

# A Life of Love



by Rob Jackson

Even though I am not quite 50, this is the 5th Eulogy I have given.

They are difficult to write, and even harder to deliver.

This one will be the hardest of them all.

So, please forgive me if my delivery suffers.



Christopher Daniel Jackson was an unusual child.

He burst into the world when Cheri and I were stationed in Key West . . .

and all he wanted to do was eat . . .

and eat

. . . and eat.

No matter how much food we gave him, he would take it, then ask for more. Like many babies, Christopher mastered non-verbal signals to communicate. For him, it was mouth wide-open like a baby bird for more, head tilt to the left for no more.

We did a lot of bird watching those first few years. Can you tell?



Christopher also spoke with a perfect English accent.

When I was in graduate school, Cheri and I had au pairs live with us for a few years.

The first one, Jenny, was from Southampton, England And she spoke the Queens' English in its most proper and precise form.

This was right about the time that Christopher was learning to speak. So soon he was talking about going out to play in the "back garden" and exclaiming that things were "simply mad," spoken just like any true Englishman . . . except that he was 2 feet tall.





He once proudly announced to the entire assembled family that he was “Christopher Daniel Jackson” and he “was a comedian”

So . . . , by the time he was 3 years old, we had this butterball kid, that spoke like he was an extra in Downton Abbey, and thought he was Louis C.K.

So THAT was a lot of fun.

After school, we moved to Panama City to be closer to our extended family.

Christopher was the first born, male, grandchild in the sea of estrogen that is my wife’s family. She has THREE sisters . . no brothers.

But they assured us that Christopher wasn’t treated any differently than anyone else.





By the time Christopher started school at Bay Haven, he was already developing his comedic talents. His third grade teacher loved Christopher because he was the only kid in class that seemed get all of her subtle, sophisticated jokes. She told us that he must be gifted - no testing needed.

In 5th grade, Christopher was having difficulty with a poetry assignment, so his teacher asked him to search for his Innerself. He said he had none, then proceeded to sign all of his papers for the rest of the term, "Innerself," as if he was still searching for it. To this day, that teacher still calls him Innerself.

Bay Haven is where Christopher became part of a great community and developed a close group of friends: Dallas, Nicolas, Josh, Austin, Jacob, Cara, Andrea, all called Christopher their friend, along with many others at Bay Haven.

And of course, there was the everpresent, Chandler.

Cayleigh told us this week that Christopher and Chan would go off into the woods at the beginning of every summer morning and only come back at the end of the day. Day after day.





What Chan did not say about the infamous Lynn Haven police adventure is that, for those of you who don't know, I am the Lynn Haven City Attorney. And I took the 2 am call that night and picked them up from the police station. So I was really hoping that no one would notice that this was my son. At first, all seemed clear. No one knew who I was. Then the next morning I got a call from Messer, the Police Chief. He said "How's your boy." Damn it!

Christopher and Chan were together so much, that I often thought that Chan was my son.

And I am sure that Charlie and Connie thought that Christopher was theirs too.

Despite going to different high schools scattered all over the county, this group stayed together and is still together today. I hope they remain friends forever.

### **Christopher would like that.**

Christopher loved the outdoors and adventure. And he had two speeds, fast, and ludicrously fast.

With Christopher, if it was worth doing, it was worth doing faster.

I learned this on our first ski trip.

Christopher was around 11. Both being first timers, we had taken basic ski lessons together.

While I was going down the bunny slope cautiously and carefully, I saw this little kid on a snowboard out of the corner of my eye tearing down the slope.

He hit a mogul, flew threw the trees and landed face first in a frozen creek. I thought "I hope he is ok," but as I got closer I saw that this daredevil, was in fact, my son.

As he picked his head up out of the creek, Christopher had his classic ear-to-ear smile on his face.

And for the first time in my life, I saw the face of pure joy.





Christopher developed his love of the outdoors in Colorado. There, we learned to fly fish together, ride dirt-bikes and ATVs, climb mountains, and, with a live lesson from his mom, he learned how not to get eaten by a bear. (Hint - scare the bear with your hysterical screaming and run the opposite way very fast).

Colorado quickly became Christopher's second home and he made lifelong friends at the Cabins on Spring Creek. Thank you to our good friends the Davisons who introduced us to this wonderful place. Christopher loved it there.



Christopher continued his cautious and careful outdoor pursuits in North Carolina, where he took up the sport of waterfall jumping.

You may not have heard of this sport, but it is what it sounds like.

You climb up a cliff near a waterfall, then jump.



Twenty foot jumps, lead to 30 footers, then 45, and finally 70 foot jumps off a waterfall into a mountain pool. Christopher simply loved it, although Mom and Dad were not too pleased.

**This past week, I have struggled to describe my son to others.**

But one of Cheri's friends who spent some time with Christopher in Annapolis nailed it.

She said "Anyone who ever spent time with Christopher knew he was special"

And he was.

Cheri and I watched in amazement one day when Christopher basically made up a jazz piece for a piano recital on the spot.

And It was beautiful.

We knew that he had not practiced at all.





In 2009, Christopher decided he wanted to try diving for his high school swim team.

Three years later, we were at the Florida High School Swim and Dive Championships in Orlando. Christopher's main competition was a young man from Orlando who was on his home diving boards and was trained by a diving Olympian. Christopher trained at Frank Brown Park with the guy who used to dive at Gulf World.

The boards Christopher trained on were from the back of his coach's pick up truck.

During warm ups at the state championship, the other diver was nailing dive after dive.

Christopher was off on most of his warm-up dives, either too late or early. Then he promptly announced that he was ready.

As the other diver continued to practice, I asked Christopher about it.

He looked at me calmly and said, " ehh, he is getting tired." That was Christopher - no wasted effort.

Well, sure enough, at the end of the meet, it came down to one dive. Christopher nailed his; the other diver missed.

**And Christopher was State Champion.**

His coach, a wonderful man named Carl Kupper said that Christopher brought out the best in him.

And I think that Kupp brought out the best in Christopher. Those two were quite a pair.

Panama City Beach bums in the big city. And they were champions.

Christopher was a deep thinker and brilliant when fully engaged.



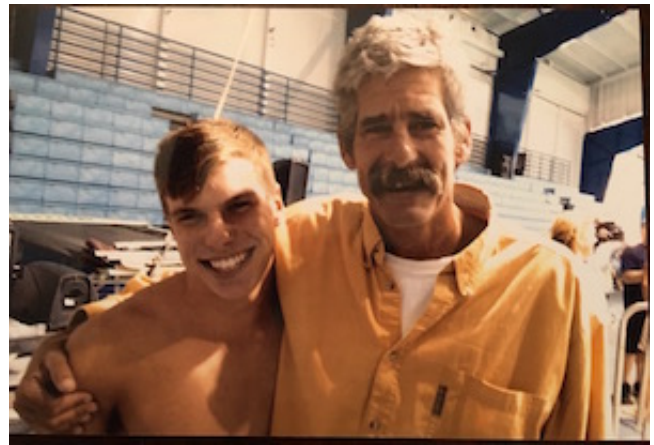


I heard more than once from people, “Where did you get that kid? or  
 “He is super smart.” or “I have never met anyone quite like him”

At times, his mind and natural abilities even blew me away.

And, for a while, I honestly thought that the most famous thing I would do in this life was to be known as this kid’s father. He was going to cure cancer or go to Mars or something like that.

**But life often doesn’t turn out like you think.**



I could go on and on, but simply put, Christopher was an incredible, . . . magical young man.

He could light up a room with a simple smile and dazzle your mind with his knowledge and deep thinking.

He was that talented at everything he did. And he made it all look easy.

**But despite this - or perhaps because of it - I often struggled to understand him.**

You think that your kids are just like you, but they are not.

Your child is his own person. He is not you, and he is not your spouse, but someone . . . something different.

During Christopher's senior year of high school, we bought a motorcycle and a kit to turn it into a café racer.

The plan was to strip the bike down and rebuild it in time so he could ride it off to college.

Well, it didn't work out that way.



We worked on the bike in fits and starts.

Christopher often didn't want to work on it, or if he did, he worked on it manically for a few days, then would get bored and stop.

Sometimes he would work on it while I wasn't there and I would come home to parts in the wrong spot, like an exhaust pipe that covers the gear shift or a missing brake part.

I have been walking by that motorcycle everyday since we bought it 3 years ago and it still sits in my garage in pieces.

I used to think that that motorcycle was symbolic of Christopher's life since high school.

An inconsistent effort, an unfinished product, and an incomplete life.

But now, I am not so sure.

I think Christopher may have figured out something



that I am just now realizing.

You see, the purpose of life is not to get rich, be famous, or finish building some motorcycle.

**The purpose of life is to love... And to be loved.**

And by any measure, Christopher met his purpose.

Christopher had a loving family that cared deeply for him . . . and he for us.

Despite all of his troubles, he knew that he was surrounded in love from his family. And the last thing he wanted to do was hurt any of us.

He was loyal to and loved his close friends. And they loved him too, making 2 trips to see him when he was in Annapolis and North Carolina.

He was kind and generous until the end, just two weeks ago he helped out a friend he had not heard from in years without complaint.

He was just an all around good kid.

So I no longer think that his life was incomplete.



He may have departed this world early, but he fulfilled his purpose.

He loved and was loved.

And you can't ask for anything more than that.

So thank you for coming today. Your presence here honors my son.

For those who knew him, his love is with you - and will always be with you ... I truly believe that.

And for those who did not, you missed out on knowing a wonderful, beautiful boy.

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