

Julie Hanson

One Mom's Support of a Vision

Ask Julie Hanson what she does for a living and she'll tell you she is a stay-at-home mom. Spend more time talking to Julie and observing her daily routine and you'll soon discover her role at home goes way beyond that of being a kind and caring mother. Julie spends her days performing sales and marketing activities, answering a never ending flow of emails, fielding a continuous string of phone calls, managing a hectic calendar ... on top of tending to the traditional responsibilities of a stay-at-home mom.

To understand Julie's atypical role as a stay at home mom, a little background is necessary. Julie and her husband, Hal are the proud parents of Jeff, 15. At the age of 6, Jeff was formally diagnosed with a genetic condition called Neurofibromatosis. In association with his Neurofibromatosis, they soon discovered a rare optic nerve tumor which would eventually rob Jeff of his vision. Over the next six years, his vision deteriorated significantly as anticipated, to the point where he became legally blind. At age 12, Jeff underwent chemotherapy in an attempt to kill the tumor. When chemotherapy was unsuccessful at getting rid of the optic nerve tumor, the Hansons tried a special form of radiation. After 28 consecutive days, they were pleased to discover the tumor had been taken care of, at least for the time being. Jeff's vision will always be impaired and becoming completely blind is a possibility but, for now, he is able to see the world as if he's looking through a piece of Swiss cheese ... blurred and in small pieces. His eyesight is anything but clear but, as you will see, his vision is remarkable.

How do Julie's daily activities tie into Jeff's experience with Neurofibromatosis? Julie, Hal and Jeff have entered into a new chapter of their life, set in motion by a need for distraction during the rough days of chemo and radiation. Julie explains how their journey began.

"During chemotherapy, we found painting to be a fun activity for Jeff. We put a paintbrush in his hand and he began painting watercolor note cards. Eventually, in the summer of 2006, we opened up a glorified lemonade stand at the end of our driveway. The traffic to our home was driven completely by word of mouth. Jeff sold his hand painted watercolor note cards and I sold my baked goods. Our glorified bake sale ended up raising more than \$15,000, which Jeff donated to a charity close to his heart and cause, The Children's Tumor Foundation."

With pride in her eyes, Julie continues to share their story. "The extraordinary response to this initial effort on our part was overwhelming. People began to really take notice of Jeff's talent and encouraged him to produce his art on canvas. Jeff took their advice and started painting individual note cards. He created a portfolio for people to look through and eventually select a full size canvas. What has happened since then is nothing short of amazing."

What started out as a simple hobby has skyrocketed into something well beyond the Hanson's wildest dreams. Jeff now sells four different designs of printed note cards and a

2009 calendar featuring his artwork and information about charities that have touched his life in one way or another. All of the proceeds from the sale of the note cards and calendar are being donated to charity. In addition, the number of personal commissioned canvas orders has increased dramatically, as well.

Julie coordinates the behind-the-scenes efforts, including marketing Jeff's art, his note cards and his new calendar. "I am so busy; I could have 20 employees right now. At least I have conceded to the fact that I am just one mom doing the work of a huge foundation. My days are extremely busy, but it is such a happy busy. I wear lots of "hats" these days ... Mother, Wife, Cook, Maid, Gardener, Art Supply Purchasing Specialist, Accountant, Marketing Manager, Graphic Designer, Executive Director of Sales and Communications and more. I gave up a sales and marketing career to raise Jeff, but he has given me back everything I left behind with my career tenfold. The paycheck is not very good, but I have never been happier in my life."

The most amazing thing about Jeff, Julie and Hal is their collective generous, upbeat attitude about something that could have easily sent their lives into a downward spiral. "I am incredibly proud of how selfless Jeff is. Through chemo, his tumor and continuous obstacles he faces, Jeff always maintains a positive attitude and a good sense of humor. His birthday was a few weeks ago and he did not have a 'want' list. He seems to get so much more from giving than he would from any gift we could have given him. He learned early on in his life the immense joy that comes from giving to others."

In something Julie refers to as a "goose bump moment," Jeff had the opportunity to meet Sir Elton John. As part of his Make-A-Wish foundation wish, Jeff was invited to spend 15 minutes backstage with Elton before the concert that opened The Sprint Center. During those 15 minutes, Jeff presented Elton with a check for \$1,000 for the Elton John AIDS foundation. Jeff's generosity obviously made an impression on Elton. Since, that first meeting, Elton has made a personal donation to The Children's Tumor Foundation, has flown the Hansons to Dubai for one of his concerts, and has spent personal time with them, teaching Jeff by example how even one person can make a difference. Perhaps the most notable outcome of this new friendship was Elton's request for Jeff to create canvases for his HIV/AIDS homes in South Africa. Jeff completed this request as a gift and soon will send the completed 12 canvases to an orphanage in Khayelitsha, South Africa.

Obviously, Jeff Hanson is not your typical 15 year old. He is mature beyond his years, with a generous and giving heart. As a mother, I know behind every great kid is a set of parents working hard to raise a child with character and values. Julie knows everything in her life is closely tied to her son. "It is all about Jeff," she admits. The time and devotion Julie has shown to her family shines through clearly in the character and success of her son.

Julie sums her parenting experience with some advice to parents who want to raise kids to make a difference. "Teach your children to find their gifts. Use those gifts to serve others and to find happiness in one's life. Parents might need to help their children seek out these gifts and guide and encourage them to use them, whatever they might be. Jeff was given the gift of art. In the midst of adversity, he is using his art to find tremendous happiness and to serve others

with the fundraising of his talents. We have nurtured and encouraged Jeff to take his talents, use them to bring himself and others joy, while giving at the same time.”

As for Julie and her jam-packed schedule, what would she do with a free couple of hours? It comes to no surprise that, true to her family’s generous nature, she would do something to give back to others. “I would bake my favorite bread, cookies or dessert. I constantly bake because I never know when I just might need to gift a friend, neighbor or stranger. Remember the “just because” baked goods? Give to others and joy will forever come back to you with many blessings along the way. It has been an amazing journey living my life this way.”

If you have been inspired by the Hansons and would like to donate to the causes they support, you can easily do so by visiting The Art Store at Jeff’s personal website, www.JeffreyOwenHanson.com. By purchasing Jeff’s note cards, you will be contributing to the four charities most dear to Jeff’s heart – The Make-A-Wish Foundation, Children’s Tumor Foundation, Elton John AIDS Foundation and the KC Blind All-Stars Foundation.

Jeff’s Generous HeART 2009 calendar is also available for purchase by visiting the Art Store at www.JeffreyOwenHanson.com. The proceeds from Jeff’s calendar sales support the charities in the calendar. Jeff’s personal goal is to “gift \$10,000 to each of the 12 honored charities in my calendar.”

Jeff’s unique, one of a kind artwork on canvas can also be purchased through The Art Store on his website, www.JeffreyOwenHanson.com.

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