



sharing

"the Hope" with you!

Nathaniel's Hope is dedicated to sharing hope with kids with special needs (VIP kids) and their families.

This includes...

- Providing programs and resources that encourage VIP kids and their families
- Offering practical assistance of FREE respite care for VIP kids
- Educating and equipping the community on how to be a Buddy to VIP kids and their families by supplying tools, training, resources, and opportunities to connect with and reach out to VIP kids and their families

Kids with special needs are our VIPs!

Buddies are friends of VIPs!

Our programs include: Buddy Break, Make 'm Smile, Caroling for Kids, VIP Birthday Club, and Hall of Hope



CONTACT US FOR MORE INFO!

Nathaniel's Hope

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A gift from the Nathaniel's Hope
Caroling for Kids program

Stories of hope

"...filled with
with
the
Real Hope
of Christmas..."



"Sharing the Hope" with Kids with
Special Needs and Their Families

Blessings

Dear Nathaniel's Hope,

One Christmas season, I heard on Z88.3 about Caroling for Kids. My daughter and I did not have anyone to spend Christmas day with, except each other, so we decided to volunteer to sing Christmas carols at the hospital with Nathaniel's Hope.

I was sent my assignment... Grandma's House. Not knowing much about it, we headed down for our afternoon shift to sing for the kids. God bless these children!

Grandma's House is a facility for kids with disabilities and they come in all shapes, sizes, and abilities. Some of the children we visited use wheelchairs, and some of them were on bed rest.

It was such a pleasure to sing songs and pray with them on Christmas day when they could not be with their families. God's love was so alive that day.

I look forward to volunteering and spending time with Nathaniel's Hope every Christmas!

—Julie Hunter

Dearest friends,

During my first Christmas working at Florida Children's Hospital (Orlando, FL) as the Childlife Specialist, I was fortunate enough to facilitate the Nathaniel's Hope carolers. They arrived with an abundance of cheer, smiling faces, and carols. As we visited every pediatric unit, including the Neonatal Intensive Care, we filled the hallways with cheer, joy, and HOPE for the patients, families, and working staff. This special visit made it easier for the patients, families, and staff, including me, to be away from home for Christmas. I can't wait to work alongside Nathaniel's Hope again this Christmas!

Thank you for your dedication and support to our hospital patients, families, and staff. Being in the hospital, patient or not, during the holidays is tough. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your organization's determination to turn frowns upside down.

Thank you for this opportunity and all that your organization does for our community.

—Sterling Goodwin, CCLS

Our prayer is that in spite of your circumstances,
your heart would be filled with the real "Hope"
that Christmas brings to us this day.

Hi you guys,

My name is Nathaniel Timothy Kuck, it means treasured gift from God. My home is at 777 Heavenly Lane and this is my story. I was born on June 6, 1997 with all kinds of aches and pains, commonly called birth anomalies by you adults. The first 89 days of my life I spent in the hospital. A nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. Once I had left the hospital I hoped that I would never have to go back except to visit others. I wanted to be at home with my family. You know what Dorothy says, "There is no place like home".

You know what happened to me; I got really sick on Christmas Eve. We got up the next morning to open a few presents, but mom and dad had to take me to the hospital again! I spent my very first Christmas in the hospital. What a bummer! I wanted to be at home with my family, drinking eggnog. Actually, the truth is I only weighed 5 lbs. and all of my food came through a G-tube in my stomach. I never had any eggnog, but I always wanted to try it. I found the hospital to be a kind of a lonely place on Christmas. No one really wants to be in the hospital on Christmas day if you know what I mean.

After that first Christmas, my mom said she wanted to help bring hope and the joy of Christmas to others that might have to spend Christmas in the hospital. So every Christmas day since 1998 my family and a whole bunch of others have been in hospitals singing Christmas carols and bringing encouragement to those that may need a little love. After all isn't that what Christmas is all about anyway? Giving the gift of love?

So, that is my story. I hope that this Christmas you will be blessed and be a blessing. Hope to see you in heaven; there is a mansion, not a manager! Plenty of room for all of you guys. The more the merrier!

Take my word for it. Jesus is the Reason for the Season.

Merry Christmas!
Nathaniel ... and my family
Tim, Marie, Brianna & Ashley Kuck



How Nathaniel's Hope Started

Nathaniel Timothy Kuck "A Treasured Gift of God" was prematurely born on June 6, 1997 with multiple birth anomalies. He was born with an undiagnosed syndrome. Surgeries, therapies, sickness, and hospital visits all become a normal part of his life.

On November 13, 2001, at the early age of 4½ years old, Nathaniel relocated to 777 Heavenly Lane. After proving himself to be "a miracle boy," beating the odds time and again by overcoming many physical obstacles and challenges, his purpose has been fulfilled, and he has now returned back home to his Creator. At his new home, he is no longer physically restricted, bound by surgeries, feeding tubes or braces. He is now free to run on the streets of gold.

Nathaniel taught us that each life holds value and purpose. What may appear to be imperfect in the eyes of humans, is really perfect in the sight of God. He taught us the meaning of unconditional love and perseverance. He was a great showcase of God's faithfulness. His captivating smile and the simple joy he brought to all who entered his world were God's special gifts and these are greatly missed.

His memory will always be cherished, and his little handprints and the lessons he taught us will be imprinted on our hearts forever. They now motivate us to bring encouragement and share "the Hope" with others through Nathaniel's Hope!



Hope

On Christmas Day 2008, my family and I were connected with a family through Caroling for Kids. A VIP mom had contacted Nathaniel's Hope and told them their story of their VIP child. We loaded up some brightly wrapped presents, already designated for this family, called the mom and ventured out to meet a family on Christmas Day -- after all, isn't Christmas about giving and caring?

We could have just sung Jingle Bells, and dropped off the presents; however, one of our children had to use the bathroom, and so the family invited our family of six into their home. We were so blessed! We proceeded to have a time of sharing, playing with the VIP kid, a little singing (since we are not so talented in this area), and then even knelt down for a time of prayer together. We felt that we had a genuine time of sharing Christmas with this family -- whom we had never met before -- and they welcomed us in! We had the privilege of sharing their journey with their VIP child, and hopefully brought some encouragement to them on a Christmas Day which for them was mixed with both joy and challenge.

We are grateful for the opportunity that Caroling for Kids afforded our entire family to embrace another family, and experience the joy of giving of ourselves to a VIP family.

*The Biddle Family
Bart, Pam, Josiah, Noah, Cristina & Julia*

Sharing

Stories from Volunteers

A Chance to Sing

It's no small thing,
To think to sing,
A song of hope,
A smile to bring.

To sing of Love,
To sing with love,
To sing with all that's
In my heart.

For if I think,
Oh, this poor child,
I deny the Grace
Born Christmas Day.

So I take a moment
At each doorway,
To thank my God,
To light the way.

And I then pray,
Lord, by your grace,
Give this child,
Many Christmas days.

*Both poems written by J.C.R.
(a Nathaniel's Hope Caroling for Kids caroler)*

Nearsighted

Far Horizons,
Blurred in my vision,
Are sharp in the Eyes of God.
While Struggling on daily,
I have sometimes become
angry
When the end is not in my sight.

Why I do cry,
Is the end not in sight,
Why must I carry on so.
For I'm tired and I'm lonely,
And I feel I am climbing
A Mountain that is far too high.

God, He replies,
Do not worry, do not cry,
The problem lies with your eyes.
For you look but do not see,
That the answer that you seek
Lies by turning your sight within.

For it is here that I dwell,
And all will be well,
If you allow My Spirit
To guide you today.

Jacob's Story

In April of 2004 our lives were dramatically changed when our 3 year old son was tragically injured in a riding lawnmower accident.

On Good Friday, while other families were gathering to celebrate the Easter season, our son was in surgery. In that moment, we found ourselves in an unfamiliar place facing unthinkable circumstances.

As a result, our son spent 18 days in the care of the AMAZING Arnold Palmer Children's Hospital staff in Orlando, Florida. During that time we learned that even in the darkest days a glimmer of light will still shine through.

Each day during our hospital stay, I would give thanks for the small milestones: no signs of infection, less medicine, less pain, less tears, a good night sleep... a smile. Sometimes just a hello on the elevator from a stranger or a nod of reassurance from the nurse on duty after a long night would often give me just the lift I needed to get through another day.

It was those small milestones that began to matter. They offered us hope and made our days not so dark. We knew we were not walking this journey alone.

When life reveals such difficult circumstances and the days seem more than you can bare, find hope in the small gifts. During this holiday season, we hope you are able to savor those special deliveries from God to lift you up and restore your soul.

From our family to yours, may bright days be on the horizon.

God Bless.
The Bainter Family

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul." Psalm 23:1



David's Story

Our son, David Jr, was born with a diaphragmatic hernia on May 1, 1998. He was given a 5% chance of living and spent the first five months in NICU. The rest of his first year of life was spent in and out of Arnold Palmer Hospital for numerous surgeries.

His first Christmas was spent in a drug-induced coma. We didn't know if he would live to see the New Year. He was so fragile and his diaphragm patch had torn for the fourth time.

One night as I sat in the hospital, I remember thinking that Christmas was supposed to be happy, but I didn't feel any happiness. The birth of a baby was supposed to be a joyous occasion, but not always. Sometimes, there is pain and grief too. As I watched David's chest retract trying to breathe, I thought about how I took that for granted. I took a deep breath. It was so easy, and yet what a gift to be able to do it. "I'm so tired of watching him suffer!" I blurted out to God.

**I "heard" a still, small voice say,
"I know how you feel. I
watched my Son suffer, too."**

Then something happened to change my perspective on Christmas forever. I "heard" a still, small voice say, "I know how you feel. I watched my Son suffer, too." Then it hit me. Jesus' suffering didn't all happen at Easter; it started on Christmas -- when the God who created the world confined himself to a human body. How strange for Him to have to breathe, to feel hunger pains, to feel discomfort, to depend on less than perfect parents to meet his every need. This world was a prison of limitations to His divine qualities.



Karden's Story

There are moments in time which change the way we think about things forever. Christmas 2006 was one of those moments for my family. Two days before Christmas, my son Karden, 3, began to complain about not feeling well. He was coughing and feeling restless. After taking him to the doctor in Deltona, Florida he was rushed to the hospital, and then transported by ambulance to Florida Hospital, Orlando. They determined that he had pneumonia but were still running tests. It was decided that we would be spending Christmas in the hospital. Normally we would be surrounded by family on Christmas, but that Christmas my father-in-law and nephew were also both in the hospital in Tampa, Florida. We felt so alone.

On Christmas Day a group from Caroling for Kids visited our room. My son Karden, and daughter, 6-year-old Jalyn were so excited to hear the singing of Christmas carols echoing down the hall. My daughter's middle name is Noel, so when they sang "The First Noel", she felt that they were singing just for her! Karden was blessed with receiving a car -- his favorite toy! Unexpected joy appeared in our room, on what had previously been a rather sad day.

After Christmas we realized that maybe God had our family at the hospital for a broader purpose. We started getting to know other families on the ward, and we started to reach out, just as Caroling for Kids had done for us. Although Christmas 2006 was difficult, we gained a new perspective about Christmas as we realized what other families might be going through at the hospital. It brought our family together with a new purpose.

Since Christmas 2006 my children have been anticipating participating in Caroling for Kids and sharing with other kids, as they shared with us. My daughter was six when this happened, and was deeply impacted by this event in our lives.

We are grateful for Nathaniel's Hope and are glad to be a part of reaching out to families on Christmas Day.

The Lewis Family

James, Latisha, Jalyn and Karden



Yannis' Story

Dearest Friends at Nathaniel's Hope,
I wanted to thank you for the wonderful acts of kindness that we experienced from your organization of friends.

Three days before Christmas, my son was admitted into the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit at Florida Hospital-South in Orlando. He was losing blood so fast he that he was given a blood transfusion. Knowing it was the holiday season, I understood that there would be less staff on duty, so I stayed with him to ensure his needs were taken of. The halls were empty except for the footsteps of family members looking for coffee. I needed to walk around, and when I did, I saw cookies, little gifts, and an entire area decorated by Nathaniel's Hope. Another family had just left the area, so I sat by myself watched cartoons and ate a cookie.

From this decorated area, I knew someone had thought about the parents and loved ones and found a way to give a simple moment of lightness to the situation. After my cookie, I returned to my son's room and looked at him, intensely feeling the Hope that had been sent to me. My son had to have surgery, and it was an unusual case. The surgeon who saved his life was a Jewish man, who had chosen Christmas Day as his time to be on call. I know an angel sent him to us.

On Christmas, my son improved with two more transfusions, and I started noticing gifts and little note cards from Nathaniel's Hope around us. I kept thinking about the strong energy and presence I felt with us, and I wanted to thank you for silently being there.

My son was just one patient in a hall of many, very sick children. However, I saw that your friends and love had touched every room. In the morning, I heard laughter from other rooms as they were able to play. This was a wonderful sound, much better than the silence previously heard.

Now every time I think of our stay at the hospital on Christmas, I think of you and say a prayer, remembering a place and time that was made lighter by our Nathaniel's Hope friends.

Thank you for being there in that room for a moment of simple kindness. God Bless Nathaniel's Hope!

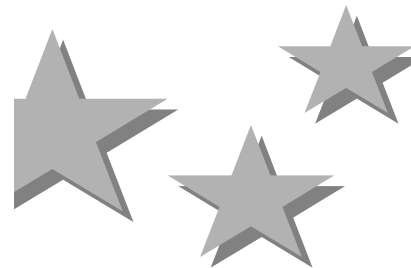
Dia Nordstrom

How different to see Christmas through the Father's eyes. He knew where Jesus was headed. He knew His suffering had just begun. Yet He allowed it for us; a bunch of people that don't even acknowledge, most of the time, the incredible sacrifice made for us. I wanted to stop my son's suffering at all cost. Yet, God's love for you and me sent His Son to purposely suffer on our behalf. That first Christmas must have been a little bittersweet for the Father—like the day David Jr. was born for us.

This Christmas may not be what you expected, but please know that you have a Heavenly Father who understands. We never would have made it through David's first Christmas without God's help. He wants to help you too. We've discovered that, in a world full of pain and suffering, Jesus truly is our only hope. We hope you accept the indescribable gift given to you that first Christmas morn.

In His Love,
Dave & Lisa Doll

**"I cried out to the Lord in my suffering and He heard me. He set me free from all my fears."
Psalm 34:6**



Faith

Daniel's Story

A Christmas to Remember

In November of 1985 I had an emergency C-section and delivered a little boy who was struggling for life. He was born with multiple congenital birth defects. Dr. Margaret Streeper informed me, "Your son, Baby Brown, was born with just a brain stem and has fluid on his head and other anomalies. With these major complications we don't expect him to live through the night." My mind could not hold onto any of the medical terms they were using. What's an anomaly? I felt like they were speaking a foreign language. I was caught up in the middle of this whirlpool of terminology with no road map to follow. In short I was overwhelmed and uncertain of what tomorrow would bring.

Daniel has been hospitalized on numerous occasions and at times again struggled for life. When I was young I used to believe that I would be in control of life. However after the arrival of a medically fragile child, I learned that I had the ability to control my reaction to life's challenges. I have friends who give me strength to walk each step of life's journey.

During one of Daniel's hospitalizations, I began thinking that maybe I had done something wrong and that maybe God was not pleased with me. I questioned "why me?" After all, I was a believer, attended church regularly, tithed, gave offering, and ministered in the nursing home and jail ministries. I would say, "Lord, I just don't understand." I also felt ill-equipped to parent such a special child.

As a single parent it felt as if I was bearing the weight of the world on my inadequate human shoulders and about to stumble at any moment.

I remembered a scripture in second Corinthians that talked about being cast down, and it went on to say that I would not be destroyed by what tomorrow brings. This passage gave me hope. It became light in the darkness.



and marched into the intensive care unit, gifts in hand. Mac was as bright-eyed and happy as ever! We opened gifts, sang carols, and read a child's version of the Christmas story as a family. We also visited with Mac's "roommates" whose families were unable to be there.

It was a blessed Christmas day. Difficult and teary at times, but so joyous to be together as a family to honor another special Baby born so very many years ago, who came to save Mac, us, and the world.

It has now been over a decade since our most memorable Christmas. Our son defied all the doctors' predictions and all the odds humans have placed on him. Although he still has a trach and g-tube, uses sign language and technology to communicate, and has a bit of an unsteady gait, Mac is all boy. He is fully included with his peers at school, has earned a position on the safety patrol, and makes A's and B's with a lot of hard work. He was awarded his 1st degree black belt along with his sister, after a three-hour testing session with a host of other Tae Kwon Do students.

But most important, Mac is a happy, positive young man who made his own decision to come to Christ when he was six years old. Several years later, he asked to be baptized, and so he was -- trach and all! How blessed we have been to have him as a part of our family, and we feel the world is all the better for his being here too. For as we are told in Psalm 139:14, "I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well." Mac, like all of us, is most "fearfully and wonderfully made."

Linda and Tom Starnes



Endurance

Mac's Story

Mac's First Christmas

Our son, Mac, was born on October 3, 1995. The day before his birth, our obstetrician determined that Mac was in grave distress and might not make it through the birth process. But make it he did, gave one small cry, and was whisked away by a group of doctors and nurses.

Two weeks later, he was transferred to Children's National Medical Center in Washington, D.C. and had his first set of over 35 surgeries or procedures under anesthetic. The physicians determined that Mac had "Congenital Bilateral Perisylvian Syndrome," but it seemed that he was strong enough to withstand a double surgery to place both a trach and feeding tube so he might fight his uphill battle a bit more easily.

We were just thrilled that he was such a fighter, while at the same time showed a sweet disposition about all he was being put through. He also had a bright twinkle in his eyes and kicked his one free foot whenever he heard our voices. The rest of his little body was held down with a tangle of tubes, wires, and casts.

Over the course of the next two months, Mac had many critical events and difficulty maintaining his breathing and heart rate. Finally, just three days before Christmas, a group of physicians met with my husband to tell him they felt Mac was losing his battle to live. It was predicted that Mac would probably not live to see his first birthday, that he would never learn to walk or talk, that he would not know us or have any quality of life. We were given the choice to place a "do not resuscitate" order on Mac or to place him on a ventilator to keep him alive.

Through many tearful prayers, we made the only decision we could. Only God could make a decision about life for our little one -- not us. So we asked that he be placed on a ventilator, and we made plans to spend Christmas at the hospital. Our daughter Emily, Mac's big sister, was only two-and-a-half at this time. But she was so excited to help pick out gifts for her baby brother



After prayer and reflection on how God allowed His son to come into the world and subsequently gave His life, I realized that all of humankind experiences challenges. No matter how weighty the circumstances were, the Lord was there giving me strength for the journey. I had something to be grateful for even though it was Christmas Eve, and we were in the hospital.

It was alright for my heart to be sad because of our circumstances, but that night as I went to sleep I found something to be thankful for. I was appreciative for the emergency surge on and the kind medical staff. Much to my surprise on Christmas Day we awoke to a few Christmas gifts at Daniel's bedside and one small rectangular comforter placed strategically on top of my sheet. It was just the right size to keep me warm, as you know most hospital rooms are very cold. Their kindness warmed our hearts that day. For a moment in time, the hospital did not seem like such a lonely place.

My prayer is that you and your family will be encouraged throughout this holiday season. Even though you may be experiencing feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and loneliness, please know that you are going to be alright. Know that there are many families thinking about you and praying for you right now as you are reading this booklet. May your hearts be comforted as you receive Christ's gifts of Love, Joy and Hope this Christmas.

Have you a Merry Christmas and a hope filled New Year,

Dianne Brown

It was alright for my heart to be sad because of our circumstances, but that night as I went to sleep I found something to be thankful for.

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

Believe

Julia R.'s Story

Our daughter, Julia, was a perfectly normal nine year old girl who began to experience flu like symptoms and was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Our life was turned upside down in a matter of minutes as the doctors explained that Julia had a life threatening disease, and we realized the steps we would be walking.

During Julia's illness, we spent many times in the hospital during the holidays. We felt so abandoned at times. It was during our second Christmas at the hospital that we decided to brighten the lives of the other children and their families who would be with us on Christmas morning. We purchased gifts, made homemade cookies, and asked others to come be a part of a Christmas party on Christmas morning for the children in the hospital who could not go home.

On Christmas morning, we had all the children and their families come down the hall to the children's lobby where we hosted a Christmas Party. We sang Christmas songs, opened gifts, and shared cookies and punch together. It was a very special time.

We will never know the impact our presence had on the lives that were touched during that time. The children and families we have come in contact with remain as treasured memories in our lives and hearts. It was a practical way of showing others how much we cared and wanted to be a part of their life and share the love of Jesus with them knowing that God gives the strength to endure.

We trust that you will experience a hope and peace this Christmas season as Nathaniel's Hope reaches out to you and shares the love of Jesus in a practical way.

*The Rice Family
Gary, Tammy, Nicole & Brooke*

**"Children are a gift from the Lord;
they are a reward from Him."
Psalm 127:3**



Julia S.'s Story

On October 23, 1993, our daughter Julia was born prematurely at Arnold Palmer Hospital. She spent seven months in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, including her first Christmas. We lived in Daytona Beach and didn't have any local family. Julia's doctors and nurses quickly became our family for that first Christmas. A sick baby, limited visitation times and cafeteria turkey made for a less than joyous Christmas. We brought in decorations like snowflakes, garland and a small Christmas tree for the hospital nursery and a Christmas bear blanket for Julia's isolette, but it was still a lonely Christmas. It would have added much Christmas cheer to have had Caroling for Kids as part of our day. Our family is happy to be part of this project today. Since we know what it's like to be in the hospital for Christmas day, we are thankful for a program that shares a little Christmas joy with those who are there now.

Anne Marie & Stan Sargent

