

October 2021

# North Main Neighbors

An exclusive magazine serving the historic districts, North Main & surrounding areas.

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Best Version Media

Cover photos by Mark Massingill -  
Ernest Rawlins Photography

“Living In and for the Day”





## “Living In and for the Day”

By Lainey Veltri

Photos by Mark Massingill, Ernest Rawlins Photography

When Ashley Thomasson got a cancer diagnosis in March 2019, one of her biggest fears was that her two young daughters would eventually forget her if she lost her battle against the disease.

Her daughters Reese and Ellie were two and four years old when she was diagnosed with bile duct cancer following a family ski trip to Utah.

“I will never forget receiving that phone call,” Ashley recalls. “It was devastating.”

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, has alleviated some of Ashley’s fears by creating customized gifts her girls will receive throughout their lives.

And while Ashley hopes to be the one to dole out the keepsakes to her daughters that she helped create, she finds comfort in knowing the gifts will serve as a testament to them of her love and thoughtfulness if she isn’t able to do so.

“LTBM has given me peace of mind knowing that my girls will always remember me, which is a huge weight that my heart carries,” Ashley says. “LTBM has created all these gifts so the girls don’t forget me and don’t forget everything that was so special in our lives...We pray everyday that I will be the one to give the girls every gift throughout their life. But I know, if it’s not me, they will always remember me.”

### The couple

Ashley, a middle-school science teacher before cancer, now works full time as a cancer-fighting superhero. She and her husband, Patrick, met while both were attending Clemson University. Ashley, a

Lancaster native, studied Human Resources and Business. She graduated in 2005 and went back to college to complete her master’s in teaching. The certified math and science middle-school teacher worked at Northwood Middle and later League Academy before cancer required her full attention.

Patrick, born and raised in New Orleans, moved to Fort Mill during his eighth-grade year and earned a degree in finance from Clemson University in 2005 and a Master of Business Administration degree in 2013, also from Clemson. He holds a CPA license and works for Sage Automotive Interiors in the finance department.

The couple married in August 2008 at Ryan Nicholas Inn in Simpsonville and moved into the North Main area the same year.

They played co-ed softball for the Greenville County Recreation Department and enjoyed attending Clemson University sporting events before their daughters came along.

### The family

The Thomasson family are Clemson fans and avid tailgaters, hosting big spreads outside the stadium and welcoming anyone to join. They attend John Knox Presbyterian Church.

The couple’s love for athletics has transferred to the girls, who enjoy attending Clemson games and hanging with mom and dad during sports events.



“The girls love going to Clemson basketball games,” Ashley says. “I think they watch the cheerleaders and Rally Cats more than the game, but Ellie did learn all the players’ names and numbers last year!”





Photo by Mitchell's Photography



Photo by Lauren Miller Photography



Photo by Wonderlight Family Photography

**The girls**

Seven-year-old Ellie is a second grader at St. Mary's Catholic School. She loves dancing and gymnastics, spending most of her time around the house "practicing her handstands and cartwheels," her mom says. This past summer, Ellie enjoyed her first year on the Stone Lake swim team and graduated from guppies to the big swim team.

"Ellie's a very sweet, smart, shy and sassy second grader," her mom describes. "Her teachers say she is helpful and responsible in the classroom. And she loves her sister unconditionally."

Reese, 5, is in K-4 at St. Mary's. She also loves gymnastics and "wants to do anything her big sister does," her mom says. She's outgoing and funny.

"She really aims to please and does not like to disappoint others," Ashley says. "Her teachers say she is nurturing and cares for others. She just recently learned to ride her big-girl bike and has an imagination like no other."

**The neighborhood**

The family loves living in the North Main area, where they can easily access the trolley into the city. They enjoy being near The Soda Shop, Croft Park and North Main Rotary Park, some of their favorite places.

The girls often ride their bikes for ice cream treats at The Soda Shop and look forward to events in the neighborhood, like Halloween, when families get together to celebrate and party.

The neighbors have been a tremendous support for the Thomasson family during Ashley's battle against cancer.

"Complete strangers in our community have wrapped their arms around us," she says. "We've received gifts on our porch from people we don't even know...The meals, the love, the kindness, the support and most of all, the prayers, mean everything to us. Knowing I have so many people rooting for me helps give me strength for my physical fight against this awful disease."

'Live in and for the day'

Cancer has completely changed Ashley and Patrick's perspective on life.

"We count our blessings each day and are so very thankful for the small things," Ashley says. "We live for today because tomorrow is not guaranteed for any of us."

If the family had a motto, it would be: "Live in and for the day."

"There is now realization of how precious and fragile life can be, and how we have to appreciate the time we have," says Ashley.

The couple have striven to help their daughters cope with her diagnosis as best as they can. They've encouraged them to ask questions and are honest with them about things.

"We believe it's important to be open about my diagnosis and



we want our kids to trust us," Ashley adds. "It's hard on them, especially when mommy is sick, but we do our best to help them live a normal daily life."

**Keepsakes for the girls**

LTBM has helped Ashley create personalized gifts for her girls, who will receive them as they reach certain milestones in their lives. So far, the girls have gotten stuffed monkeys, made

from the fabric of two of Ashley's old shirts. She chose monkeys because that is what she calls the girls as a term of endearment.

"I gave them to the girls right before one of my medical trips to Houston," she says. "I was going to be gone awhile for a surgery. I gave them to the girls to hold on to at night for comfort. They have slept with them every night since."

The Thomassons supported LTBM long before they became a sponsored family. They participated in the organization's Dine Out for Mom annual fundraiser each year.

"Little did I know I would later need their services," Ashley says. "To me, Kipra Anderson (LTBM's founder) and this organization mean everything. She is an angel on Earth and just wants to help others. Her kindness, creativity and the love she has given us cannot be matched."

Ashley says she hopes her children will realize what a huge blessing LTBM has been.

"I hope the legacy I leave for them through these gifts will show them how much love I have for them," she adds. "And more than anything, I want my children to understand how important it is to have a close relationship with Jesus and to rely on Him during our time of need. Many of my gifts to them are reminders of Jesus' love. He has provided me with strength along this journey that I didn't know was possible. It's important for me to teach them of His presence so that one day I will be united with them again."

Nominate a Family to Be Featured in *North Main Neighbors!* Do you have a neighbor with an amazing story or a fascinating hobby? We love to connect neighbors and brag on how wonderful the people are in our community. Email me at [eveltri@bestversionmedia.com](mailto:eveltri@bestversionmedia.com) with suggestions.



# Parents Leave Legacies Through Customized Keepsakes

Contributed by Kipra Anderson

Let There Be Mom is a local (started right here in Greenville) non-profit organization with the mission of preserving the legacies of Upstate moms and dads who have been diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses.

All of the families we serve have at least one child under the age of 19. It's either mom or dad battling the life-threatening illness and facing the very real possibility of not having a future here with their child(ren). Our goal is to capture the life story of the parent in tangible keepsakes that are given to the children now and throughout their lives for future milestone events. The ailing parent MUST participate in the interview, as we want to make



LTBM volunteers spreading the word about the organization and our raffle during DOFM.

sure we are planning exactly what they want for their children.

We usually end up creating 12 to 15 gifts per child (depending on their age and the milestones the parent wants to mark). While the requested milestones we cover vary from family to family, some of the most requested occasions include getting their driver's license, Sweet 16, prom, high-school graduation, going off to college, college graduation, first job, engagement, wedding, first house, and first baby.

Many times, we use items that belong to the parents to create something new and meaningful for their child. We are working

with a dad who is a builder—one of his requests were gifts for his children when they become members of the church. We will be welding some of his tools together to create a keepsake cross for each of them. Another Dad wants to mark college graduation for his sons with a reminder of his love for travel; he had us create travel sets with a special message to “Embrace the Culture.” A mom we are working with wanted her clothing sewn into a quilt for her children as a gift for now—each square is appliqued to



The Poynters, a family served by LTBM, are giving back to the organization by volunteering!

tell the story of her life, making it possible for her little ones to physically wrap up in the mom's life. Another mom we served taught her son, at a young age, the value of being able to grow and cook your own food. When he gets his first home, he will receive a set of gardening tools engraved with a special message from his mom as well as a cutting board engraved with his two



LTBM supporter enjoying coffee from one of our DOFM Restaurant Partners.

restaurants partner with us by donating 20 percent of their sales from the ENTIRE day to the organization. Supporters just have to go buy food (or gift cards). It's an easy way to have an impact that will last for generations. And since it is an all-day event, every meal and snack can come from a **Dine Out for Mom** restaurant partner!

We use many volunteers to make the event a success. If you

favorite recipes that she made.

On average, we end up spending approximately \$2,000 per child. All of our services are free to the families; we are supported by community donations and our fundraisers. Our biggest fundraiser, **Dine Out for Mom**, happens this month. This year our 15th Annual **Dine Out for Mom** is set for Thursday, Oct 21. Local

would like to learn more about our organization, apply for services, find out how you can help, or even where to **Dine Out for Mom** on Thursday, October 21, please visit our website at [LetThereBeMom.org](http://LetThereBeMom.org).

## Dine Out for Mom

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21

Featuring restaurant partners who will donate 20 percent of their total sales to Let There Be Mom.