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THE COX FAMILY:

Living and loving as
a tribute to Jeremy

PHOTO BY ANDREA GILSTRAP PHOTOGRAPHY

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THE COX FAMILY:

Living and loving as a tribute to Jeremy

BY LAINEY VELTRI / PHOTOS BY ANDREA GILSTRAP PHOTOGRAPHY
AND COURTESY OF THE COX FAMILY

Jeremy Cox lost his battle with cancer three years ago, but he left behind a legacy for his wife Niki and his sons Caleb and Carson that will last a lifetime.

From audio recordings and flash drives to thumbprint charms and bow ties made from his favorite shirts, Jeremy made sure he included special messages, mementoes and reminders of a life well spent with those he loved most: Niki, Caleb, 12, and Carson, 9. With help from Let There Be Mom (LTBM), a non-profit organization that works with families to preserve the legacies of moms



and dads who have been diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses, the Cox family was able to memorialize Jeremy's life story in keepsakes the children will receive at different milestones throughout their lives.

"LTBM has been wonderful for our family," says Niki. "They have continued to provide support and include us in activities since Jeremy passed."

So far, the boys have received thumbprint charms with Jeremy's thumbprint with a message inscribed for each of them. They've also gotten bowties made with Jeremy's clothing. There will be many more treasured mementoes and videotaped messages for the boys in the coming years as they reach certain milestones like graduation, baptism, their wedding day, and first days of college.

"We wanted to preserve as many memories and as much of his legacy as possible so the boys would know everything they could about their dad," Niki says. "We knew it would be emotional to work through the various projects, but we also knew these were projects we could not complete on our own with us both working full time and Jeremy undergoing treatments, all while keeping up with the boys' busy sports schedules."

The couple

Jeremy and Niki married May 7, 2005, in Anderson, following their engagement in Cooperstown, NY at the National Baseball

Hall of Fame. Both families love baseball and Jeremy was a baseball player, so the setting was fitting.

The couple experienced many fun trips and adventures, but the "best memories were the times we spent together after his cancer diagnosis," Niki says.

"Everything seemed a little more special once we knew our time together may be cut short," she adds. "We were more intentional about soaking up every moment together as a family."



The family

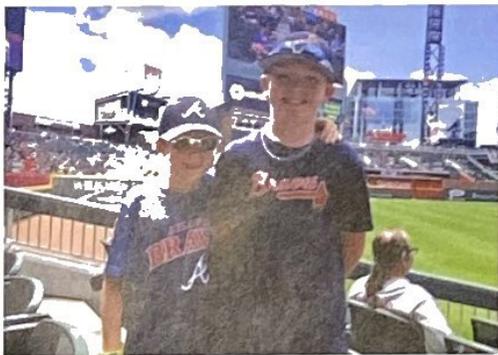
Like their father, Caleb and Carson are athletic. They play baseball, soccer and basketball, love to fish, hike, ride bikes and play at the lake. Niki enjoys watching her boys play sports and makes time for herself to run, ride bikes and spend time at the lake. They follow Clemson sports and are Atlanta Braves fans.

"Our family loves sports, so you can almost always find us on a field somewhere," Niki says.

The family attends Fellowship Greenville and volunteered in the nursery once a month until Jeremy passed. Niki also delivers Meals on Wheels and served on the Young Philanthropist Committee for United Way. You can also find Niki practicing baseball with the boys or warming them up in the batting cages.

Both boys play baseball for Greenville Little League and are on a travel team during the off-season. The brothers play shortstop, pitcher, catcher, and Caleb also plays third base. Their father was a pitcher in college.

Jeremy also played soccer and raced sports cars. Thus, his sons seem to be following in their father's footsteps playing soccer and loving cars. Math and science are their favorite subjects.



The boys

"The boys are very different, but each has gifts that we treasure," their mom says.

Caleb, who is in Junior Beta Club and plays clarinet in his middle-school band, has a mechanical mind like his dad.

"He is able to repair lawn mowers and many of the tools we have, which has been a huge help since his dad passed," his mom says. "He is a quiet leader who has shown

leadership through this journey and has taken on many of Jeremy's chores around the house and he has exhibited courage and wisdom beyond his years."

Niki says she's watched her son's faith deepen over the past few years.

"He is often my voice of reason when I am overwhelmed and stressed," she says. "This was his dad's role in the past, but now Caleb will quietly

remind me that things will be okay, and the current issue is not that big of a deal. I firmly believe this is Jeremy's calming voice coming to us through Caleb."

Carson is the loving and affectionate one, his mom says. He easily reads his mom's feelings and can sense when she's stressed or struggling. She calls him Jeremy's "mini me."

"He never withholds a hug and usually sticks close to mom," she adds. "Carson is quick to come put his arm around me and hold on a little tighter in these difficult situations."

The family share their home with Ginger, a four-year-old tabby cat with several orange patches throughout her coat. "Since we are all three redheads, she fits right in," Niki exclaims.





The neighborhood

The Cox family call the Holly Trace subdivision home. They live in a cul-de-sac that is usually abuzz with kids on bicycles and scooters, neighbors interacting, and games underway.

When Jeremy fell ill, the neighbors rallied around the family and made sure they had what they needed and then some. They prepared and delivered meals, kept the lawn mowed, and surprised the family with monthly treats at their front porch: Halloween candy, Easter Baskets, pool and beach supplies, and countless gift cards.

"They were a huge support throughout our journey with Jeremy," Niki says. "This neighborhood is truly special...There have been many times over the past few years when I am feeling overwhelmed with everything that needs to be done or with several things breaking at once and someone happens to offer help at just the right time...You may think you don't know what to say or how to help, but just reaching out means more than you know."

Jeremy's legacy

Ironically, the family had supported Dine Out for Mom for years, an annual fund-raising event LTBM holds every October to support the organizations' mission, not



knowing that one day they'd be one of the families seeking their services.

"LTBM does such special work," Niki says. "We try to spread the word about this organization every chance we get since we have been so blessed by its services."

Jeremy's colon cancer diagnosis rocked the family as expected and yet he and his wife strove to keep life as normal as possible for the boys despite the exhausting treatments and difficult conversations that needed to be had. He continued to work and coach both boys through May before passing on July 1, 2018. He would often leave the hospital or chemo treatment facility, squeeze in a quick nap, and head to the ballpark to be with the boys.

"We were lucky that Jeremy was so

strong and handled most of his treatments very well until the end," Niki says. "He amazed us all with his strength and positive attitude through everything. But that was Jeremy in every situation in life—even long before his diagnosis."

And as earth-shattering as his diagnosis was to the family, it taught them that every moment in life matters and to cherish the time spent with those you love.

"We learned so much from how Jeremy approached life and our situation," Niki says. "He lived every day (even pre-diagnosis) like it was his last and he enjoyed every moment he was given. We are all trying to apply this to our lives as a tribute to Jeremy now that he is gone."

If the family had a motto, it would be: "Live and love like Jeremy did," Niki says.

"Jeremy was my balance and provided the fun and the adventure in our family, so I am trying to embrace the lessons he taught us about living each day to the fullest and enjoying every minute we are given," she



says. "Jeremy was so good at living in the moment and not worrying about the future. I think we can all learn from that."

Niki says she hopes her husband's legacy will serve as an anchor for each of her sons.

"I hope the boys realize how special their dad is and how many lives he impacted with the way he approached life and his diagnosis," she says. "I want them to value the things that were important to their dad and grow into young men who will make their father proud. The gifts we worked on with LTBM will help me to pass along and share his legacy with our boys."

