



Kelly Finger-McNeela and author Doreen Rickert-Rademacher with Kelly's service dog.

Kelly's Place: The CanDId House gets local support

by Fan staff

Kelly McNeela became the inspiration for a book entitled *I Can & I Did, the Kelly Finger-McNeela Story*, by Doreen Rickert Rademacher.

The author and Kelly have toured the western half of Michigan to share McNeela's story and to shine a light on the shortage of suitable housing for people stricken with a physical disability requiring assistance with daily activities, a situation encountered daily by Kelly McNeela.

Having battled multiple sclerosis since the age of 15, Kelly has endeavored to live a normal life. Despite being confined to a wheelchair, she was homecoming queen at her high school, and graduated from Michigan State University. She competed nationally on a wheelchair tennis team based in East Lansing, and helped plan the 1996 Paralympics. Kelly went on to pursue a career in therapeutic recreation at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago and with the Sanctuary at St. Mary's.

McNeela married, adopted a daughter, and commissioned a special house with the special equipment she would need to live. But in the fall of 2010, she was committed to a nursing home. At just 39 years old, she was without her daughter, divorced, and without her service dog.

The lack of appropriate housing for someone like Kelly became apparent. After a difficult search, McNeela moved to Green Acres in Lowell, Michigan. She is comfortable, but is 40 years younger than the average resident there.

Inspired by Kelly's struggle, as well as the stories of others in similar situations, Rademacher wrote the book with the hope of calling attention to the need for specialized housing.

Two students from Rockford High School produced a new documentary film featuring Kelly's Place — the CanDId House.

While there are several assisted living facilities in West Michigan, most are geared toward retirement living for the elderly and senior care. Kelly's Place is intended to serve people who are younger, active, often employed and want to be independent. They simply need help to do things that most people take for granted, and home construction that allows for wheelchairs, service animals, and other forms of support.

Right after the book was published, a young woman visited Rademacher and McNeela. Rademacher said, "She was stricken with rheumatoid arthritis. The 30-year old part time teacher's assistant used a power wheelchair, had a service dog and relied mostly on her mother for daily assistance to get up and go to her job. We met her mother, too. She was using a cane due to an ailing back and it became clear that a new living arrangement was paramount to quality of life for both of them and very soon."

The Hope Network Foundation is collaborating with others in the effort to establish Kelly's Place.

The Bible Club at Dr. Martin Luther Church, 1860 E. Hile Road, is raising money to support the goal of building an assisted living facility for younger adults with physical disabilities.

On May 18, author Doreen Rickert Rademacher will be visiting the church for a special presentation of funds to support Kelly's Place, followed by a luncheon. The public is invited to attend. •

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