



the Patrick family

On a Tuesday morning in September, Joe and Marie Patrick took off from a New York airport as their two-month-old daughter cried uncontrollably. When they arrived at 8:46 a.m. in Atlanta for what they thought would be a short layover, people were huddled around horrific images on TV screens and Marie watched as her corporate headquarters in the World Trade Center fell to the ground. On a day that changed the U.S. forever, a journey to change a baby girl's life began.

Erin Patrick was born June 28, 2001. At birth, her mom noticed her eyes were set far apart. Two months later, Erin was diagnosed with sagittal craniosynostosis. The soft spot on her head closed prematurely. Marie will never forget Erin's piercing cries. "She had so much pressure on her brain, it hurt."

The Patricks bought plane tickets to Columbia, Missouri with hopes that doctors there could correct Erin's condition through surgery. On that fateful Tuesday, however, flights were canceled nationwide and the Patricks were stranded at the Atlanta airport. But they didn't give up. Joe and Marie rented a car and drove 12 hours, 999 miles to Columbia. They arrived at the Ronald McDonald House® exhausted and scared with just the clothes on their backs. "Thank God for the House!" Marie said. "We literally had nothing." There, the Patricks found a warm bed, hot meals and others facing similar situations.



On September 14th, Erin underwent surgery to remove the portion of her skull that had fused together. After the operation, the Patricks stayed at the Ronald McDonald House while their daughter recovered. "There were times when I just needed to let it out," Marie said. "I could go in my room and cry or I could go in the living room with other people who knew what we were going through."

Ten days after the surgery, Erin's cries softened and the Patricks began to see smiles. "She was like a brand new baby. She was perfect!" said Marie. The operation was a success. Erin wore a helmet to help mold her head back into shape and her family returned five times over the next year to get it fitted. Thanks to the Ronald McDonald House, the Patricks were able to bring their two sons along. "I'll never forget their generosity," says Marie about the Ronald McDonald House. "We arrived as strangers. It's one of the most moving experiences I've ever had."

Your contribution to the *Building a House to Call Home* campaign will help ensure that thousands of families just like the Patricks will find comfort and care - a place to call home - in their great time of need.



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