



July 6, 2012

Dear Bernie and Baptist Home staff:

Our journey with you and your staff began in October of 2011 when we knew we had to find a facility that would be able to care for Rachel who had sustained paralysis in 3 months from the onset of her weakness which was diagnosed as an inoperable brain cancer on October 7 following 5 hospitalizations/rehabs. She needed skilled personnel to handle her day-to-day needs, physical therapy, etc. so our search began. The Baptist Home was suggested by a contact in central-PA as being a top location and it was the first (and best) place we toured of many. Holly graciously took us on a tour and, although the building is older, we were impressed with the cleanliness, smiling personnel and, more importantly, we did not see lots of people sitting in the halls in wheelchairs with their heads hanging down as we'd seen in other nursing homes. Aside from places we toured, we have been in several other nursing homes because of having certified therapy dogs. We looked at each other that evening and were convinced that this would be the best place for Rachel. We both commented on how much effort had been made throughout the building to make it feel less institutional and more like a home with the country kitchens, sitting areas, outdoor (and indoor) garden area on the 1st floor, activity room, etc. The rehab areas were also impressive.

As you know, there were problems with Rachel's chemotherapy medication and the insurance company's initial unwillingness to work with your pharmacy, but Margette worked hard to help us get through these problems and you assured us that Rachel would be welcomed there once this issue was worked out. When she arrived in later-October, we were amazed to the point of tears at how much effort had been made to help this young woman feel comfortable. Her room with the sofa, nearness to the nursing station and furniture for storage were as comforting as we could find at that time.

You and your personnel are exceptional examples of loving and caring individuals and, although we won't remember most last names and are sure that some will be missed in this, we want to make a point of letting them know our gratitude for their care:

Holly Schmidt: her initial tour, kindness and help to work through the difficulties to get Rachel admitted when we had no knowledge of any other personnel were invaluable.

Kathy Lang: one of the best Social Workers we've ever met. Kathy was kind and clearly cared for Rachel as she made time for her, made suggestions on how to keep her active, listened to problems and was in the process of trying to arrange for Access to take by wheelchair van to outside activities. She was also a blessing to us as she kept us informed on progress and listened to our frustrations with Rachel's illness.

Margette Berringer: she has the patience of a saint as she struggled through the medication issues with Rachel and continued to reassure us on several matters during Rachel's stay there.

Kathy Walsh: she treated Rachel like a daughter and handled the arrangements and paperwork for transport to doctors, took the time to listen over these months and became a friend to all of us.

Christie: showed continual concern for Rachel's nursing needs and spoke with us on numerous occasions when there were concerns or questions.

Lisa (nurse on 2nd floor): especially during Rachel's final days, Lisa was so loving and kind to all of us during this awful time.

Senida and Amber: aides who were so kind and patient in handling all of Rachel's needs which continued to increase over the months as her condition worsened. There were other aides on different shifts on the 2nd floor who should be recognized here and we do not know all the names, but are grateful for their skills also.

Rommie Schmidt-Zoeller: helped with the medical assistance paperwork and listened as we tried to understand the social security issues.

The entire PT, OT and ST staff: continually tried their best to give Rachel whatever therapy she could handle, ordered new braces, wheelchair and comfort devices, etc. to make every effort to keep her as mobile and comfortable as possible.

You personally, Bernie, showed your compassion for Rachel's age and condition, allowing her the assurance of knowing that you cared for her as well.

In all honesty, there were SO many great people (and we cannot recall all of the names) who sincerely cared for, visited Rachel, cheerfully greeted us in the hallways and tried to make the unwelcome scenario of a 35-year old living in a nursing home as comfortable as is possible.

Aside from wanting to thank you and your entire staff at The Baptist Home, we would like to say that we are quite aware of the emotional struggles that all of you assumed with accepting Rachel at her age and condition as well as dealing with the knowledge that her life would be shortened. None of us realized (including the doctors) that the cancer would take her so quickly and violently so this was even harder on everyone. Although this was a very trying time and huge responsibility for all of you, we want to point out what a gift this was for us as the family. It was so hard for us to accept that we were unable to care for Rachel, but we did know that her condition was one that required very skilled personnel and this was clear even in the early days of her illness. At The Baptist Home, we were at least secure in knowing that our daughter was in capable and kind hands 24 hours of every day and that your professional and knowledgeable staff would give the best care she could have. It was devastating for us to learn Rachel's destiny and we would like to ask that, if it happens that another family approaches you in the future with a similar situation to ours, you consider such a case like Rachel's and not turn them away because of the emotional cost incurred by those in close contact. We would NOT have known what to do without all of you at the Baptist Home, and are sure that you were all gifts from God to us and Rachel.

When Rachel returned from Shadyside Hospital for the final time and Hospice was called in, all of your staff rallied to assist with her care, comforting us, providing courtesy carts for the long hours we would be at her bedside and being patient with the number of visitors there to help all of us through this process. Those last days were some of the most heartbreaking and amazing we have ever had as we watched friends, family and The Baptist Home staff members from every floor come and quietly talk to Rachel, pray, sing, tell stories, encourage all of us, etc. Rachel was a very spiritual person and never once lost her faith in spite of her worsening condition. If there's such a thing as a beautiful death, Rachel had it because we could clearly feel the presence of God and saw Him in the eyes of those who helped her and us get through this sad time.

Bernie, there's no way for us to fully express our gratitude to you and all of your staff, but please pass along our most sincere appreciation to all who cared for and loved our little Rachel. She will be sadly missed by many people but she left behind a legacy of love and faith that is amazing for such a young and humble person. She wanted to "be an inspiration" to people and she has accomplished this (see www.touchingthecanvas.com). We believe she is dwelling in the heavenly mansion that she so strongly believed in.

God bless you,

Paul and Carol Koch