

# The B House

By Jane Drake, [janedrake55@gmail.com](mailto:janedrake55@gmail.com)

February 25, 2019

They call it the “B House” of Canyon Creek in Richardson, Texas, deriving its name from the first names of the happy and content guys who thrive within its walls. If you abide by the national grading system, the house really deserves to be called the “A House” for it is top of the line and lacks nothing for the three young men who call it home. At a time when many typical men in their twenties need to be chased out of the house, these three willingly stepped up their game and walked into a new space without letting the significant social challenges of high-functioning autism keep them from life’s bounty.

## B is for Vision Board

Two years ago, Jill Burt created a Vision Board describing how she and husband

Ross Sivertson would purchase a home and offer it to their own son, Britton, and two others. She shared this vision with Ann and the late Erwin Ruggles, and Dianna and Bob Reynolds. The Vision Board became reality when all three families moved their sons – **Barrett** Reynolds, 24, **Britton** Burt, 25, and **Brian** Ruggles, 28 – into what would become the **B House**.

Known as a “companion care home,” it differs from a state group home in that it doesn’t require a 24/7 caregiver who must stay awake at night to provide round-the-clock care. The home fosters independence. Also, state group homes are typically for residents who need more care and monitoring than the three Bs. The Bs thrive in their home on a wooded cul-de-sac which their parents refer to as a *teaching house*. Each “B” has his own

bedroom and the caregiver has a private master suite.



*A closet in the B House reflects the importance of each roommate having his own space within the shared space.*

“We came up with goals to help push them towards independence,” said Jill Burt.

“They do their own laundry, cook one meal a week, and go with the caregiver to shop.” As Ann Ruggles pointed out, “we wanted to take them from where they were and move them forward.” And for reasons only parents may know, it’s difficult to move them forward when they are under your roof. These three families did not want “failure to launch” on their parent resumes.

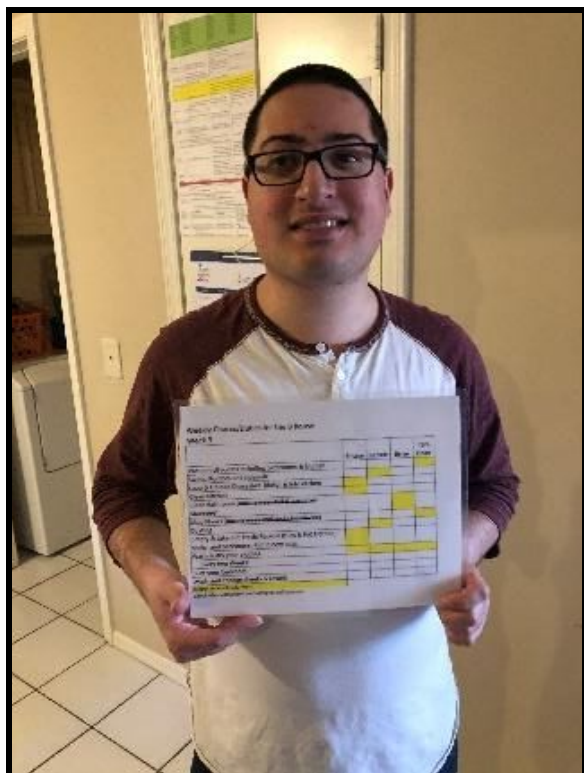
## **B is for Biggest Issue**

As those who have a child with disabilities could guess, the overwhelming issue is

finding and keeping caregivers. Caregivers are generally responsible for the three Bs during the week and weekends, with hours of time off in between car trips to the store or other venues. Time off amounts to one weekend a month when all three roommates return to their family homes to visit. Because all three of the Bs have jobs at different locations and at different hours, scheduling is a challenge. The caregiver must be willing to sacrifice a bit of freedom – a sacrifice not lost on the parents who strive to be fair about what they expect.

Although none of the three guys drive, this small detail hasn’t stunted their social growth. Using a combination of the DART (Dallas Area Rapid Transit) rail, bus, and paratransit, supplemented by a caregiver who drives, they travel to their jobs or hop over to a local arcade to play games or bowl. Once a week, they attend a Bible study and HEROES (HELPING EVERYONE REACH OUTSTANDING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS)

Academy at King of Glory Lutheran Church. Not much time for extended-play video games or lollygagging. These B guys are on the go.



*Britton Burt showing the schedule for a busy week.*

Ann adds: “It’s about finding the right mix,” referring to not only the roommates but the parents as well.

## **B is for Backup**

What happens when a caregiver’s car loses its brakes or has another kind of emergency? Living next door, Jill and Ross can be at the house in a matter of minutes if needed. However, to be fair and to allow all parents to have a life apart from the three Bs, all three sets of parents rotate responsibility for this assignment. Currently without a caregiver, the B House continues to be in full swing. Jill looks at the monthly schedules and figures out everyone’s availability.

Time slots are divided into mornings, afternoons, evenings, and weekends. Parents take turns working their “shift.”

## **B is for the Big Deal**

“Undoubtedly, the big deal is that we’re all on the same page,” states Jill. Adds Ross, “There are a lot of tactical pieces. Parents have to work together.” He compliments the moms, calling them “warrior” moms who do the heavy lifting. Ross refers to himself as a warrior parent and it’s clear he has skin in this game. As the kindly “landlord,” (he and Jill own the home and lease it to the other two families), Ross has a bit more objectivity because he addresses the physical environment, although he also deals with the emotional and psychological demands that parents of children with disabilities confront regularly.

## **B is for Biggest Issue**

As those who have a child with special needs could guess, the overwhelming issue is finding and keeping caregivers. They are generally responsible for the three Bs during the week and weekends, with hours of time off in between car trips to the store or other venues. Time off amounts to one weekend a month when all three roommates return to their family homes to visit. Because all three of the Bs have jobs at different locations and at different hours, scheduling is a challenge. The caregiver must be willing to sacrifice a bit of freedom – a sacrifice not lost on the parents who strive to be fair about what they expect.



## The Three Bs

The three Bs appear to be proud and confident in their surroundings. Sitting together on a couch, they reflect just the right combination of brothers and friends. They are painfully polite and do not interrupt each other although the temptation is palpable.



*Brian, Britton, and Barrett relaxing in the comfort of the B House.*

What do the roommates gain from living together?

Brian likes “laughing and joking around” with the other guys, referring to “family,” (combination of friends and family) night. Once a week, they take turns planning something fun like ordering pizza, playing games, riding DART, and other activities. He likes being able to escape to his own room.

Barrett comments that he is “practicing his independence.” He says, “It’s an opportunity to learn how to handle things for yourself.”

And Britton had this succinct thought: “I feel happy and safe.”

To show support for their Canyon Creek neighborhood, the guys attend crime watch parties to meet the neighbors and vice versa. They even volunteered to participate in last year’s July 4<sup>th</sup> Parade jointly hosted by the Canyon Creek Homeowners Association and a local country club. With help, they decorated a pickup and threw candy to eager open hands.

## B is for Break Even

Make no mistake: the B House is not a money-making venture. Rather, it should be viewed as a necessary low-lying branch where three nestlings can roost before taking full flight. It’s semi-independent living. They are not home with their parents or in a group home with round-the clock supervision, situated far away from family, friends, and familiarity. Assisted by their monthly Supplemental Security Income (SSI) checks and work earnings, they each pay \$602 a month for rent, utilities (utilities re-evaluated every six months), and groceries. The caregiver pays rent as well and her salary is paid by state-supported Home and Community Based Services (HCS) funds or by private pay.

## B is for Beaming

What changes have the parents seen?

“He is still anxious as ever,” confesses Ann about son Brian. “But he has learned to recognize a nasty thought before he says it. He has grown in his understanding about himself – his likes and dislikes. He has gained self-confidence.”

Considered by those in the disability parenting world as a model of success, the parents at the B house stay behind the scenes like stage mothers who prepare their children for a performance that will last a lifetime. But this is real; no actors involved. At some point, the parents know they cannot care for their adult children and have taken the difficult yet necessary steps to prepare them for what lies ahead without being maudlin.



*Parents and founders of the successful B House.*

the caregiver. SSI helps defray the cost of rent.

- Far-reaching: The B House is a model of organization, devotion, and accomplishment.

The idea for the B House began when the Dallas Housing Authority announced they were offering applications for Project-Based Vouchers, specifically for property owners who wanted to rent their homes to people with disabilities. The Project-Based Vouchers are not available yet to support family-owned homes such as this. COMMUNITY FOR PERMANENT SUPPORTED HOUSING is actively working to make these vouchers available and works with property owners to prepare for when the vouchers are available.

For more information on Neighborhood Homes please contact [community@txcpsh.org](mailto:community@txcpsh.org). For more information about COMMUNITY FOR PERMANENT SUPPORTED HOUSING, visit us at [txcpsh.org](http://txcpsh.org)

## **B is for Brave**

COMMUNITY FOR PERMANENT SUPPORTED HOUSING (CPSH) hails the B House and others like it as representing one of several environments that are optimal for adults with disabilities. The key factors making it a good situation:

- Familiarity: All three B guys grew up together and knew each other before moving in together. Britton took the CPSH Safety Training class as preparation for his move out.
- Funding: Two of the roommates use HCS Medicaid waiver funds and one roommate uses private pay to pay for