

Helping to Save Young Lives

THE JEREMY STOM REMEMBRANCE FOUNDATION SPONSORS LIFE-CHANGING ACTIVITIES FOR UNDERSERVED TEENS

MONTHS AFTER CIRI AND SCOTT STOM lost their 18-year-old son Jeremy to a drug overdose, they brainstormed ways to honor his memory with their two adult children, Jean and Sayra.

“We decided not to focus on what took his life,” Ciri said. “But rather on how he found hope and joy living with the struggles and pressures of being a teenager.” Jeremy had the opportunity to try just about every activity—Boy Scouts, piano lessons, soccer, swimming, and tennis. He particularly loved the outdoors and connected with nature during a wilderness program. “The experience had a profound impact on him,” Ciri said. “It made him more at ease with himself, more confident.” Unanimously, they decided to give “an experience of hope” to underserved teenagers by founding the Jeremy Stom Remembrance Foundation.

GIFTING EXPERIENCES

Since 2011, the foundation has given teenagers, between the ages of 13 and 18, the opportunity to participate in recreational activities that lead to independence and growth, both intellectually and spiritually. Best of all, the teens choose the activity, be it summer camps, sports, art programs, music lessons, spiritual retreats, Sea Cadet programs (mini-boot camps), or trips related to it. The foundation grants full and partial sponsorships up to \$1,500, to teenagers in Illinois and across the country. Moreover, they don’t have to fill out paperwork; the person who refers them, typically a social worker, already knows they qualify for the program.

After Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico—Ciri’s mother lives there—the foundation sponsored teenagers there to travel with their orchestra to New York City, to perform at Carnegie Hall and made it possible for an entire basketball team to play in a tournament. “The foundation gives any teen that is under-resourced an opportunity to experience something great,” Ciri said. “And just maybe that experience will be one they will always remember and ultimately help them make better choices in their lives.”

To date, the foundation has sponsored 197 teens, including one who attended a two-week art program at the renown Sotheby’s Art Institute in New York City. Its enthusiastic committee of 15 volunteers tirelessly fundraise throughout the year, putting all the money they collect into the program. It was Jean (pronounced John), their other son and a veteran of the 82nd



Sayra Stom and her parents at a fundraising event. From left: Ciri Stom, Scott Stom, and Sayra (Stom) Pasquesi.

Airborne Division, who shaped the foundation into what it is today, Ciri said. When he passed away at the age of 27 from a drug overdose, a year and 10 days after Jeremy died, the family decided to honor his memory by sponsoring the children of veterans through the not-for-profit Salute. Like many veterans, Jean struggled with PTSD after returning home from the Iraq war in 2003.

PRICELESS REWARDS

For the Stoms, the work has been healing. “From the start, it has given us an opportunity to take a devastating family tragedy and use it as fuel for something positive,” said Sayra, who lives and works in Barrington. “It is a way for Jeremy’s memory to live on, by giving him a legacy, not only for those who knew him in life, but also for those who only get to know him through the good that has been done in his name.”


The Stoms often receive thank-you notes from teens after they arrive home from their exciting adventures. Without fail, all of them mention Jeremy. To some of them, going away to summer camp is a break from the daily stresses of living in poverty. In one letter, a teen joked he never thought he could be away from home or worse, from his phone and video games, for two weeks. But he was glad he went to camp and “did things he didn’t think

A family devastated by the loss of both of their sons turns tragedy into trying to save other young people’s lives.

he could do,” such as make new friends—he always hung out with the same crowd at home—and enjoy new activities like kayaking, archery, and horseback riding.

Another happy camper was thrilled to discover there is more to life than drugs and video games. He returned the following year as a camp leader and is now in college, flourishing. Then, there is the teen who wrote of living his dream, participating in a worldwide surfing competition in Southern California. It happened to take place at Jeremy’s favorite childhood beach, a coincidence Ciri found comforting.

Ciri and Sayra occasionally share their story while promoting the foundation to schools and civic organizations. “It has helped me through the toughest years of my life,” said Ciri of running the organization with her family. “It is a platform to honor both of our sons and gives me hope that just maybe all of this work will possibly save a young life.”

To learn more, visit jeremystomfoundation.org; email info@jeremystomfoundation.org or call 847-438-8058. 

Melanie Kalmar is a freelance writer specializing in business and human-interest features. When she’s not writing, she enjoys spending time with her family.

One Young Life Lost Is Too Many

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:

Our community has lost too many children to drug overdoses and alcohol related deaths. Please talk to and educate your children—whether they use substances, don’t use, and even if you don’t know whether they use or not—to let them know that it is urgently necessary to get immediate medical help for someone in their presence who has passed out or has overdosed. Have them reach out to an adult for help or call 911.

In Illinois, the state has a statute that offers limited immunity from prosecution (720 ILCS 570/414) if a person, who, in good faith, seeks or obtains emergency medical assistance for someone (or themselves) who is experiencing an overdose of drugs or alcohol, or if someone in their presence has blacked out.

Let your teen know that if one of their friends has passed out, that this is already a medical emergency and that thinking that this person can “sleep it off” is potentially life threatening and may cost that person his or her life.



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