strong enough to return to high school in November 2008. Jamie graduated on time from Lake Forest High School in 2009 and is now a freshman at the University of Wisconsin. She hopes to pursue a degree in advertising.

Since her ordeal began almost two years ago, Jamie has received 10 surgeries for her injuries and more are planned in the future. Despite the long road ahead, the family reflects on

how far Jamie has come. "Thanks to the fabulous care she has received, we consider the progress she has made to truly be a miracle," Lisa said.

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