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A Healing Space for Nicole

by Sarah and Matthew Dumoff, and Jessica Lash

Sitting in Nicole's "healing space" - where a soft tranquility engulfed every corner of her new dream bedroom - it was evident that this eighteen year old girl now has a peaceful haven to unwind in. Nicole has not had peace in her life for a very long time. First diagnosed with Leukemia at the mere age of twelve, Nicole has been through a six year whirlwind of hospitalization, treatments, and fighting to beat her illness and move on with her life to begin college. "My room is alive, I feel surrounded by peace" said Nicole, after spending a few days in her new space. "Words cannot express how grateful I and my family are to Healing Spaces and all of the incredible volunteers who helped bring my dream come true."

Nicole's room was created and made possible by Healing Spaces, Inc. a non-profit organization that helps warm the hearts of seriously ill children by creating a unique healing environment in their home while minimizing the stress of hospitalization and giving them their own space to recover.

Healing Spaces began in April 2004, when Matt Dumoff came across an article about a similar project based out of Michigan. Using interior design to help children with life threatening illnesses struck a chord with both Matt and his sister Sarah. "Searching for a mitzvah project (for my January 2005 Bar Mitzvah) that offered the chance to be actively involved in making a real difference in the life of another child was exactly what I was looking for" said Matt, "so we decided to create Healing Spaces, approach a children's hospital and find some partners".

Along with their parents, Sarah and Matt met with Dr. Michael Harris, Director of Tomorrow's Children's Institute (TCI) at Hackensack University Medical Center, and explained that Healing Spaces could help so many children affected with life threatening diseases. Dr. Harris wasted no time in working with his team of social workers to find patients that would benefit from such an exceptional project. "It is my hope that all pediatric cancer and blood disorder patients are able to go home to an environment that promotes healing and gives them the space they need to recover and to feel like a kid again."

"When I first heard about Matt's Mitzvah project in my synagogue (Shomrei Torah of Wayne, N.J.) a seed was planted in my heart. I knew that getting involved and supporting Healing Spaces would not only become my Mitzvah project this past spring, but something really special that I would stay connected with. Healing Spaces is a wonderful organization. Many of these children spend endless hours in their rooms after their chemo and radiation treatments. Coming home to their "dream room" makes the experience all the more, less traumatic" said Jessica Lash.

In April 2006, TCI contacted Healing Spaces to recommend Nicole Monar from Clifton, N.J., as a candidate for a Healing Spaces dream room. The process was underway. "We met with

the Monar family, spent time to get to know Nicole, learn about her interests and dreams; her favorite colors, music, books she enjoys reading, determine any special needs and take room measurements” said Sarah. “We organized a team of volunteers, prepared a project plan and shopping list. We found some great partners in local communities of New Jersey as well as around the country. There are a lot of really caring people who want to contribute in any way they can...this is tikkun olam” said Matt.

“Nicole was very excited that someone wanted to do such a nice thing for her and even participated in picking out some of the furniture and accessories for her room. In late August, she and her family moved out of their house for the weekend and a group of 8 of us went in and created Nicole’s room. Wow! What a change. We painted, refurnished and redecorated her room. It was a lot of fun and when Nicole returned home, she was really happy. Nicole, herself, wants to help Healing Spaces create more healing environments for New Jersey’s children. What an awesome experience this has been for all of us” said Jessica.

We appreciate the generosity of our volunteers and contributors, whose support enable these little miracles. We also want to thank some very special business partners: Seelas (Wayne), Caldwell College (Caldwell), Saplings (West Caldwell), House, Inc. (San Francisco), American Heritage Furniture (Georgia) and Dubnoff’s (Clifton).

Healing Spaces hopes to bring joy and create many more dream rooms, but we can’t achieve that goal without sponsors, volunteers and donations. Healing Spaces is the perfect Mitzvah or Community Service Project for an individual or group to participate in. All it takes is a little time and some fundraising efforts to make a big difference in some child’s life. Please contact Healing Spaces to make a donation or to arrange to participate in an upcoming project. Healing Spaces, Inc., PO Box 2603, Wayne, NJ 07470, or contact us at healingspacesinc@aol.com.