

# Keeping Families Close: **GRAHAM'S STORY**



Five-year-old Graham Barnes has accomplished a lot in his short life. He's run a 5K, won a trophy in baseball, and is really good at math. But his biggest accomplishment took place four years ago when he rang the bell at Riley Hospital for Children at IU Health – the bell letting the entire floor know he had finished his last round of chemotherapy treatment and would be going home.

"August 1 is his remission date. We eat a lot of cake that day," says Graham's mom, Amanda Byers.

"We felt the tumor on Christmas Day. My best friend, who also happens to be an ICU nurse at Riley was over. I was changing his diaper and we both noticed something was wrong," says Amanda. She immediately called the pediatrician and a CAT scan was scheduled for Graham. "I will always remember seeing this large mass

on the screen and the expression on the technician's face. They wouldn't let us leave the building."

Later that evening Amanda received a call from the pediatrician instructing her to go to Riley right away. Amanda and Graham made the three-hour commute from Evansville, IN under the assumption that they would be at the hospital for a couple of days. Instead, doctors explained that her 15-month-old son had been diagnosed with Stage 3 hepatoblastoma – a stem-cell based cancer of the liver – and would need to start chemotherapy right away.

Over the next eight months, Amanda and Graham had several long stays at Riley – their longest being a 42-day stretch. Each time, the Ronald McDonald House of Indiana was there for Amanda at a time she needed it most.

"There was no way I was going to leave Graham and to know that I could still be right there but be able to take a hot shower and get a good night's sleep – you just can't imagine how good that feels, until you've been sleeping on a cot for days on end," says Amanda.

Now, Graham finds great joy in serving other families staying at the House. From donating toiletry items in celebration of his birthday to throwing an ice cream party in honor of his remission date, Graham and Amanda are happy to give back. "When you're in the thick of it – the deep, nasty, sleep-deprived, exhausted thick of it – [to find] a welcoming face, 'here's a bed', 'here's a shower', 'do you want a hug?' There are no words to describe it...We can't do enough to give back."

