

Keesling

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Both doctors ordered x-rays, and the same radiologist happened to see both images. He asked the second doctor if they were images of the same kid or if it was some kind of joke. The two scans, taken just six days apart, looked nothing alike. "His tumor had grown that fast," Doug said.

Chase went back to the second physician, who now knew what to look for. "That was late afternoon," said Doug. "By evening we were in Kansas City at Children's Mercy. By midnight we were doing tests. First thing in the morning he was diagnosed."

Living in KC

For the next 11 months, Chase and his father more or less lived in Kansas City while Chase was treated at Children's Mercy. The Keeslings lucked into a loft made available because some teacher friends had decided to teach one more year before retiring.

"The loft was ready but they weren't ready to move from Manhattan," Doug said. "Within a few days of Chase's diagnosis, they were there and gave us the keys to their loft. That ended up working out extremely well.

"We tried to come home a few times. Every time we came home we ended up going back to Kansas City by ambulance or by plane. It just wasn't a fun experience. We quickly learned that, unless we knew everything was going to be all right, we'd just stay in the loft in between treatments."

At the time, Chase was a second grader in Tina Ludwig's class at Park Elementary. His step-mother, TJ, and brother, Colby, stayed behind in Lyons to maintain a more regular schedule. Doug, a farmer by trade, leaned on some coworkers to take the time off.

"It wasn't easy," he said. "I farm and I have some really good employees. They chipped in above and beyond the call of duty so I could go and be with my family."

The good news would eventually come. Chase was able to stop treatments after 11 months. He continued making trips to Mercy every few months for

checkups but remains in remission.

A chance drawing

Early in his treatment, while in isolation, Chase was asked to draw the hospital. "Keep in mind, this is an eight year old who's in isolation and can't see the outside of the hospital," Doug said. "The only time he'd been into the hospital was by ambulance at that point in time. He didn't see the outside."

With crayons, Chase constructed a multi-story tower, color coded by department. The top five floors were offices. There were also floors for tummy aches, cancer, broken bones, surgery, and even a gift shop near the base floor and helicopter pad on top.

"I drew a lot of offices because, when you walk around, there are lots of random wooden doors that are numbered or say 'office' or 'lab.' I saw a few of them around in different wings and thought there must be a lot of these. So I added on a few extra and it turned into a lot more.

"From one of the rooms I was put in, I could see the crane. I drew the crane as best I could because I really hadn't seen all of it. There's a little worker on top of it."

Dr. Tom Curran is now the executive director and chief scientific officer at Children's Research Institute at Children's Mercy, and he's been the driving force behind turning the Children's Research Institute into a leading center for pediatric research.

Back in 2011, Chase's drawing caught Curran's eye. "Chase's drawing was first brought to my attention by the Chair of Pediatrics, Dr. Mike Artman," said Curran. "At the time we were in the early design phase of the new research building and I was struck by the similarity to the architect's renderings.

"I played a trick on them as I said that I was very disappointed, as when we spend so much on a building design, we expect to get something new. Initially the architect was a bit crestfallen and he started to say, 'Every building is based on every previous building...'"

"So I said, 'No, that's not



Keesling converses with Ant-Man star and Kansas-native Paul Rudd prior to throwing out the first pitch. Also pictured is Modern Family star Eric Stonestreet, a graduate of Kansas City Piper High School. (courtesy photo)

what I mean. We have a design from several years ago that is identical.' Then I showed Chase's drawing. They all cracked up."

All jokes aside, Curran said there were several features in the drawing that resonated. Chase's drawing had included a dock, and executives spent 30 minutes discussing the location of a dock at the new facility. Chase's crane loomed large and the hospital currently has the largest crane in Kansas City.

Chase's departments were not far off, either. "The many areas of the hospital that we are integrating with research (like tummy ache), we had to change the helicopter route due to the height of the building, the location of the cafeteria - all are consistent," Curran said.

"The other feature is that half of the building is office space. We had decided that, given the need for 'big data analysis' in scientific research, our research building would be 50/50 dry lab to wet lab space - half would be offices and half would be bench space.

"Our principle in the Children's Research Institute is that we are being led by our patients," said Curran. "We will work on the conditions that don't have current answers in the clinic or those

that need better answers. The fact that Chase's drawing looks like the design for the building embodies this concept."

Chase's drawing is now featured on thank you cards sent out to donors who have raised more than \$200 million to help build the new facility. The Keeslings had the opportunity to meet with Curran on the recent baseball trip to Kansas City.

The Big Slick

So the latest trip to Kansas City proved to be a fun one. A former employee of the Child Life division of Children's Mercy had remembered the Keeslings and, through her new position, emailed Doug to see if Chase might be interested in throwing out a first pitch.

In 2010, Kansas City-natives and celebrities Rob Riggle, Paul Rudd, and Jason Sudekis joined forces to host a poker tournament to raise money for Children's Mercy. The Big Slick Celebrity Weekend was born. That first year, the group raised \$120,000. Fellow actors Eric Stonestreet and David Koechner later joined the group, and the event has grown each year since, raising more than \$6 million for the hospital through sponsorships, auctions, and online fundraising.

The 2018 group included big names like Today Show Weatherman Al Roker, former Royal great Bret Saberhagen, musician Chris Daughtry, CNN's Jake Tapper, former SportsCenter anchor Rich Eisen, and many other writers and actors, many associated with Saturday Night Live and Scrubs.

Prior to the first pitch, Chase hung out in the Royals media room with the other four cancer survivors. Each was given a Royals jersey. Then it was time to take the field.

"I'd been on a baseball field before but I'd never been (on the field at Kauffman Stadium)," he said. "I was nervous the whole time and beforehand."

One of the biggest celebrities in the Big Slick bunch is Rudd, a 1987 graduate of Shawnee Mission West High School in Olathe Park. Rudd, the star of Ant-Man, has more than 100 acting credits to his name. Chase was supposed to throw his first pitch to Rudd.

"I actually met him before at a previous Big Slick and he recognized me when I went down there. He said, 'You're the kid who kicked my butt at air hockey.' Another kid wanted to throw to Paul so I said go ahead."

Chase instead threw to Koechner, another prolific actor with 174 credits on imdb.com. Koechner is perhaps best known for his role as sportscaster Champ Kind in the Anchorman movies. Chase missed out on meeting Angela Kinsey, better known as Angela on The Office. Royals players signed Chase's first-pitch ball, which he got to keep.

The Big Slick festivities were but another remarkable episode in Chase's journey. Chase, 15, will be a sophomore at Lyons High School later this year, and his family thanks everyone for the support over the past seven years.

"There was lots of help through all of this," Doug said. "There were several people who threw dinners for him, some who made T-shirts that said 'Chase's Army.' There's a whole community of support when anyone goes through this. Our community is very good about supporting each other. That's one of the reasons why we love to live in a small town."

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