

Devin Hart Bearden

Caring, athletic, bright, witty, attractive

At 6'2", Devin was lanky, handsome, and a natural athlete. Equally at home on a skateboard, snowboard, or when surfing, he was a pleasure to watch; so fluid and graceful. He was a good soccer and baseball player and loved hiking in nature or being at the beach, especially on the annual family beach trips to Hatteras in North Carolina.



More than anything Devin loved being with his family. He was full of life and brought joy and fun to every get-together. He liked clowning around and was often the center of attention. The biggest mark he made in life was the close relationship he developed with his four nieces and nephews. He would virtually become a child with them, playing endlessly. Even when it was obvious Devin was worn out, he wouldn't say no to connecting with the kids. When asked if he ever thought about having kids, he said, "not sure that's going to happen." It was as if he suspected he might not get his life together enough to do so.

As a teenager Devin was a camp counselor for young children and later attended an experimental school in Colorado with an Outward Bound-type program. He responded well to the physical challenges and thought of being an instructor, but at 20 he was "hijacked by his opioid addiction," his dad Joe said. "He set high standards for himself and needed to be perfect; drugs gave him the feeling of worth. He would catch a glimpse of his passion at times, but he just couldn't find his footing."

During Devin's active addiction, everyone in the family rallied around him. As his dad put it, "tough love could have been fatal love." So, they loved him unconditionally and tried everything they could to help him overcome his substance use addiction for the 12 years it had a hold on him. "He always knew he was loved," his mother said. Devin had just been in rehab and drug free for 50 days; he was

recovering his self-esteem and feeling good about himself. He had a date and got anxious and went to what he knew to calm his nerves. He passed away of an accidental overdose on drugs containing fentanyl.

There is now a hole in the family that everyone is aware of, especially during family gatherings. Joe said, "It is the sadness that lingers, like a wet blanket restricting you, but then you remember the joyous times and get some relief. Devin was a good kid, we always knew that. I don't think he always did."

Devin's father, Joe Bearden, provided the information for this narrative.

Devin Hart Bearden

November 13, 1985 - February 4, 2018 (Age 32)

Portrait Artist: Theresa Clower

Narrative Writer: Barbara Francois

Sean Timothy Blake

Gregarious, witty, loving, generous, creative

Sean was a generous, loving, hardworking, and charismatic man. Sean grew up in Vermont with his mother Kimberly, father Tim, and younger brother Ned. The two boys loved building with Legos and played countless games of Monopoly and Risk. Tim and Sean shared a love of music, and the family enjoyed bowling, golf, and travel, making many cherished memories together.



From a young age, Sean played the oboe, sailed with his high school sailing club, and was co-captain of the South Burlington High School Ski Team. He attended Champlain College and the Community College of Vermont. He later considered clerking his way to becoming an attorney, which is possible in Vermont.

Sean loved the water, so it seemed fitting that he joined the Navy. He wanted to cook while in the service, but he scored so highly on the entrance exam that he was trained to be an electrician on submarines and graduated from submarine school. Unfortunately, because of his substance use, he eventually lost his position in the Navy, later working in many Burlington restaurants, using his exceptional, self-taught cooking talents.

Family and tradition were deeply important to Sean. He treasured summer trips to the family camp in Canada, where he sailed and skied. Kimberly recalls one Christmas morning when she was called into work for several hours; when she returned home, Sean had waited patiently, making his brother wait as well, so they could open presents together as a family.

Sean was engaged to be married twice, deeply in love both times, but his disease and mental health caused pain for both him and his loved ones. It also landed him in jail for misdemeanor charges, where he developed an interest in improving the carceral system.

Sean had a vibrant, gregarious spirit and a unique ability to get along with everyone. He maintained friendships with many young people from Chile who spent summers working in Vermont and had many close local friends who shared stories after Sean's death about his desire to help others. Friends and family remember his wit, charm, and humor, and his love of music, writing, and poetry.

Regrettably, Sean's illness stole his pride and steeped him in cycles of shame. "It's a terrible loss," Kimberly said. "Sean was so full of promise. He deserved better." She emphasizes the need for better treatment and less stigma and shame around substance use disorder.

The loss of Sean to the family and his community is immeasurable. Kimberly reflects, "When you lose a child, you lose all the future you imagine. They don't get married or have a family. It just aches, the missing of someone who meant so much to our family. It never goes away. Mostly, you're heartbroken that they never found recovery. The loss is immense." In death, Sean continued to give—as an organ donor, he saved the lives of four people.

Sean's mother, Kimberly Blake, provided the information for this narrative.

Sean Timothy Blake
March 22, 1990 - August 4, 2017 (Age 27)

Portrait Artist: Clayton Conner
Narrative Writer: Barbara Francois

Tyler Carter

Beautiful, luminant, loving, compassionate

A soft-hearted person, Tyler was kind, compassionate, and brave. Throughout his life, he was always looking out for others and seeing the good in them, despite the circumstances. His mother, Kim, believes he was here to teach people compassion, and that though his time on earth was short-lived, the impact he made continues to live on in the hearts of all who were lucky enough to know him. In addition to his kind heart, Tyler was adventurous and brave. He loved the outdoors and spent a lot of his time hiking, fishing, and snowboarding with his friends. He was also intelligent, charming, and loved a good challenge. He was a big fan of reading and collecting his favorite movies. His favorite book series was *Game of Thrones*.



Tyler loved holidays, and Thanksgiving was his favorite. One year, after moving to California and finishing treatment, he sent his mother a picture of the first Thanksgiving dinner he made all on his own. She was so proud to see him living independently and doing things he loved. The next year Tyler moved back to Vermont and attended the family's Thanksgiving dinner. They were all thrilled to have him home, but that evening he relapsed and did everything he could to make it through the day, a true testament to his powerful will and love for his family. Unfortunately, that was his last holiday with his family, as he overdosed a week later. His family is infinitely grateful for that final sweet memory they made with him.

Tyler had a love of life, and an excellent work ethic, but his working life was hard. He worked mostly in warehouses, which meant long hours and tedious work. And he worked constantly to overcome his addiction. More than anything in the world, Tyler dreamed of being sober and leading a calm, happy life. Though his life was short, Tyler touched the lives of many people and was a safe place to land for many of his friends who also struggled with substance use disorder.

His mother recalls one of his close friends telling her about the night that she was abandoned while she was overdosing, and how Tyler picked her up and took her home to care for her throughout the night.

Kim says that throughout all the struggles Tyler faced that changed him, his heart was always there. Tyler lived and died by the principles of kindness, always striving to help other people overcome their own hardships and addictions. He always saw the best in others and wanted them to be the best versions of themselves. His family, especially his younger brother Zach, who grew up watching his big brother fight for his life, dearly miss him.

Kim says that Tyler was her greatest teacher in this life. He made her more compassionate toward people, especially those living with the disease of addiction. She is more understanding of those who view addiction negatively and hopes they can be more accepting of others. Kim says she knows in her heart that when something makes her laugh, her connection to her son is still alive and well. She misses him every day, especially his hugs, smiles, laughter, kissing his forehead and giving him peace.

Tyler's mother, Kim Pratt, provided information for this narrative.

Tyler Carter

May 31, 1990 - December 2, 2016 (Age 26)

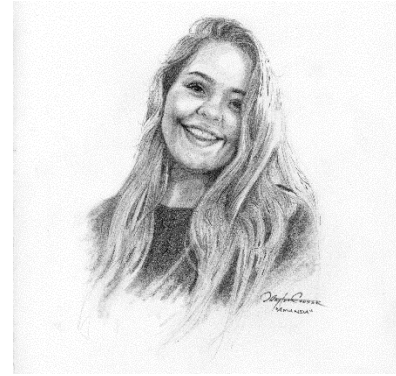
Portrait Artist: Jeremy Hebbel

Narrative Writer: Victoria Estes

Amanda Cass

Fearless but shattered beneath her mask

Silky brown hair and perfectly manicured nails coated with residue from welding machinery or fixing a tractor, and soles covered in dirt from hiking, fishing, and hunting barefoot—that was Amanda. She was feminine, wild, and fierce, with a heart tender enough to rescue a fawn in need, or a skunk for that matter, and hands gentle enough to pick wildflower bouquets for her mother and her grandmother. She was a breath of fresh air in a stale world, making time with her unforgettable.



Her mother, Lisa, a wildlife photographer, understood this best. Her camera documented countless adventures, which she always shared with Amanda first. Amanda adored Lisa's photos so much that she had two of them tattooed on her body. They also shared a love of hiking. Once, they revisited a waterfall, but this time, they needed a route directly to its base. Amanda hypothesized the brook would guide them there, so she hauled Lisa's photography gear and blazed ahead and arrived exactly as Amanda suspected. While Lisa set up her camera, Amanda vanished into the trees, climbed up the steep incline surrounding the falls, and called back to her mother from the top. When she came back down, Lisa captured videos of Amanda plunging into its cold basin.

Amanda also shone professionally. Initially, Amanda worked in a gravel pit. She amazed her coworkers with her strength and fearlessness, but she could be playful too, like the time her grandfather visited. She coaxed him into the front seat of her dumptruck and gleefully carted him around.

She was also a welder and learned the trade at her high school's technical career center before taking a summer of college welding classes. Renowned locally for her metalwork, Amanda could repair any equipment or signage, and the local country club even

commissioned her to make benches. She attracted so many clients that she quit the gravel pit and started her own welding business at 22, for which Lisa happily made business cards. Welding was also her art. She crafted metal barrels into stunning firepits adorned with natural scenes, and her mother proudly received a bear and tree-themed firepit and a four-foot-tall butterfly sculpture for her flower garden.

Amanda was the youngest of her sisters, Jessica and Emily, whom Lisa had with her first husband. When her mother remarried, they moved from New Hampshire to Vermont, and Amanda got a bonus sister and two brothers. The group formed a family—just like the Brady Bunch. Tragically, her brothers, Nathan and Zachary, would pass away in accidents. At only 8, Amanda tried to fill Nathan's role for the sake of her stepfather, learning how to hunt just like him. She tried to be tough after experiencing incredible pain.

Toughness was an asset, but it was also the mask she used to hide her intense emotional world. Though Lisa and her daughter were close, Amanda disguised her struggles with substance use disorder well, leaving her mother blindsided by the news that a lethal dose of a drug containing fentanyl and carfentanyl had taken Amanda's life.

Amanda never chose the easiest path. She preferred to bushwhack through the hardest one, and in so doing she cleared the way for others to embrace lives of strength and softness and do everything with their entire selves, just as she had.

Amanda's mother, Lisa Allard, provided the information for this narrative.

Amanda Cass

September 21, 1999 - October 4, 2021 (Age 22)

Portrait Artist: Clayton Conner

Narrative Writer: Willow Kline

Andy Collins

*Thoughtful, hardworking, tough,
charismatic, funny*

Andy had a big personality and an even bigger laugh. He loved a good joke and was always quick to make the people around him smile. Being around Andy meant you were likely to hear a funny story about his most recent fishing trip or see that big grin of his that could light up a room.



One of Andy's favorite traditions was the annual family trip to Bailey's Campground in Scarborough, Maine. Bailey's was a second home. There, generation after generation—grandparents, parents, and children—slowed down and reconnected. They'd catch up in the crisp morning air and tell stories around the crackling fire. Their laughter echoed long after sunset, into starry nights, mingling with cricket chirps.

When he visited his Grandma Janet and Grandpa Bub at their home by Lake Champlain, they would sit together and "watch the lake go by." This meant the trio would take in the summertime boats drifting, winter's ice fishermen, and the painted sunsets. Lake Champlain was also where he spent time with friends and family for BBQ's and boating.

Even the most bitter winters couldn't diminish Andy's love for the outdoors. When the lake froze, Andy and Grandpa Bub bundled up, drilled holes in the thick ice, and sat side by side in the still winter air, conversing, storytelling, and waiting for the fish to bite. They'd snowmobile across the frozen landscape, laughing as the wind nipped their faces, or wandering through the snowy woods searching for tracks. Grandpa Bub loved showing Andy how to read the land: where animals had passed, how the wind moved, how to respect nature.

Fishing was Andy's connecting point with many of his loved ones. Andy and his brother, Lee, built a shanty together and spent countless nights on the ice, staying up until sunrise chatting and waiting patiently for the next big bite. Competing in local fishing derbies alongside Lee, his friends, and his brother-in-law, Brian, Andy found camaraderie amidst rivalry. Win or lose, that time meant everything.

He shared fishing and his love of nature with his twin daughters, Abigail and Madison. They made countless memories in the woods and on the water, but that time wasn't just about hunting or fishing. It was being together, learning from their dad, and feeling loved. Andy loved watching them play sports. Always their biggest fan, Andy could be easily spotted amongst the crowd, clapping and cheering the loudest on the sidelines.

Andy believed in showing up, working hard, and taking care of others, especially during difficult moments. When his brother Lee was struggling with addiction, Andy stepped in. He was familiar with the tough battle for sobriety and compassionately supported Lee with unwavering loyalty. Whenever Grandpa Bub and Grandma Janet needed help around the farm and lake, Andy was there. Whether in the midst of other's struggles or his own, Andy's devotion to his family made their bonds unbreakable in the face of hardship.

Andy's mother, Victoria Collins, provided the information for this narrative.

Andy Collins

September 29, 1979 - October 4, 2024 (Age 45)

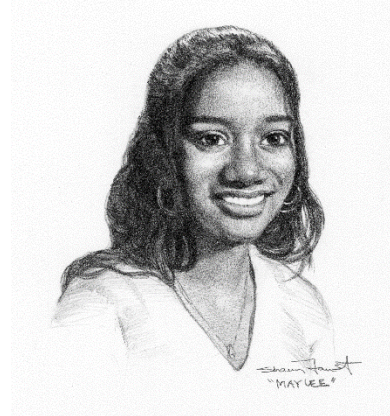
Portrait Artist: Shawn Faust

Narrative Writer: Willow Kline

Maylee Covington

The most beautiful person: lost

Stunningly beautiful inside and out, Maylee was a bright, charming, and generous woman. Born in India, Maylee was 4'9" and 90 pounds of pure charisma that drew people to her. In elementary school, teachers called her "the little mother," because she instinctively comforted others. A teacher once told her that if there was a reward for social life, she would be a high honors student!



Maylee enjoyed an active social life—shopping, driving her sports car, and spending time with her dog, Ari, a white pit bull. She was deeply devoted to Ari, whom she raised from eight weeks old and fed with a fork. As a puppy, she carried her around in her purse, and all the store clerks knew May and Ari, as they made their rounds.

Maylee loved skiing, sledding, bike riding, and swimming as a child. Family trips to Boseback Mountain Camps in Maine were highlights, where the family hiked, kayaked, and watched loons and the northern lights. She enjoyed whale-watching trips in Cape Cod and loved Christmas, carefully choosing gifts for family and friends. Maylee also loved time working with her stepfather, John, in the woods, and was apprenticing in maple sugaring. She had enough inherited money after her father's death that she didn't need to work, though she did briefly serve as a barista.

In her late teens, Maylee developed mental illness, resulting in multiple personalities and dissociative disorder, which made her life chaotic and unpredictable. Shortly after taking oxycontin at a party, she became addicted, and the drive to get high dominated her life for 16 years. Despite her struggles, she was generous and supportive, often helping others emotionally and financially, especially those who were at their "wits' end."

Maylee's illness prevented her from developing a lasting relationship or pursuing her personal dreams. She struggled with hallucinations and paranoia in her final years and tragically died by suicide. "We will never be the same," her mother, Starr, stated. "It takes all my strength to stand up every day and be present." Starr misses the powerful joy of May's company. "I always told her I love her more than life." There is an emptiness in Starr's soul that no words can adequately describe.

A year before Maylee's death, she traveled to Alaska with her mother. After being hospitalized in Anchorage for five days, she used all her strength to continue the trip. They visited Katmai National Park to see brown bears and salmon runs and spread her grandmother's ashes in the stream. During that trip, Maylee bought an artistic plaque of the mountains and northern lights that says, "In a world of darkness, BE THE LIGHT." It hangs in her childhood home.

Maylee's mother, Starr Strong, provided the information for this narrative.

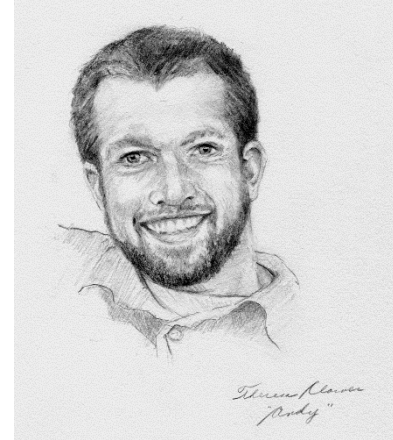
Maylee Covington
February 10, 1990 - June 13-2024 (Age 34)

Portrait Artist: Shawn Faust
Narrative Writer: Barbara Francois

Andy Donovan

*Intelligent, passionate, funny, curious,
athletic, musical*

Andy navigated the world with a keen mind and a wonderful spirit. Always hungry for knowledge, he would pursue his favorite topics with unrivaled passion. He was athletic, a talented musician, and a voracious reader who loved to travel. Most of all, though, he was a loving son and brother.



Andy began to show his intelligence and curiosity about the world around him at a young age. He had a "wicked sense of humor" and was popular with his friends. He could spend hours entertaining himself with imaginary baseball games, keeping stats on his favorite players and running bases in front of his childhood home. His interest in music was also evident early on. "When he was little, he loved to stand on the hearth and strum the fireplace bellows as if it were a guitar," Andy's mom Jane remembers.

Andy's competitiveness and his natural gift for music grew over the years. His intellect allowed him to graduate from high school a year early. While there, he was also in the school bands and played all three years on the varsity soccer team. During this time, he played the bass guitar as well as the saxophone and played in a local rock band called Mothers Magilicutti.

While at the University of Delaware, Andy played bass guitar with the UD Jazz Ensemble. His skills as a musician improved immensely during this time of his life. He focused his academic pursuits on world history and geography and received degrees in both subjects. His ultimate goal was to get a job with the U.S. Department of State so that he would have the freedom to travel the world and work on foreign policy. Andy spent a semester in Wellington, New Zealand, which solidified his desire to explore and learn everything he could about the world.

Accomplishments aside, Andy was simply a fun person to be around. "Andy had a very dry sense of humor and a sublime appreciation of the ironic," Andy's dad Dewey said. "He marched to his own tune, enjoyed his independence, and was comfortable being by himself." He enjoyed his family—playing cards and board games with his sister Lexie and his brother Jack, and spending time with his extended family while at the beach in Avalon, New Jersey.

Over time, Andy's struggles with addiction caused him to become isolated, depressed, and hopeless. He lost interest in athletics and competition, in his music, and in his relationships. Despite the hardships, his family was always right by his side, always trying to help. Since his death, they have found ways to cope. Jane has been reaching out to others who have lost loved ones to addiction and helping to bring INTO LIGHT Project to Delaware.

"We have had to find ways to live with our grief, and our experiences have added strength to our relationships with each other," said Jane. Andy's family will always miss his wry sense of humor, excitement for life, and compassion.

Andy's influence has extended beyond his family and friends. As a memorial to his incredible sportsmanship and kindness, his former basketball coach created the Andy Donovan Scholarship. It is a financial assistance program that provides opportunities for children who would otherwise be unable to participate in a sport. This is just one of the gifts and lasting impacts that Andy leaves behind.

Andy's parents, Jane and Dewey Donovan, provided the information for this narrative.

Andy Donovan
April 15, 1983 - January 2, 2012 (Age 28)

Portrait Artist: Theresa Clower
Narrative Writer: Scott Clower

Melissa Gaboury

Brilliant, loving ray of sunshine

Melissa, unique and free-spirited, with undeniable charisma and a huge heart, cast the world around her in captivating light. Music inspired her, athletics challenged her, and faith steadied her. Melissa could usually be found either with family and friends, at Church of the Rock, writing poetry and song lyrics, playing the keyboard and piano, or getting her hands dirty. A firecracker to her core, she was never the type to go with the flow, and she delighted in spreading smiles far and wide. Her six cats and her dog, Onyx, were beloved companions, as were her friends Melinda and Crystal, parents Steven and Crystal, brother Issiah, sister Meghan, a huge extended family, and her favorite pastors, Pete and Joann Fiske.



Social and outgoing, and drawn to unique experiences, Melissa loved sharing her passions and interests with others. She often exercised with Melinda, running or jogging surrounded by nature. Whenever they came upon an animal, Melissa gave them creative monikers and was tempted to save them all. Church meant singing her heart out, and she displayed her incredible gifts by producing music, dancing or singing to it, and recording her performances to share with anyone who'd watch. Her writing was so profound that she was pursued and acclaimed by professional authors. The outdoors welcomed her, and she was especially drawn to the sounds of birds, open-air markets, and live music venues. Melinda recalls a time the two were caught in the rain but overjoyed anyway. "Rain is nature, so we love that too!" Melissa proclaimed.

Melissa also had a passion for auto-mechanic work. From a young age, she sought out any training she could on the subject. She worked in multiple garages and gave seasoned mechanics a run for their money with her natural talent.

Her own struggles with the justice system, mental health, and substance misuse since age 16 inspired her to help the vulnerable. She encouraged others to “please listen to your children, friend, sibling, or others, and if they need help, please get them the appropriate help.”

Ongoing struggles with substance use disorder stole Melissa’s joy. The sparkle in her eyes dimmed, the invisible weight betraying her true nature. Stability so quickly shifted to hopelessness when misuse snuck in. Melissa’s unpredictability led to prayer-filled days and sleepless nights for her closest kin. Her innocence, hope, and childlike wonder flickered like a candle clinging to a rapidly disappearing wick. During bouts of wellness, she aimed to bring hope to others. Resilient and imaginative, she was poised to use whatever skills she had to help others fight their battles, but before she could, Melissa’s sunshine slipped below the horizon on March 13, 2021.

The impact of her passing weighs heavily on those she loved most. Melinda misses her church and recovery meeting companion, the sound of her vaulted voice, her generosity, and the joy they shared. She cannot perform music without Melissa on her mind. Her grief-stricken friend has recommitted herself to advocacy, wellness, faith, and self-affirmation, to honor one of the “most beautiful souls I ever had the honor of loving.”

Melissa’s friend, Melinda White, provided the information for this narrative.

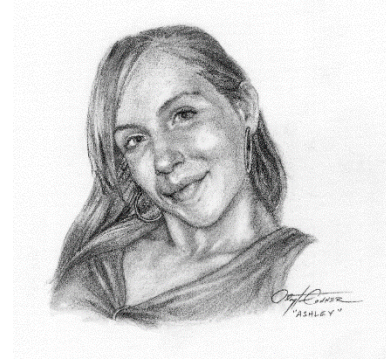
Melissa Gaboury
May 15, 1991 - March 13, 2021 (Age 29)

Portrait Artist: Jeremy Hebbel
Narrative Writer: Jill Marie Denton

Ashley Hawthorne

*Loyal, loving, energetic, giving, beautiful,
fierce, courageous, strong*

Ashley had a playful spirit. As a child, she often borrowed—or “stole”—her brother Justin’s belongings for school photos, once getting caught by appearing in a picture wearing his missing bracelet, watch, and cross necklace all at once.



There are fond memories of holidays with Ashley, Justin, and their mom, Cynthia, making homemade noodles together. Ashley, her mom, aunt, and later her niece did all the cooking. “But the real joy was watching them laugh together, smile, and talk about memories, while making new ones,” Justin shared.

Ashley loved being in crowds, dancing for hours, and losing herself in music. She enjoyed cooking and gardening. For birthdays and holidays, she went all out with tons of food, decorations, photos, and laughs together. Ashley had a natural ability to connect with others and a passion to make people feel special. She was a protector of vulnerable people and animals. Her brother Justin said, “She didn’t look down at people, she looked in.” She made everyone feel valued and seen.

Ashley loved being a server and hostess, striving to give everyone a good dining experience. She was looking into college hospitality programs. She and her mother shared a vision of opening a restaurant together called Rose Marie’s, with plans that grew to include a bed and breakfast and, eventually, a place by the water where Ashley felt happiest.

Ashley was a devoted mother to her daughter, Jasmine Rose, “Jazzy.” She loved spending time with Jasmine doing everyday things—getting their nails done, shopping, watching movies, and singing together. She often said that Jasmine was her greatest accomplishment, and she knew she would go on to do great things. She was right. Jasmine, now 20, is at the University of Chicago

studying medicine with the goal of becoming a pediatrician. Ashley was also deeply connected to Justin, her sister-in-law Deidre, her niece Avery, and her best friend Cassidy, with whom she shared many experiences, including early motherhood.

Ashley lived with substance use disorder for approximately ten years. Over time, the disease changed her life, taking away her rational thinking skills and autonomy. There were periods when her kindness and warmth still shone through, and others when the illness overtook her ability to be present and she could be mean, selfish, and hopeless. Justin said, "One of the worst parts was seeing my mother suffer, dying slowly from cancer, while Ashley was in the worst shape of her life." Ashley died in September 2017. Her mother passed in February 2019.

Ashley's life continues to be reflected in those she loved. Justin honors her through his own recovery and his work supporting others, carrying out a promise he made during Ashley's final days, after an overdose. "It was the first time in my life I used something so traumatic as a reason to be strong and resilient instead of an excuse to get high and run away," he said. He has kept his promise to stay sober and build a life of hope, happiness, and healing, and to make their mother proud.

Justin is now the first felon and person in "loud recovery" to be hired by the Brattleboro Police Department as a Community Resource Specialist working with police officers and police personnel to support recovery in the community. The promise he made at his sister's bedside remains with him, shaping a life that honors both Ashley and their mother.

Ashley's brother, Justin Johnston, provided the information for this narrative.

Ashley Hawthorne
November 7, 1987 - September 12, 2017 (Age 28)

Portrait Artist: Clayton Conner

Narrative Writer: Barbara Francois

Peter Martin Krag

*Loving, giving, creative, persistent,
and gentle*

Peter Martin Krag lived in Shelburne, Vermont, where music, people, and the outdoors formed his days. He was of Filipino and Danish heritage and was known for being gentle with others, often placing their needs before his own.



Music was a constant in Peter's life. He began playing piano when he was three. His father said, and others agreed, that Peter was a "genius musician who would bring tears of joy to listeners." He performed, wrote, composed, taught, transcribed, and recorded music. A top jazz student in college, Peter won composition awards as a boy and young adult. His parents, David and Jesusa, witnessed a steady stream of local musicians visiting Peter's studio to collaborate with him. The studio was on the family property inside a converted barn that Peter helped build. "Music filled the air," his family remembers.

After his death, more than 300 condolence letters arrived from former school friends, creative collaborators, family members, and even police, describing him as gentle, loving, and remarkable. Many musicians shared that Peter encouraged their own growth, often encouraging them to play their solos first when performing together. They credit his support in helping them establish their professional careers. One young student gave Peter's parents a life-size paper outline of himself, saying it could offer a hug whenever one was needed.

Family life included cross-country skiing, camping, and hiking. Peter loved being outdoors and enjoyed building. He shared a close relationship with his brother, Christopher, who is twelve years younger. Their bond was strong, built on love and mutual respect, and they deeply admired one another.

Even in difficult periods, Peter continued to share music. During COVID, he recorded and posted music online to support people who were isolated. In his gentle way, he was reaching out, forming connections during a time of anxiety and uncertainty.

Peter kept trying to get better and did not stop working toward that goal. “No one could try harder than Peter to get well,” his father said. He lived with substance use disorder for eight years, and the illness made long-term relationships difficult. He did not have children, though he hoped to raise a family and continue performing and recording his music.

For his family, loving Peter meant living with the realities of his illness, including lost opportunities and self-condemnation. The impact was all-consuming. His father, a medical doctor, has since turned his professional skills toward addressing substance use disorder and now leads a large database of information drawn from published data.

Peter is missed in everyday ways. The sight of one of his trademark flannel shirts is enough to bring his loved ones to tears. The Krag established a permitted burial site on their property in Shelburne to ensure that Peter will always remain at home with his family, his biggest supporters. His gravesite features a bronze sculpture created by his mother, Jesusa, an artist, depicting him as a young boy poised to leap—the way she remembers her “little puddle jumper,” as she described him.

Peter’s father, David Krag, provided the information for this narrative.

Peter Martin Krag
September 23, 1985 - May 22, 2020 (Age 34)

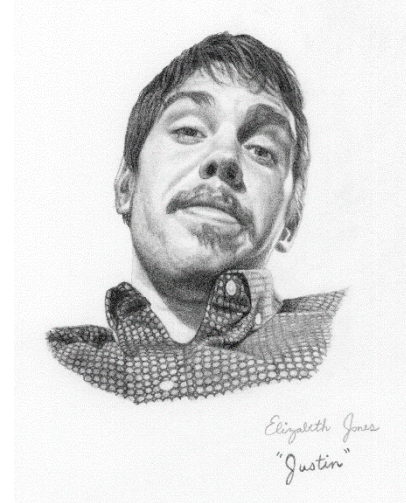
Portrait Arist: Shawn Faust

Narrative Writer: Barbara Francois

Justin Bradley Lemay

The strongest person I knew

Justin's struggles started early; his mental health began to spiral at just eight years old. He was diagnosed early in his teen years with bipolar disorder. While his mental health was an enduring challenge, it also gave Justin a unique ability to connect with and support others through their own struggles. In fifth grade, one of his classmates locked himself in the bathroom and refused to come out. It was Justin, and only Justin, who could soothe the anxious child and eventually persuade him to unlock the door.



Justin was beloved amongst his friends and family. His laugh, sense of humor, and extensive knowledge endeared him to countless people in his community. He lovingly considered his closest friends to be "adopted" siblings. Chris, Justin's dad, said that his son was his best friend. His brother Tyler deeply cherished his younger brother, endearingly referring to him as "his baby." Corey Duclos was also a dear friend throughout Justin's life. His aunt Kathy fondly remembers late night phone calls with her nephew in which Justin described in detail his inner world.

Anything automobile-related brought Justin immense joy. He loved auto shows, cars, and working on his own vehicles. He read extensively on a wide variety of topics, but information about cars was where he truly shined.

Despite Justin's sharp and curious mind, school was always a difficult place for him. The education system simply did not accommodate Justin's needs. Not only did it fail him, but so did all the other systems meant to support him—mental health care services, law enforcement, social services, and the court systems misunderstood and misplaced Justin at every turn. Justin dreamed of someday opening his own marijuana farm once it was legalized in Vermont,

but was largely not able to conceptualize the future because of the intensity of his day-to-day struggle with his mental health.

After witnessing the devastating failure of community infrastructure to support Justin, his mother Margie Lemay transitioned into a new job at the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Vermont (NAMI). There, she became a passionate advocate for individuals facing substance use and mental health crises. Just a week after her son's passing she testified at the Senate Health and Welfare Committee. She asked the committee to help re-design the social systems that do not efficiently or adequately serve those that need it most.

Justin did not want his life to end. He was seeking relief from his mental pain in a world where the systems offered little respite. His parents poured all their love, resources, and energy into supporting him, but in the end, Justin was a prisoner of his mental illness and substance use disorder. He is remembered with deep love, and his story remains a call to action for a more compassionate and responsive world.

Justin's aunt and mother, Kathleen Kilbourne and Margie Lemay, provided the information for this narrative

Justin Lemay
October 11, 1991 - January 24, 2023 (Age 31)

Portrait Artist: Carol Meckling
Narrative Writer: Livia Cohen

Shawn T. McDonald

He was the greatest son one could imagine

In the summer of 2023, when catastrophic floods swept through Vermont and left the city of Barre submerged and shaken, Shawn McDonald became a familiar sight moving from one waterlogged basement to the next. With his generator and water pump in tow, he worked tirelessly to clear homes and businesses of floodwater. He never asked for payment. He simply showed up because that's who he was. For Shawn, service was not an act of heroism—it was purely instinct.



Shawn lived life with an ambitious drive, a penchant for hard work, and contagious *joie de vivre*. He had a deep passion for bass fishing and deer hunting, where he found peace and purpose and delighted in teaching others his skills. After high school, he went to tech school for data workers of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Union Local #300. He worked as a data installer and as a carpenter before starting his own construction company. One of his proudest achievements was the house he built for his mother.

To his father, Tom, and mother, Susan, Shawn was “the greatest son one could imagine,” steadfast, loyal, and endlessly giving. He held a special place in the lives of his nieces and nephews, who adored him. Shawn was deeply devoted and very close to his younger brother, Scott, watching over him and his friends with fierce, protective loyalty. He also enjoyed a close kinship with Scott’s wife, Monica. His stepmother, Patricia, was his confidante, and the family’s memories with Shawn—holiday gatherings, Christmas traditions, and vacations to Maine are remembered fondly.

By 2024, Shawn had a lot to look forward to. His construction business was steadily growing, and his dreams of retiring before 55 were increasingly feasible. He had plans to marry his partner, Ashley

Clark. More than anything, Shawn dreamed of having children he could teach to fish and hunt, sharing with them the passions that had shaped him.

But everything that Shawn was working toward was cut short. A back injury that required prescribed pain medication derailed Shawn's carefully planned future and set in motion a struggle that ultimately claimed his life. In the aftermath of their loss, his family now faces the devastating truth of just how ubiquitous Shawn's story is. His passing has left a deep and painful chasm in his family and community—an absence felt daily in the quiet moments, the traditions, and the places he once filled with such life and generosity.

Now Tom attends a grief group and spreads awareness about the dangers of substance use disorder.

Shawn is missed every single day.

Shawn's father, Tom McDonald, provided the information for this narrative

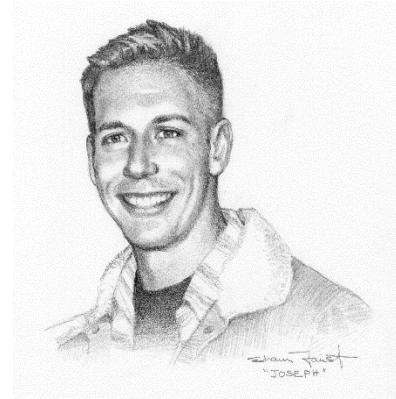
Shawn McDonald
May 3, 1983 - January 5, 2024 (Age 40)

Portrait Artist: Clayton Conner
Narrative Writer: Livia Cohen

Joseph M Mikenas

Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt

Joey was a selfless, kind soul who, despite times of depression, wanted to see life as beautiful. He was loyal, loving, and charismatic—always the first to help a friend or family member in need. If he had five dollars, he would give you four. His mother, Agnes, shared, “He once pitched an entire game with no hits. His nickname was Smokin’ Joe. He had a fastball no one could touch.” Though she didn’t recognize the signs of addiction at the time, she loved him through all the tough times he experienced.



From a young age, Joey showed extraordinary natural artistic and musical talent. He could pick up any instrument and play it beautifully—guitar, piano, drums—all self-taught. Music was his refuge and his gift to others. “It was magical how he played guitar,” his sister Shannon stated. “It could bring you to tears.” As he poured emotion into every note, his listeners became transfixed, and Joey forgot about his addiction.

Joey’s artistic spirit extended beyond music. His former wife, Brianna, said, “He was talented in drawing and with his words and writing as well. So many phrases he made up, I still reference today.” Joey’s addiction opened her eyes to the reality that no one is immune to this disease, even ones we respect, admire, and hold in the highest regard. It knows no bounds.

A hard worker, Joey went to night classes to become an electrician, ultimately becoming a well-respected and sought-after journeyman. He took pride in his craft, often driving his daughter Jacy to see the jobs he completed.

Family was everything to Joey. He adored Jacy, now 23, and treasured every milestone with her—teaching her to swim, drive, play guitar, and appreciate both the good and the bad in music. He often

made-up songs spontaneously. Jacy remembers the “Jacy song” and how he learned the theme songs to every television show she loved just to sing them for her. Now Jacy feels the deep ache of knowing her dad will never meet her boyfriend, Ryan, be at her eventual wedding, or know any children she might have. A philosophical man who felt everything deeply, Joey left this quote for Jacy in a book: *“There is a world beyond us. The more we look and harder we believe, the more real it all becomes.”*

Joey was also the best big brother—helping Shannon learn to ride a bike, spending time with her children, and offering wisdom and laughter through long philosophical conversations. His presence made every family gathering brighter, whether on Christmas Eve or during the annual apple-picking tradition with the Juntas, his mother’s large extended family.

Joey struggled with addiction for many years, sometimes becoming withdrawn, cold, and defensive. After his death, his sister thought that Joey, being at peace in heaven, would give the family peace as well, but she found “there is just a huge hole in the family and in our hearts. We are forever changed.”

Despite his pain, Joey was a reliable worker and was determined to get better, seeking treatment many times. “His energy was contagious; you wanted to engage with him,” Shannon stated. The family remembers his wisdom, his humor, his contagious smile, and his ability to see beauty in everything. A favorite quote from Kurt Vonnegut captures how he wanted to see the world: *“Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt.”*

Today, Shannon continues Joey’s legacy by pursuing a career in nursing, dedicating her work to helping others affected by addiction. “They are human. They are sick. They need love and support,” she says. “I hope he is proud of each and every one of us. We miss him more than words can describe.”

Joey's sister, Shannon Hansen, together with his mother, Agnes, daughter Jacy, and former wife, Brianna, provided the information for this narrative.

Joey Mikenas

August 11, 1981 - April 3, 2020 (Age 38)

Portrait Artist: Shawn Faust

Narrative Writer: Barbara Francois

Mayah Murchison

Sensitive, loving, wild, brilliant, powerful

One label could never capture Mayah. She was an adventurer, an explorer, an artist, a singer, and a devoted friend. She embraced the lost and was a ray of sunshine for the hopeless.



As elusive as she was undefinable, the easiest way to find Mayah was to follow the trail left from her beglittered regalia that inevitably dropped, which might lead down the path to a local swimming hole or maybe behind an abandoned building. You could also follow the sound of the colorful words she used to paint stories about faraway places or read aloud to a friend or cousin. Her beautiful mind encouraged others to dream and fight for what they believed in, even when it seemed crazy.

When the sun beat down, she and her companions waded in muddy waters and sweatily rambled forgotten lanes searching for lizards and crows. At night, when everything cooled, they drifted across shadowy graveyards and empty houses, passing through waist-high grass, catching flashes of snakes slithering between the blades.

From a young age, Mayah's imagination was vivid and boundless. A natural leader, she brought her brother, friends, cousins, and the occasional stranger together to spend countless hours constructing elaborate fairy houses by the stream, playing games in the hayloft, and producing various "Mayah-inspired" skits and performances.

She never outgrew that childlike wonder, and as a result, she drew it out of those around her, endearing herself to all who knew her. She took them cloud gazing, contra dancing, midnight walking, and cartwheeling across the beach. In earnest conversations, she taught those around her to love deeply and dream big, and they took her lessons to heart. She talked often about the world and her concern for global causes, especially the crisis in Gaza.

Her encouraging words continue to inspire those who loved her to remain openhearted, because their next great friendship could be where they least expect it.

Creative time was essential to Mayah. She spent hours reading, writing, gardening, walking, collaging, sewing, and doing origami in solitude. As practical as she was fanciful, teenage Mayah completed a 500-mile self-powered winter adventure with an expedition company, where she skied, canoed, rowed, and biked a circuit from southern New Hampshire, through northern Vermont, Lake Champlain and back. She later ventured overseas for an Ecuador program and on her own through Europe. Her friend described her best as “an intrepid traveler who loved the world and wanted more for and from it.”

Though the realities of managing substance use disorder changed the scope of her travels, she never stopped adventuring, loving people, or trying to escape from the trap she found herself in. Mayah harnessed her substance use struggles, channeling her energy into education and advocacy. She was passionate about substance use disorder education and wrote for a friend’s project, stressing the importance of harm reduction. She hoped to enroll in a long-term recovery treatment center and train for substance abuse prevention work to continue her positive impact.

Mayah’s mother, Rebekah Perry, provided the information for this narrative.

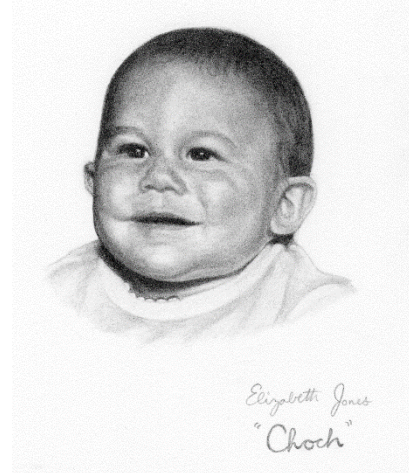
Mayah Murchinson
June 13, 1999 - May 29, 2025 (Age 25)

Portrait Artist: Clayton Conner
Narrative Writer: Willow Kline

Carleton “Choch” Murphy III

Loving, talented, protector, faithful, kind

Choch was funny. He was a protector. He had a strong faith and a big heart, and the people who loved him describe him as a big teddy bear. He was talented in art and drawing and could do impressions of others that made everyone laugh. He liked rapping, fishing, being outside, cooking good food, and spending time with family. One of his greatest joys was being with his dog, Capone.



From a young age, it was clear that Choch had a deep and natural well of empathy. His sister, Tera, recalls an ice-cream excursion from early childhood. The two had gone to get cones from a local shop. When she accidentally dropped hers and began crying, Choch, without a second thought, threw his own cone on the ground and told her not to be sad.

Family mattered to Choch. Holidays were always spent together, even birthdays. Although Choch and Tera were three years apart in age, their birthdays differed by just two calendar days, so they always had joint parties. Those family gatherings were important to him and remained a part of his life as long as he was able to stay connected.

Choch worked in construction and furniture delivery. Friends and family remember him as “a good guy with a good heart.” After his death, many stories were shared about how he quietly helped his friends and showed up for their children.

Choch lived with the disease of addiction for more than ten years. Over time, it changed him. He became distant and began lying and stealing. He disappeared for long periods, and when he was around, he was reserved and uncharacteristically serious. He no longer laughed. Five months before his death, he was hospitalized for an extended time after trying to take his life while under the influence.

Sadly, he returned to using drugs within 48 hours of being discharged from the hospital.

He is deeply missed by his mother, Shawni, his father, Charlie, his stepmother, Cristy, his sisters, Tera and Charly Ann, and many aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, and a godchild. His sister describes losing him as the “greatest pain she has ever known” and carries lasting guilt about not being able to help him.

In Choch’s memory, his sister Tera, who is in recovery, has turned grief into action by helping to organize Windsor’s Overdose Awareness Day. The event brings together recovery resources, free opioid reversal drug training, and speakers with lived experience. It ends with a candlelight vigil to honor lives lost to overdose. It is now in its fifth year.

Though substance use disorder had a tight hold on Choch from early in his teenage years, he is remembered as a deeply caring person whose dreams for the future were cut short. His sister says, “I miss everything about him, except his substance use disorder. I miss being able to hang out with him, hug him, and just seeing his face.”

Carleton’s sister, Tera Howard, provided the information for this narrative.

Carleton “Choch” Murphy III
October 19, 1987 - September 25, 2019 (Age 31)

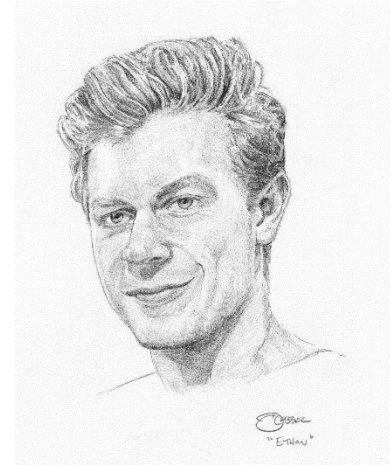
Portrait Artist: Elizabeth Jones

Narrative Writer: Barbara Francois

Ethan Parker

Empathetic, fun, generous, helpful, loved

A natural-born leader, Ethan was the type of person who took his role in people's lives seriously. He was inquisitive and cared a lot about gaining a deeper understanding of his loved ones. He always worked to ensure everyone felt seen by him and felt good about their time together. His unique sense of humor could make anyone laugh. Being smart, valuing communication and connection, and being personable were some of his greatest strengths. Ethan and his childhood best friend, Caleb, remained close for his entire life. The two of them were thick as thieves, and in their free time they enjoyed gaming as well as working on small-engine machines like mopeds and lawn mowers to see how fast they could make them go.



Aside from his friends, his greatest love in life was his car. Ethan spent countless hours in the garage working to improve its performance. He also had a propensity for outdoor sports and was a big fan of hunting, ice fishing, and shooting sporting clays. Ethan found immense joy in cooking good food and had an excellent work ethic. He worked for his father in his construction business, which employs over 200 people. Ethan planned to take over the business in the future. In addition to working, Ethan graduated with a bachelor's degree from Union College in Albany, New York.

Ethan always loved spending the holidays with his family. His Aunt Cat typically had the pleasure of spending New Year's Eve with Ethan and his sister Camille. She reminisces about the time they rang in the New Year at their family's cabin. The trio hiked on snowshoes to the totem pole to celebrate the holiday. When they returned, they stayed up drinking hot cocoa and playing a trivia game. They all brought out their sleeping bags and slept on the floor in front of the fireplace. Another fond memory of hers is of the Easter they spent together,

where she drove the four-wheeler down a trail while the kids looked on both sides to find the candy that the Easter Bunny had hidden.

Though Ethan was full of life, he also had struggles to face. One was his ongoing battle with Lyme disease. His body grew resistant to the treatments over time, which left him fatigued. Being 22 and dealing with a chronic illness took a lot out of him and contributed to his depression. More than anything, Ethan wanted to work and make memories with people he loved, but his physical and mental health proved a constant barrier. He didn't know how to ask for the help he needed. Cat says she regrets not knowing how to help him in the last months of his life, but Ethan was good at pretending he had things handled and nobody was aware of how bad things had gotten for him. The things she misses the most about Ethan are his hugs, his laugh, his wit, and their insightful conversations.

Ethan's aunt, Cat Yoder, provided information for this narrative.

Ethan Parker

March 4, 1999 - January 11, 2022 (Age 22)

Portrait Artist: Jeremy Hebbel

Narrative Writer: Victoria Estes

Kristina M. Perrin

Beautiful, caring, fun-loving spirit

"She was a soul on fire, streaking through the universe like an asteroid bound for great things. She was a healer, drawing wisdom from her scars, she was a spiritual beacon who taught me how to love and accept my higher power. She was passion itself. She loved and she loved hard." This excerpt, from one of Kristina Perrin's best friends, is just one testament, amidst countless others, that tells of Kristina's profound impact on those around her.



At 16, Kristina's life was irrecoverably altered when her best friend was abducted and murdered. She suffered other dark tragedies throughout her years, but just as she cultivated strength in the face of addiction, she too challenged the harsh realities of life with her trademark vibrant spirit. Thus, despite personal hardship, people often remarked on Kristina's childlike spirit and sense of wonder.

Kristina struggled with substance use disorder for 20 years, never losing hope, and working hard to maintain sobriety and health. She attended dialectical behavior therapy classes to regulate her emotions and behaviors. She also maintained work, nurtured a rich social world, and never stopped fighting, despite life's setbacks. Kristina dedicated herself to many restorative practices: yoga, gardening, singing, running, strength training, cooking, and reading, to name a few.

Through a love for movement and the outdoors, Kristina continued to find beauty and ambition in life. From an early age, she competed as a runner, often receiving awards for her performance. She planned on becoming a certified yoga instructor, with aspirations to manage her own studio. Adept in the restaurant industry, she earned three pins recognizing her outstanding service, trust-building skills, and exceptional teamwork. Kristina also worked as a manager and cook at a deli and as a natural products demonstrator/ambassador.

Kristina was an integral and loving member of her tight-knit family. She had a close relationship with her brother, whom she looked up to all her life. She loved spending time with her nephews, often scurrying off with the boys for ice cream or a craft project. Together, the family ran as a relay team for the Vermont City Marathon. The Perrins also enjoyed family trips to Misquamicut Beach and the White Mountains.

Kristina's legacy is one of inspiration, her vibrant personality continuing to inform those who knew her. One of her best friends wrote: "To remember her I will make tabouli from scratch, I will run a 5k to promote recovery, I will love my nephew beyond words. I will live as fiercely as she did. And love as freely, as well." Her mother, Cynthia, maintains the same unbreakable spirit as her daughter, continuing Kristina's optimism with the message: "As a parent: Never Give Up Hope!" Cynthia is a member of Vermont Team Sharing, a non-profit organization for parents who have lost their child to substance use disorder.

Kristina's mother, Cynthia Perrin, provided the information for this narrative.

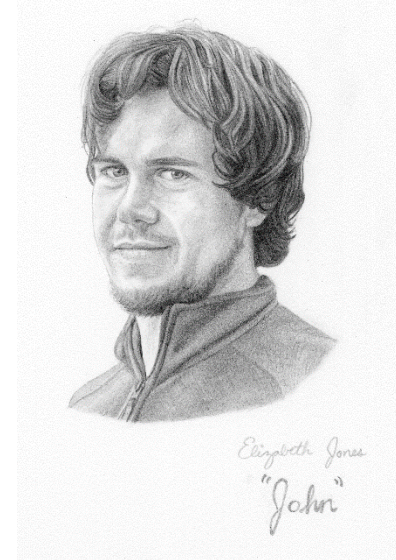
Kristina Perrin
July 10, 1983 - January 12, 2021 (Age 37)

Portrait Artist: Jeremy Hebbel
Narrative Writer: Livia Cohen

John Thomas Randall

"Live well and do good"

John, a musical, outdoorsy wanderlust, loved life and could find the good in anyone. Vivacious and intelligent, he loved problem solving and sharing his knowledge. With teachers for parents, John spent many summer vacations all over the world. He had many passions in life, including skiing, science, computers, technology, and travel. Kind and caring, John was one-of-a-kind, a phenomenal listener, and a helper to his core. Dance, music, and socializing filled John's days with joy, and his calm presence and loyal nature helped him form lifelong bonds, like with his neighbor Thomas and his younger brother Will.



John's family loved skiing, so he grew up on the slopes. He raced downhill until he was 15, then became a ski instructor. His love of the sport took him everywhere from the Adirondacks to Austria, and many places in between. When the weather warmed up, he hiked the hills instead. Off the trails, he learned the intricacies of computer science, achieving his CompTIA A+ certification. He intended to complete a college degree and begin a career in technology. He developed a passion for assembling and repairing computers, as well as making music with them. Talented in trombone and bass guitar, he found a way to combine his musical interests, channel his creativity, and make music part of his career. An avid reader with a strong academic curiosity, John was especially interested in science—particularly biology and how substances affect the human body.

Temptation from his social circle caused the initial exploration of drugs. Though John was aware of how they would change him physically and mentally, he embraced the effects, his scientific mind more curious than cautious. He understood how substances would change him over time, how his dopamine receptors would react, and explained these details to his mother, Jane, while she grew more

frustrated and helpless. While enduring the disorder, he was often sick, tired, and lacked his usual joviality. Family maintained their support, encouraging wellness and rehabilitation programs, though John sought independence and thought himself strong enough to endure after stints of success. After six months of wellness, a period full of promise, a single choice ended John's journey.

Ten years have gone by since John's passing. Jane's grief is insurmountable. She and John's father are left with unanswered questions and suppositions about what could have been done differently to prevent the tragedy. Understanding substance use disorder became even more important, and they joined *Step Into Action VT* to advocate for wellness. Jane misses her son: his hugs, his voice, and his love. She is dedicated to continuing to share his motto as a testament to her undying love: *"Life is precious; live well and do good."*

John's mother, Jane Halliday-Randall, provided the information for this narrative.

John Randall
January 11, 1988 - July 1, 2015 (Age 27)

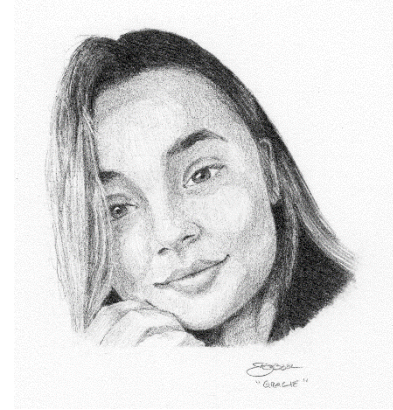
Portrait Artist: Elizabeth Jones
Narrative Writer: Jill Denton

Grace Katherine Riley

Grace and grit in equal parts

When Gracie was just 15 years old, she helped deliver her baby brother, Asa. She had planned to stand by her mom's side, hold her hand, and keep her gaze steadily focused on anything but the ensuing action.

But when the doctor stepped out of the room, Gracie stepped forward. She was an essential part of bringing Asa into the world and even cut the umbilical cord herself. From that moment on, Asa was just as much hers as anyone's. The two were inseparable. He called her his "big, big."



That instinct to step forward, show up for others, and act with bravery defined Gracie. At just 5'2", she was a force on the basketball court, renowned for her killer three-pointers. Off the court, she loved to cruise the Burlington waterfront on her longboard, paint abstract portraits, write, or read to Asa. She loved spicy food, singing obnoxiously in the car with her mom, fishing with her dad, and chocolate chip pancakes with strawberries and Nutella.

Known for using her loud voice unabashedly and fearlessly to advocate for the abused, the unheard, and the hurting, Gracie planned on using her college scholarship to further her ability to help others. She was pursuing a degree in psychology with aspirations to work in either addiction treatment or child psychology. Yet her own battle with addiction was a source of deep shame. She did not see "nice girls" from middle-class families in her community facing addiction, and the stigma only deepened her pain and isolated her.

In her wake, Gracie left behind a community of beloved friends and family. Marcella and Destiny, her two best friends, and Hunter, her soul mate, carry on her memory. Hunter's younger sister Maggie was Gracie's honorary little sister. She was just 13 when Gracie passed, and she was deeply affected by the loss. Maggie went on to write a paper about Gracie that was published in Congress, as well as work

as a Narcan ambassador for local schools. She has since been nationally recognized for her overdose awareness advocacy.

Gracie's mom, Amy, misses her loud laugh, her smell, the trail of paint she left all over the house, and her long, soft hair.

On the last day of Gracie's life, she had dinner at home. Her parents had cooked her favorite dinner. After eating, she spun Asa around the dining room, the two siblings whirling into one of their classic impromptu dances. Then she got in her car and drove away. When she parked, she took a single pill, went to sleep, and never woke up.

Even in her absence, Gracie's force of nature is felt. Three people have credited her as the reason they sought recovery. Two of them are still alive today. Her story continues in the lives she touched, the voices she lifted, and the love she gave so freely and fiercely.

Gracie's mother, Amy Riley, provided the information for this narrative.

Grace Riley
August 25, 2000 - June 2, 2022 (Age 21)

Portrait Artist: Jeremy Hebbel
Narrative Writer: Livia Cohen

Professor William Ruff

Compassionate, brilliant source of inspiration

Beloved father, professor, photographer, counselor, botanist, astronomer, songwriter, comedian, musician, mentor, and motorcyclist, Bill Ruff lived a dynamic and impactful life. Donning the moniker “Your Highness” in his peer counseling circle, Bill’s grace, intelligence, compassion, and humility demonstrated his deep dedication to supporting others. Rooted in the earth as well as the heavens, his two daughters, Emily and Kelsie, enjoyed digging in the dirt with their father just as much as stargazing. They were his favorite photography subjects.



Bill wore many hats throughout his life, from alligator handler to home builder to piano tutor, demonstrating his innumerable talents. He expressed his creative spirit by writing, playing and recording music, and preparing family-loved Scottish sweets on holidays. A man of limitless inspiration and tireless ambition, he was a true gentleman, sensitive and attuned to emotional and physical realms.

Bill’s early years were spent on a tropical fruit farm in Florida. At six, a visit to a local observatory sparked a lifelong interest in astronomy. His childhood on the farm, combined with studying Latin in high school, eventually led to a career in plant taxonomy, including bachelor’s and master’s degrees in botany. As a teen, Bill discovered his talent for music. He founded a local band, The Incidentals, in the late 1960s, before becoming road manager for the band Flow. He co-authored a song with legendary guitarist Don Felder in 1970.

Love of astronomy and photography took him to Bogotá, Colombia, in the 1970s to capture solar eclipses. He also went on trips to view shuttle launches, organized community stargazing events, and savored an autographed, first-edition copy of Buzz Aldrin’s book *Magnificent Desolation*.

As a professor of earth and space science at a local community college for most of his adult life, Bill showed his students the natural wonders of the world. With true charisma, he toted around a binder full of presentation-ready jokes, broke out perfect Spanish at Mexican restaurants, and sarcastically joked that, after a single ski lesson, he'd surely continue to Olympic qualifiers.

Though he struggled with various mental health diagnoses, remnants of early-life trauma, and lifelong substance misuse, he worked hard to maintain wellness. Bill was active in groups like NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) and Wings Across Alabama, as an advocate, facilitator, peer counselor, and trainer in his later years. His work influenced legislation, landing him on local news.

In 2016, a grant from the Twilight Wish Foundation outfitted his apartment with recording equipment, and he quickly produced a catalog of original music. Though misuse caused separation from his daughters in the 1990s, the trio later reconnected to form authentic, meaningful bonds that made up for lost time. Bill lived with his daughter in Vermont in his final years, preparing to relocate there full-time to be closer to his family, continue his music, watch the stars from northern skies, and stay active in peer counseling and advocacy.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 and the related disruption to his social and support systems ended Bill's life in 2020. Three separate Zoom memorials followed to accommodate the many grieving hearts he touched. The depth and breadth of his impact were extraordinary. His daughters, inspired by his courage, his transformation of pain into purpose, and his commitment to advocacy, are forever shaped by his example. Though their grief is indescribable, it has led them to further his cause, to see the beauty in everything around them, and to share his legacy as openly and genuinely as he lived his life.

Bill's daughter, Emily Ruff, provided the information for this narrative.

William Ruff

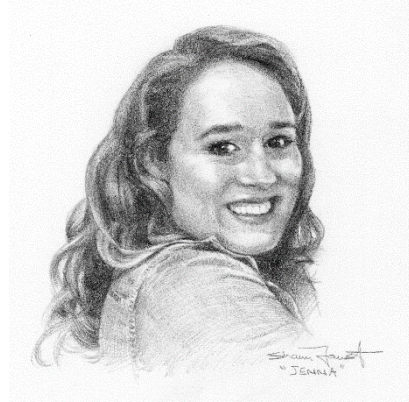
October 10, 1948 - May 19, 2020 (Age 71)

Portrait Artist: Clayton Conner
Narrative Writer: Jill Denton

Jenna Rae Tatro

*Charismatic, inventive, loving, heartfelt,
and compassionate*

Always smiling, Jenna had a gift for making people feel truly seen, valued, and loved—each person as though they were her best friend. She also had a soft spot for both animals and people in need, providing nurturance and encouragement to help them move forward. Drawn to adventure and adrenaline, Jenna loved the outdoors—skiing, showing horses, riding snowmobiles, and driving fast cars. A gifted writer, artist, and photographer, Jenna communicated her thoughts and feelings eloquently through a variety of creative outlets.



After graduating from high school, Jenna and her best friend, Fiona, traveled around the world, staying in hostels in Dubai, Germany, India, Greece, and Turkey. Upon returning home, she began attending Johnson State College to embark on her dream of becoming a psychiatrist. However, after one semester, addiction disrupted that path and prevented her from continuing her education.

Even in her struggles, Jenna held tight to her circle of eight inseparable friends from high school: Fiona, Lilly, Ashley, Meg, Riley, Jasmine, Tori, and Julie, who proudly called themselves “Jenna’s Posse.” They delivered eulogies at her funeral, were her pallbearers, and are the keepers of her memories. Friends from recovery, Kaylea, Bee, and Mickey, stood by Jenna during difficult times and credited her with keeping them in the program. To this day, all of Jenna’s friends remain connected with her family.

Every year, Jenna and her Nana traveled to New York City to see shows. She loved spending time with her brother, Gregory, his wife Amy, and nephew Eisen, whom Jenna adored. Her dad, Greg, remembers days skiing together, followed by Peppermint Patties to satisfy Jenna’s sweet tooth. Her mom, Dawn, treasures memories of

Jenna walking along the roadside and picking wildflowers to bring home. Once, instead of flowers, Jenna had found an injured owl that she rescued and brought to the vet. Dawn especially misses her daughter's daily phone calls, their shopping trips, and the quiet moments they spent watching television side-by-side.

Family vacations were also a source of joy and treasured memories. One especially meaningful trip was to Costa Rica. At first, Jenna's father was reluctant to go, concerned about safety, but he eventually joined to "protect" Jenna and her mom, who had already decided to make the trip. The trip was so special that the family purchased a home there, returning each year to spend a month together.

Over time, the disease of addiction consumed Jenna's life. She spent time in multiple treatment centers and was often sick from drug-related illnesses. "It took her heart and soul away, and she became someone that we did not recognize when she was using drugs," her mother stated. "We couldn't save her—the disease owned her and stole her spirit."

Even in her own struggles, Jenna had a unique ability to guide those affected by substance use disorder toward hope when they could not find it themselves. After Jenna's passing, the family faced a choice. "We decided as a family that we could do nothing and be consumed with our grief, or do something to help others," Dawn said. "Jenna had an emotional connection with people that inspired others to follow. Her adventurous spirit helped people be resilient and view challenges as opportunities for growth, inspiring hope and optimism." Jenna had her family promise her that they would help others enter treatment and spread awareness about substance use disorder. They have carried forward her wishes with "Jenna's Promise," a nonprofit they created to break down barriers to addiction recovery, just as Jenna had always planned to do.

Jenna's mother, Dawn Tatro, provided the information for this narrative.

Jenna Tatro

August 3, 1992 - February 15, 2019 (Age 26)

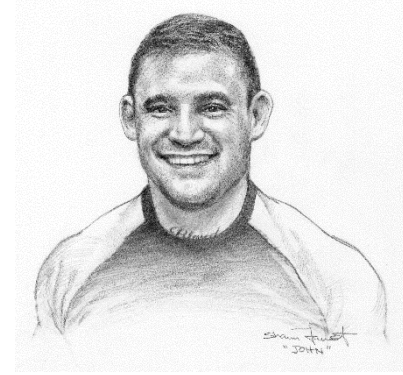
Portrait Artist: Shawn Faust

Narrative Writer: Barbara Francois

John R. Thorpe

Compassion, loyalty, struggle, love, strength

John warmed every room with his charm and kindness and had a natural gift for connection. It didn't matter the context, a party or the gas station, John was sure to walk away with a friend. That was just how quickly and naturally he made others feel seen. Then, once he cared for someone, his loyalty ran deep.



Not even John's opponents could resist his friendship. Mixed martial arts was John's greatest passion, and during his first match in Maryland, he and his adversary, Leonard Poe, were incredibly nervous. Although John lost, his fighting won Poe's respect, and their bond lasted far beyond the match.

John's physical prowess earned him the title of number one hugger outside the ring, at least according to his sister, Jaime. He'd wrap her in a squeeze that was the perfect amount of pressure, the sort of hug that melted even her biggest worries away.

He also had a keen mind. He saw what others missed, readily acquired new skills, and was determined in his goals. When he set his sights on George Washington University, it was only a matter of time before he was admitted. This knack, combined with innate curiosity, lent well to his habit of tinkering and working with his hands in his spare time. He did everything, from carpentry to customizing his Harley-Davidson, especially if it meant time with his dad.

Family was crucial to John. Formal get-togethers and casual hangs all held equal importance, but growing up, summers were his favorite. He, Jaime, and their parents visited their grandmother's home in Calabash, North Carolina, every year. Those sunny beach days were filled with laughter as they plunged into the waves and buried each other in the sand. The trip was not complete until they stopped at their favorite spot, Callahan's gift shop.

John's greatest joy was his son, Hayden, and John wanted to make up for the milestones he'd missed during active addiction. Addiction changed him into someone deceitful, self-centered, and angry, but recovery transformed him. He made amends and restored trust with people he thought he'd lost forever. Step by step, he began to shine again and became stronger. He spent five years rebuilding his life, reconnecting with Hayden, and sharing his experiences with his family. John helped them understand his struggles by confessing the darkest truths of the disease. He revealed that if given the choice between what he loved most—his son and his sister—and substances, he would always choose substances. It pained him to admit it, and he wished it were false, but it was the reality, and John refused to be dishonest with his loved ones.

People assumed a lot about John, and classmates said he would amount to nothing, but he became so much in the face of adversity. He proved himself capable of deep love and transformation in the darkest moments. John's unwavering commitment to honesty brought his struggles and the struggles of many with substance use disorder into light.

John's sister, Jaime Thorpe, provided the information for this narrative.

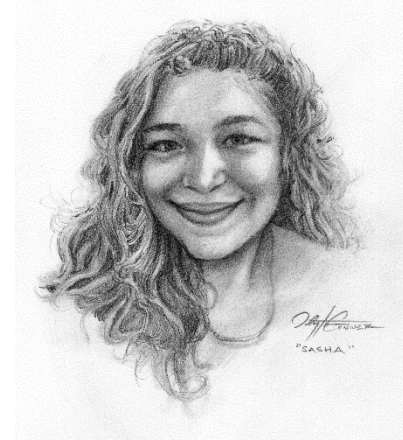
John Thorpe
April 1, 1986 - May 10, 2017 (Age 31)

Portrait Artist: Shawn Faust
Narrative Writer: Willow Kline

Sasha Torrens-Sperry

Talented, hilarious, compassionate, brave, and loving

Beautiful, kind, and gifted, Sasha possessed a heart naturally attuned to life's rhythm. She was talented beyond her years and possessed a musician's ear. Her aptitude was clear from a young age. She had sophisticated taste, refined from hours spent listening to global genres, honing her voice, and practicing piano, trumpet, guitar, and sitar. With a striking mane of long, curly hair, a dark sense of humor, and subtle elegance, she left a lasting impression.



Sasha's innate empathy and compassion put those around her at ease. She could make even acquaintances feel less lonely with her presence. Holiday celebrations, especially Halloween and Thanksgiving, brought joy to Sasha's life, as did the family cat Mimi.

Sasha's Dominican heritage meant she traveled to the island often, riding the family's Donkey, Bepo, spending quality time with loved ones, and going on beach outings. Back home, she delighted in concerts. For her 25th birthday, her mother, Abigail, took her to see Radiohead. Radiohead was their soundtrack for every car ride to and from school, and Abigail will never forget her daughter's pure joy during the show. An only child until nine, Sasha was eventually graced with a younger sister, Gabriela, whom she adored and doted on like a protective mother. Together, Abigail and her daughters shared a tattoo that Sasha had designed: a symbolic reminder of their bond, despite physical distance.

After acceptance to Berklee College of Music on a piano scholarship, her talent and life goals truly took shape. Her finely tuned ear also lent itself to a knack for foreign languages. College-level Chinese and Russian classes taken at the same time posed no issue for Sasha.

After graduating early from Berklee with a degree in Electronic Production and Design, she taught music in Boston. Teaching was gratifying to Sasha, and she excelled, winning Outstanding Teacher of the Year. She loved motivating people to enjoy the craft as she did.

With addiction came depression, anger, and defiance. The pandemic-spurred isolation further intensified her struggle. Abigail worried day and night for her daughter as she lost control in the terrifying turnabout. Gabriela felt neglected as Sasha's behavior commanded attention, and both she and her mother felt the endless turmoil of unconditional love.

She moved to New York to seek treatment and continue her creative endeavors among a mix of people and cultures. After stints in treatment, Sasha landed a rigorous teaching position at a piano academy. She moved to Queens, planned to walk more, and take care of her health. She aimed to repair relationships marred by substance use disorder and continue her love of all things musical. Unfortunately, after seven years of struggle, the curtain closed on Sasha's symphony.

Though her performance has ended, Sasha's opus plays on in the hearts of those she touched. The music lessons she taught, the final visits she made to family, and her deep influence form lasting memories. Abigail's grief is indescribable. To honor her daughter, she plants sunflowers each spring, commemorating Sasha's light-seeking energy. She encourages destigmatizing advocacy, art, and music, and believes no one should feel alone or ashamed of this disorder. She misses Sasha's music, the random text messages or phone calls while she ordered chopped cheese sandwiches at the bodega, her hugs, and perhaps most of all, the strong, resilient, and effervescent energy she brought to the world.

Sasha's mother, Abigail Sperry, provided the information for this narrative.

Sasha Torrens-Sperry
July 16, 1993 - July 24, 2022 (Age 29)

Portrait Artist: Clayton Conner
Narrative Writer: Jill Denton

DJ Walters

Gentleman, witty, loyal, mischievous, devoted

DJ Walters was known for the way he carried himself—he believed in chivalry, being a gentleman, and in small gestures that mattered. He was also known for his charm, his signature grin, and his 100-watt smile. When meeting a girlfriend’s mother or grandmother, he would show up with flowers and a pressed button-down shirt. It was simply who he was.



“Ever since he could walk, he was playing a sport,” his sister, Kimber said. At Mount Anthony Union High School, he stood out for his athletic ability, competitiveness, and drive. Though he was intelligent and capable, he hated the confines of a classroom and left school before graduating.

Family was central to DJ’s life. He grew up surrounded by a large extended family. He was especially close to his cousin, Derrick. Though he and Kimber fought non-stop, they grew closer later in DJ’s life and confided in each other. It was common for DJ to show up at someone’s home, sit on the porch, and talk for hours with coffee and cigarette in hand. He also loved to dance, be outdoors, camp, and plan elaborate pranks. Quick-witted and funny, DJ was often the first to deliver a perfectly timed comeback.

For DJ’s tenth birthday—a big, loud, family gathering with dozens of cousins—his mom splurged on a Steelers-themed football field cake. The moment the group finished singing, DJ, and cousins Derrick, Matt, and Dennis dove in, smashing the cake and staging a full-on food fight while the adults shouted and DJ’s sister ran off in tears. The chaos became one of the family’s favorite stories still told today.

His quick thinking and cleverness showed up in other ways as well. DJ’s childhood included trauma that sometimes resulted in anger or restlessness. So, his mother took him to see a therapist. After fighting

him all the way there one day, his mom finally said, "If you can figure out a way to get out of it, you don't have to go." Less than five minutes into the appointment, the therapist came out, offered condolences for the "loss" of DJ's grandmother and suggested rescheduling. Embarrassed and confused, his mom rushed DJ to the car and asked what had happened. He said, "You told me if I could figure out a way to get out of therapy, I didn't have to go—so I told him your mother died."

DJ found purpose working alongside his father, Seth, uncles, and cousins in the family tree business and sometimes built homes. Though he spent much of his adult life in jail, DJ earned his GED and talked about going to college to become an architect. DJ cared deeply about family and wanted to be a husband and a father. He formed close bonds with the children in his life, including the twin girls of a partner, and he took those relationships seriously.

DJ lived with substance use disorder from a young age, as did other members of the family. The one time he asked for help at an emergency room, help was not given, which should never happen.

Kimber is now an advocate for those with substance use disorder. Her own addiction and experience with DJ led her to work with SafeSpot, a virtual overdose prevention hotline. She says, "The work has taught me that there is room for humanity, humor, and connection even in really heavy spaces."

Kimber misses laughing with DJ and remembers him as protective, funny, and constant. "I find myself grieving the future he never got to create."

DJ's sister, Kimber King, provided the information for this narrative.

DJ Walters

April 8, 1984 - August 20, 2008 (Age 24)

Portrait Artist: Clayton Conner

Narrative Writer: Barbara Francois

Alexa L. Williams

Kind, caring, loving, funny, and smart

One thing was always clear about Alexa Williams—she was brilliant. In high school, teachers would consult Alexa to double-check that their computations were correct. As a child, instead of doodles, the pages of her notebooks and the margins of her books were cluttered with complex arithmetic. Friends and family brought her computers and laptops to fix, which she did, eagerly, and in a flash. After graduating from Mount Mansfield Union High School, she earned her degree in math and psychology at East Tennessee State University. That was also where she met her loving husband, James.



As a baby, people often remarked that Alexa looked like Tweety Bird, with matching round eyes and thick eyelashes. When she was first beginning to talk, she would lift her arms and command “Gupper!” a variation on “get up there,” expressing her sweet demand to be picked up.

Growing up, Alexa was inseparable from her older brother, Jason. They tore around the neighborhood on their bikes, romped in the sandbox and swing set, and played board games. The siblings’ very favorite activity was King Pied, a strategy-based French card game, which they played with their grandparents and great-grandma. She grew into a striking woman, 6’1”, with hazel eyes, full lips, and a beautiful smile.

Gloria was Alexa’s best friend. From middle school through Alexa’s entire life, the two were like sisters. Alexa, Gloria, and Alexa’s sister-in-law Kiersten all got pregnant the same year, having their babies within six months of each other. Alexa’s baby boy, Ethan, was everything to her. Spending time with him was her most treasured activity. Her mom, April, said that Ethan was like a mini version of

Alexa, and the duo adored watching Minions. She loved being a mom and always dreamed of having another baby.

All throughout Alexa's life, she was incredibly close with her April. They spoke every day, often several times. They loved to have mother-daughter weekend getaways. April remembers a trip to Playa del Carmen in which her luggage got lost. They had to share clothes the whole trip, and they loved it. One of their last memories together was in Vermont. Alexa had come home to decompress. The two picked peaches together, made jam, snuggled, and watched their favorite movies.

Substance use wrought distrust and tragedy amidst Alexa's tight-knit family. A few years before her death, she and James lost a child. Her behavior became increasingly erratic and manipulative. April found she could no longer trust her and had to ask her to leave the house in Vermont. Despite the tensions, April did all she could to help Alexa. She cared for Ethan for four months while Alexa was in treatment, fighting valiantly against the suffocating grip of substances. Ultimately, the long-lasting violence of an early opioid prescription ended Alexa's life. Her bright, big eyes, beautiful smile, brilliance, and endless love endure in the memory of her many loved ones.

Alexa's mother, April Williams, provided the information for this narrative.

Alexa Williams

February 25, 1986 - October 26, 2019 (Age 33)

Portrait Artist: Jeremy Hebbel

Narrative Writer: Livia Cohen