

Family Wouldn't Do Anything Differently Boy Who Died 'Always Gave 110%'



Jeffrey Blair Scott, age 11, died suddenly 3½ weeks ago. He died while playing street hockey with his friends — and, in fact, just after scoring the winning goal in a late Saturday afternoon game only two short blocks from his Depew home.

Jeffrey's friends remember him rejoicing, saying, "We won!"

Then they remember other things — one of them pulling a fire alarm, others calling their parents, some "putting snow on Jeffrey" in an attempt to revive him.

"The boys said Jeffrey had felt tired during the game and had dropped out for a while," says his father, Blair "Bud" Scott. "When he rejoined the game and apparently, when it was all over, just lay down ... At first, his friends thought he was kidding."

Jeffrey, according to his death certificate, died of pulmonary edema due to cardiac failure. Early media accounts of his death centered upon his having had a minor heart problem.

Most of those accounts mentioned the fact that doctors had said Jeffrey's activities needn't be curtailed in any way, that he was free to take gym, play hockey, baseball, play practically anything he wanted.

"Except football," says his father, "because he had inverted chest bones. He had an operation two years ago to correct that. He came through it beautifully. We always thought of Jeffrey as one of the healthiest kids."

SINCE JEFFREY'S death, however, his family — his mother, Donna; his father; his brother Christopher, 10; his sister Lynn, 15, and other relatives — have encountered what his mother calls "misconceptions."

"There have been inaccurate comments," says Donna, "some we have found very disturbing. We know that people just want to know more — and want to know why."

Mostly, the Scotts are concerned about individuals who concluded that Jeffrey had a heart murmur and shouldn't have been playing hockey.

They are particularly concerned about parents of children with heart murmurs who have told them they do curtail their children's activities — among them some parents who have told the Scotts they have done so only since hearing of Jeffrey's death.

Says Donna: "This upsets us. It's true. Jeffrey did have a heart murmur. Many children

do. But we don't feel that Jeffrey's was the cause of his death. And in hindsight we don't feel that we would do anything differently. We're just glad that although the life Jeffrey had was short, he was a happy boy and that he loved what he did, especially hockey."

A heart murmur, put simply, is abnormal blood flow in the heart, something you can hear with a stethoscope. "And most of the time," says one local pediatrician, "a heart murmur is not even pathological, is not serious or is of no consequence."

"MOST PEOPLE do not curtail their children from their usual play and gym activities with almost any heart disease. As a physician, I do not curtail children with heart murmurs. It is a philosophy of life."

"It would be hard to imagine Jeffrey curtailed," says his father. "He was energetic, into everything, I don't know how we would have done it. The morning of the day he died, for instance, he'd played in a league game (Cheektowaga Major Hockey Association)."

"Afterward, he just wanted to stay on, to see the Sabres come in for practice. They forgot to put the ropes up — and Jeffrey was thrilled. He reached out and touched a Sabre's jersey. The Sabre turned around and smiled."

Jeffrey Blair Scott was born July 1, 1970, with a heart murmur — but one "so insignificant," says his mother, "that the doctor didn't even tell us till Jeffrey was 2 or 2½, when the doctor felt the murmur was a little louder. We took Jeffrey to a cardiologist. He had very preliminary tests then — and a catheterization when he was 6 ..."

The diagnosis was a mild form of aortic stenosis or narrowing of the artery. The doctors did not restrict Jeffrey's activities, except for football.

"Jeffrey was never really sick," says Donna. "Years would go by and he wouldn't miss a day of school."

Jeffrey was a sixth grader at U-Crest Elementary School at the time of his death — a boy remembered as "sensitive, caring and very mature to talk to."

Says his father, Bud: "Jeffrey could get along with a 2-year-old as well as a 19-year-old."

Adds his mother: "He had so many friends, some we didn't even know about. It took an hour to get into the funeral home — and a policeman had to be sent for to direct traffic."

St. Barnabas Church was filled for Jeffrey's Mass of Christian Burial. And, in the weeks since, his parents, sister and brother have received hundreds of letters and cards.

HIS FATHER — a district manager for the Drackett Products Co., a division of Bristol-Myers here — remembers how Jeffrey, in winter, always wanted to be the one to shovel the driveway — and, in summer, the one to cut the grass. "He would dig up the garden for his younger brother (Christopher) who loves to plant things."

Donna Calandra Scott — who teaches dance both at the Scotts' home in Depew and in her old Lovejoy neighborhood — now does her ironing in Jeffrey's bedroom, where she can see his bowling trophies, hockey trophies, baseball trophies.

"He and Christopher," she says, "had separate rooms. But Christopher had moved in with Jeffrey. They did so many things together. We all did. Lynn and Jeffrey were best friends. She's just gotten him into open skating. She loved to introduce him to her friends."

Jeffrey Scott was a swimmer, a wing for his hockey league, a pitcher last year in the U-Crest Little League, a boy who had just started golf and planned on starting soccer this summer. Says his father (who last year coached Christopher's softball team, Lynn's softball team and Jeffrey's baseball team): "Jeffrey always gave 110 percent."

"At first," says his mother, "we couldn't get ourselves going. The cat, Sylvester, grieved so, got so sick, that we had to get pills. All of us, including the dog (Gypsy) didn't really know how to go on. Lynn was the one who decided we would open up the dance studios again. She's my helper."

"Then there are my famous words. I've always said 'The world doesn't need another quitter.' So none of us quit. Jeffrey wouldn't have liked that."