

## An Unbreakable Bond

As the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, Dina and Dovi Meles' connection to the Village transcends the ancestry they share with Give Kids The World Founder and Holocaust survivor Henri Landwirth. Late last year, the Meles family had the opportunity to experience the legacy Henri created first-hand during their son, Rafi's, wish trip.

At just six months old, Rafi began experiencing frequent infections and high fevers which took weeks to resolve. His parents' worst fears were confirmed when genetic testing revealed an extremely rare, life-threatening disorder called X-linked lymphoproliferative syndrome (XLP) with a median survival rate of six to 10 years – and the only known treatment a potentially dangerous bone marrow transplant. As the disorder only affects boys, the Meles' other two sons, Joey and Akiva, were tested for the disease. Thankfully, neither tested positive; but two-year-old Akiva was found to be an exact donor match! Shortly after, Akiva donated his bone marrow to save his brother's life.

Following six weeks in the hospital, one year in near total isolation and extensive therapy, Rafi and his family embarked on what his parents describe as “the thrill of a lifetime from beginning to end” at Give Kids The World Village.

“When Rafi was in hospital, the idea of having his wish granted was a real motivator for him to push through. It gave us something positive to talk about that was going to happen in the future and put him in the right frame of mind,” says Dina. “We knew the Village would be special, but we didn't realize just how special until we visited. Every child is made to feel special, not just the child who has the illness. Rafi is not the most adventurous of our sons, but on this trip he pushed himself to experience new things. Given how much he has been through in his young life, he is now unafraid to try anything.”

“It was joyful to watch not just Rafi but all three of our boys feel like normal, happy, carefree children again, without the stresses that illness places on family life,” says Dovi. “Rafi's story could have ended differently, but a combination of faith, medical expertise and parental perseverance have given him a second chance at life. Our week together at the Village helped all of us heal; it was a week of family bonding, respite and closure on that difficult chapter in our lives...it provided medicine that doctors and hospitals cannot.”

After missing his entire year of kindergarten due to isolation and recovery, Rafi is now back in school and thriving socially, emotionally and educationally. Congratulations, Rafi and family!

