

On September 17, 2004, Lynn Gordon “Gordie” Bailey, Jr. was found dead at the Chi Psi fraternity house at the University of Colorado in Boulder. He was 18 years old.

On the evening prior to his death, Gordie and twenty-six other pledges dressed in coats and ties for the fraternity “bid night” event. They were blindfolded and taken to the fraternity’s lodge in the mountains of Arapaho Roosevelt National Forest. Once at the lodge, Gordie and the other pledges were instructed to drink all of the alcohol provided by the fraternity members in 30 minutes, in order to be able to return to the fraternity house. The pledges quickly consumed four handles of whiskey and six bottles of wine around a bonfire and were transported back to the Chi Psi house.

When the group returned to the fraternity house, Gordie was visibly intoxicated and was placed on a couch to “sleep it off” at approximately 11pm. When Gordie passed out on that couch, the fraternity brothers wrote all over his body with permanent markers—a fraternity ritual meant to embarrass brothers who pass out. Gordie was left on the couch in the Chi Psi house for 10 hours before he was found dead at 9am the next morning, face down on the floor.

No one had called for help.



Lynn Gordon “Gordie” Bailey, Jr.

“Dough.” This is probably the first word I ever said to Gordie because I couldn’t pronounce the full “Gordo.” He was the most amazing person I have ever met. And I truly mean that. I am so glad I got to know him, and more importantly, have him as a brother.

He was always so protective, never letting me watch certain TV shows and never willing to swear in front of me. And I can tell that he acted as a big brother to many of you, too. He was always looking out for the people he cared about, and had such a great trust and faith in people. He had that amazing bear hug that I’m sure most of you would remember. And that duck walk ... which definitely runs in the Herrlinger side of the “fam” as Gord would say.

He had such high self-confidence, more than anyone I know. He never cared about what people had to say about him, as long as he could put a smile on their face. And I think that is truly what he lived for—to make other people happy.

Gord had such an incredible range of talents, pursuing almost everything he was interested in, in only 18 years. He was one of those rare people that when you saw him, you just had to smile. It was so contagious. And I even saw that when he would meet people for the first time. I think everyone looked up to him for his amazing ability to light up a room instantly.

He was one of those people that would never talk about himself. And I know this because many of the people in Dallas never knew his love for acting, which he started at Deerfield.

I think anyone who had the privilege of knowing him would agree that we all learned something from him. He taught us to always stay optimistic and always look at the good side of everything. He never complained. And he was never mad. He would always cheer up my day with his ridiculous faces and movie quotes. Most importantly, he made me feel like the most important person in the world because he was always eager to be with me.

I never understood how he could be so good at so many things at such a young age, but now I think I understand. He was only given 18 years to live and he made the absolute best of it. I believe he did more in his few years than many people have done in 50.

“I never understood how he could be so good at so many things at such a young age, but now I think I understand. He was only given 18 years to live and he made the absolute best of it.”

—Lily Lanahan

When I was little, he would always make fun of how I ordered food in a quiet voice that made me seem so unsure of myself, since he would order so that basically the entire restaurant could hear. He taught me to be sure of myself and proud of whatever I do. He was proud to be a Texan when he went to Deerfield and then so proud to have come from Deerfield when he went to Boulder. And something that I just realized recently is that what I am most proud of, is to have been his sister.

I know this is a hard day for everyone and I don't know if this helps, but I definitely know it comforts me. The day I found out about this tragic event, I was waiting in the airport and all of the sudden, I heard from a TV next to me, “Hey Blue, there's no ice in my lemonade. Drop and give me 10, NOW!” said by actor Will Farrell in *Old School*. This was probably Gord's favorite line from one of his favorite movies. I truly think this is Gord's way of telling me he is all right. We are all so lucky to have known him and I truly feel worse for the people who never got to meet him. He was definitely one of a kind and I think everyone will remember his happy way of life forever.

I will always love you, Gordie. As my big brother, my greatest role model, and my best friend in the whole world.

—Adapted from the tribute Lily gave at age 14 during Gordie's memorial.
September, 2004



Gordie and Lily



Leslie, Gordie, Michael, and Lily

Called to Act

Losing a Son, Continuing his Story

September 17, 2019, marks the passing of 15 years since Lynn Gordon “Gordie” Bailey, Jr. died a preventable, senseless hazing death at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Fifteen years feels like a long time ago, and somehow still like yesterday for his mother and stepfather, Leslie and Michael Lanahan. They can recall in painstaking detail where they were when they learned of Gordie’s death, and it’s incredibly difficult to think about that time. Leslie had talked to Gordie on the phone shortly before he left for the fraternity pledging ceremony that killed him.

“Gordie called Leslie as she and I were driving down to Austin for a meeting. Gordie was really happy to tell us that he had made the lacrosse club as a freshman. It was a 2-minute phone call because he had to rush off—he told us that he was accepted to pledge at Chi Psi, and had to go get dressed up for the pledging ceremony,” Michael remembers. “I think about that phone call a lot. If Leslie had handed me the phone, would I have said, ‘Be careful?’ Having been in a fraternity, I’m not sure I could have given him the warnings—in my experience, we didn’t have a ceremony that would have people drink to excess and put their lives in danger. It wasn’t something I was thinking about at the time, so would I have even said that to him?”

The fact that they didn’t know what their son was about to face, or that alcohol overdose was possible and deadly, is why Leslie and Michael didn’t retreat after Gordie’s death—instead, they felt compelled to take action to prevent other families from feeling their same pain and loss. As hard as it was to share Gordie’s story through their grief, they wanted Gordie to not be forgotten. Their boy had lived 18 years, and hazing couldn’t steal that time from them like it stole his future.

Gordie Bailey, 1986–2004

Gordie was born in Connecticut on February 22, 1986, and was the first child for Leslie and her then-husband, Lynn Gordon Bailey, Sr. When Gordie was a baby, Leslie was working toward a degree in interior design at the New York School of Interior Design, after having been an advertising executive in New York and San Francisco. She felt design school was a great way to build the foundation for a career that would allow her flexibility, and to be home with her kids as they grew up. “I didn’t want to be on a train commuting from Connecticut and be gone all day—I wanted something more creative and something I could do from home.” After Leslie and Lynn divorced, Leslie and Michael were married and she moved to Dallas, TX, with 3-year-old Gordie. Michael was in Dallas pouring his time and energy into Greystone Communities, the company he founded in New York City in 1982. A daughter for Leslie and Michael followed a year later—Lily was born shortly after Gordie’s 4th birthday.

“As a child, Gordie was so busy,” Leslie says with a laugh. “He was like a giant golden retriever. He was so loving and eager to please. Thankfully, we found the perfect school for him in Dallas—Lamplighter School, whose campus is like a farm with animals. He attended Lamplighter until 4th grade, and it was perfect for him—he was sword fighting, jumping all over, just busy. It was very hands-on, and Gordie thrived in a creative environment. He became really good with computers and technology—even developing video games. He really was creative—his first grade teacher told me he was a renaissance man. I’m not musical, but boy, was Gordie musical—he just loved singing and playing instruments since he was a baby. He was always front and center dancing—he didn’t have a shy bone in him. He was just going to do what he wanted to do—he marched to his own drum.”

In 5th grade, Gordie transitioned to the all-boys St. Mark’s School of Dallas. “Gordie was always looking forward. When he got out of 4th grade, he was so excited to be going into 5th grade—always looking forward to the next year,” Michael says. Gordie stayed at St. Mark’s through 9th grade, making the varsity football and lacrosse teams as a freshman. “He scored the winning goal in overtime against lacrosse rival Highland Park as a freshman—it was great!” Leslie smiles at the memory. Those years were wonderful for the family. Lily had started at Lamplighter School as well, but the lack of structure wasn’t for her—Leslie and Michael moved her to Episcopal School of Dallas in 2nd grade. Michael’s company thrived, and Leslie served as a docent at the Dallas Museum of Arts for 12 years. The family spent their summers in Sun Valley, Idaho, where Gordie’s dad and stepmom lived—it was a blessing in their lives that Gordie’s four parents were good friends. Leslie and Michael took the kids on vacations to Europe and Jamaica—they all had the travel bug, and enjoyed being together.

During Gordie’s 9th grade year, Leslie and Michael began researching boarding schools for him—Leslie attended The Taft School in Connecticut, and Michael attended St. Paul’s School in

New Hampshire, so boarding school was part of their family tradition. Gordie toured his parents’ alma maters, as well as Phillips Academy Andover and Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts.

“When we toured Deerfield, I saw the students wearing coats and ties, and I thought, ‘Gordie definitely won’t want to go here—too many rules.’ When we got back in the car, he said, ‘That’s where I’m going.’ He loved it. I think a lot of it was the campus—he loved the layout, because it was more like a college campus. He loved standing out because he was from Texas—his junior year, he won an award for his declamation, where he had to stand up and recite his paper in front of the whole school. His paper was about being a Texan in the Northeast—he wasn’t really that big of a Texan, but he played it up. He liked that he was different that way,” Leslie recalls. Michael adds, “He couldn’t have been happier to get the experience at Deerfield away from home.”

Gordie embraced everything that Deerfield had to offer—he played varsity lacrosse and football, had the lead in the school play, and most importantly for him, he developed close friendships. Senior year, he served as a Proctor in his dormitory, mentoring younger Deerfield students. He could often be found with his guitar, hanging out with friends, or in front of the TV with his buddies watching a football game. Leslie, Michael, and Lily came up to Deerfield frequently to cheer at his games and watch him on stage in the theater.

“A standout athlete who also stars in the school play ... Gordie never took the path that people would expect somebody to go. He wasn’t a renegade or revolutionary, but he saw a different path for himself. He was good at math ... we never saw him studying, but he always did well on tests,” says Michael. Leslie echoes, “He had a lot of things going for him—he was very creative, artistic, and athletic. Things came easily for him. The joke was that he never graced the door of the Deerfield library.”

The University of Colorado (CU) in Boulder presented itself as an opportunity after Gordie was disappointed by his lack of acceptance at his top college choices. “Gordie didn’t apply himself at Deerfield until it was too late,” Leslie remembers. “He really wanted to go to the University of Virginia or Washington & Lee, and he didn’t get into either.” Leslie suggested that he apply to CU because her sisters had gone there. He loved snowboarding and the outdoors, so he decided to make the most of CU. He graduated from Deerfield Academy in May 2004, and in the last week of August, Gordie and his family moved him into his dorm room to begin the next exciting chapter in his life.

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“I miss him. Gordie and I really could not get enough of each other. We would stay up all night playing video games and watching movies until Leslie would come up and tell us we were being too loud and to go to bed.”

—Gregory Clement, Gordie’s childhood best friend



Serena Keith

Enduring Friendship

Serena Keith arrived at Deerfield Academy, a private co-ed boarding school in Deerfield, Massachusetts, at the start of her sophomore year of high school in the fall of 2001. Also new to Deerfield in his sophomore year that fall was Gordie Bailey. Serena and Gordie met early on that year, and sat next to each other in Spanish class.

“Gordie had a wonderfully terrible Spanish accent, and I think I cracked a joke about it, which sealed our friendship. He was always a ball of sunshine, always making people laugh, and also a genuinely warm, caring friend,” Serena recalls. Over the course of three years at Deerfield, Serena and Gordie spent a lot of time together—in classes and study groups, at meals in the dining hall, and hanging out on the weekends with their group of friends. Gordie also took Serena to Deerfield’s prom. Serena carries wonderful memories of that time with Gordie, and how much he valued his friends is something Serena will never forget. When they graduated from Deerfield in the spring of 2004, Gordie headed to Boulder to begin college at the University of Colorado, and Serena stayed in Massachusetts to attend Harvard. Just three weeks into their freshman year of college, Gordie died of alcohol overdose after being hazed.

It was a Friday afternoon when Serena learned her friend was gone. “A Deerfield classmate who had also started at Harvard with me that fall came rushing across the freshman yard to tell me the news. We both sat frozen, under a tree, hugging each other for about an hour. We then reached out to others on campus who knew Gordie, and sat in the freshman dining hall telling story after story about our favorite Gordie memories.”

Serena struggled with Gordie’s loss, especially since she was caught off guard by his cause of death. “Before Gordie died, I’d never given any thought to death by alcohol. I knew about drunk driving crashes, but that was really it. Learning about alcohol overdose was really formative for me, and made me realize just how little I knew about healthy and unhealthy drinking habits. I’d received almost no education about it—teachers never talked about it.”

After Gordie’s death, the Gordie Center created materials on hazing, alcohol overdose, and how to help a friend in an effort to provide education and close the knowledge gap. “The Gordie Center’s focus on giving friends the tools to help their friends had a huge impact on me in college and afterward. It oriented me to a role I could play in preventing an awful tragedy to the next person, and it empowered me by giving me a job to do—I think it helped me be a better kind of friend. Just like Gordie was to all of us.”

“He was such a warm guy who didn’t have any reservations in getting to know anyone. He was going to invest in friendships.”

—Serena Keith, *HAZE*

Serena has kept in touch with Gordie’s family in the years since his passing. Gordie’s mother, Leslie, says they always pick up right where they left off when they talk. “Serena and Gordie had an awfully special friendship,” Leslie recalls. “She was a great role model for him, and he for her—they were a great balance for each other. Serena is really bright, and can be maybe a bit more serious than Gordie. She tried to help Gordie apply himself more, because he was awfully short-sighted—he didn’t understand the big picture as far as applying himself academically to get into a really good college. She was the opposite—very mature, did well, and went to Harvard. She appreciated his sense of humor, and he was flattered to have a friend who was so loyal and dear to him. They laughed together a lot. Gordie had a number of friends who were girls, but she was one of his very best friends.”



Serena’s desk still features a photo of her with Gordie at Deerfield’s prom



Gordie with Serena and Alex Kleiner at their graduation from Deerfield Academy

Serena is also featured in *HAZE*, the documentary that shares Gordie's story. The film ends with her, talking about "pulling a 'Gordie'—'Gordie' has become the term for 'lighten up,' 'get some perspective,' and 'recognize what's important in life,'" she says in the film. *HAZE* is shown in high schools, colleges, and communities across the country, and Serena feels that Gordie's story is still relevant "because Gordie is someone whose life and death had a tremendous impact on so many people—he changed the course of all our lives forever. He's not a statistic, he's a real person whom we love and lost far too soon. I think students can relate on an emotional level and draw lessons that will hopefully influence the real and sometimes hard choices they'll make in their own lives."

Today, Serena lives in San Francisco and runs a corporate training startup for employers in the Bay Area. Gordie is never far from her thoughts. "I keep a picture of him in my bedroom—it's the two of us at prom. He's wearing a blue tux (so typical of Gordie!), and I always shine just a little brighter when I look at that photo. Fifteen years later, he's absolutely still a figure in my life. When I get down or life feels hard, I think about Gordie's lighthearted spirit and it helps me calm down, enjoy the process, and hug my friends a little tighter." ✨

Deerfield Academy

Gordie had spent most of his life in Dallas, Texas, and was looking to branch out during high school by attending a boarding school. He had completed his freshman year at St. Mark's School of Dallas and was ready to try an experience farther from home. He considered his mom's alma mater (The Taft School in Connecticut), and had toured a few other boarding schools when Deerfield Academy captured his attention.

Deerfield is a coeducational independent boarding and day school located in Deerfield, Massachusetts, with approximately 630 students from all over the country and the world. The campus is beautiful, the sports teams are competitive, and the arts program is vibrant. Gordie was drawn to Deerfield for those reasons, and elected to attend his sophomore through senior years at the Academy.

Kris Loftus was a teacher at Deerfield when Gordie arrived on campus. She joined the Deerfield staff in 1994, and was teaching a class called Health Issues and supervising Deerfield's Peer Counseling program. "I had Gordie in my Health Issues class, and I feel like I knew him well. Truly, everything about Gordie was big—physically and his personality. He had a great sense of humor and was genuinely kind to all. I fondly remember his big cowboy hat, but more memorable was his warm personality. He was larger than life in his time at Deerfield—involved in everything! Sports, clubs, and acting ... it was very rare to have a varsity football and lacrosse player on the stage in the winter performances. I remember him being involved in almost everything—he was definitely one to get activities going on the weekends or be a fan at games when he didn't have one."

Gordie thoroughly enjoyed his time at Deerfield—he immersed himself in every aspect of student life and was a proud Deerfield graduate in the spring of 2004. Three months later, he was gone.

"There are very few words to describe the impact—it was unbelievable and shocking. He had just left campus, and his presence was now missed in a way that was indescribable," Kris says when remembering how the Deerfield community experienced the news of Gordie's death. "Personally, I felt a tremendous amount of guilt. I was the one responsible, as his health teacher, for preventing this type of tragedy. It was very difficult to think that our time together in Health

“I think Gordie was quite legitimately the most popular person in our class in high school—he was a great athlete, attractive, he was physically a big guy, played football. No one ever said a bad thing about him. People who have all these things going for them can still be the subject of hazing. Nobody deserves it, but it doesn’t discriminate—it can happen to people who you might not think it can happen to. Hazing doesn’t just happen to people who are weaker amongst us—Gordie was the strongest and most well-liked, and he was still put in a situation where because of some weird systematic pressure, things were being done to him that were unfair, and it was hard for him to fight back against.”

I remember hearing the news the next morning—it was horrible and devastating. Everybody from the immediate area congregated at a house in Greenwich—Deerfield classmates from New Haven, Massachusetts, New York ... we just dropped everything and wanted to be together, which made us feel closer to him. At that time in our lives, he was such a symbol of the unity of our class—he brought everyone together, and he continued to do that after he left us.”

—Alex Kleiner,
Gordie’s best friend from Deerfield

Issues two years before had not adequately educated Gordie on the possibility of alcohol overdose, but it was a huge wake-up call for me and for Deerfield that we needed to try to do more.”

After Gordie’s death, there was a greater emphasis on the risk of alcohol overdose added to the sophomore curriculum. The school also added a senior transition program that includes a showing of *HAZE* with a discussion after the viewing. Deerfield students are asked to rank their class sessions (on a scale of 0 for “waste of time” to 5 for “I learned a lot/very helpful”), and the class that includes the *HAZE* showing is the highest-ranked class every term, receiving almost all fives.

“When we first started to use *HAZE* in class, some students either knew Gordie or his younger sister (who went to Taft) and they had a hard time with it all—it really hit home. Fifteen years after Gordie’s passing, the film still truly hits hard with each Deerfield student—you can hear the gasps when they first see Gordie in his Deerfield football uniform, since students assume the film is just another health video. ‘Wait, he went to Deerfield?’ is whispered and the discussion afterward has a palpable seriousness with the realization that he was one of our own. The message of loss for a family, community, and school due to something that was so preventable is powerful.”

Deerfield honors Gordie by continuing to share his story every year, and recently made cards featuring him for a campus kindness campaign—Gordie had started a “Hug Club” while a student at Deerfield to spread kindness through hugs. “We also have a bench on campus on the hill going down to our lower athletics fields, facing the football field and the river. The plaque on the bench says ‘Gordie’s Overlook.’ Students who watch *HAZE* in sophomore class often nod their heads in realization of who the bench honors.”



Gordie playing football at Deerfield Academy

Deerfield partnered with the Gordie Center shortly after Gordie’s death, running fundraisers and creating products for Deerfield students, like GORDIEcheck wallet cards with the signs of alcohol overdose. Kris even gave GORDIEcheck cards to friends of her son when they graduated from high school. “One of his friends pulls the card out of his wallet each time I see him—and he’s now a junior in college.” Kris’ Peer Counseling students helped her hand out GORDIEcheck cards at Deerfield events and the health classrooms at Deerfield display GORDIEposters with the signs of overdose and information on how to help a friend. Deerfield’s current Health Educator, Margaret Brown, echoes Kris’ feelings about continually educating Deerfield students about Gordie. “When we show *HAZE*, we talk about relationships and look for opportunities where folks surrounding Gordie could have made a difference,” Maragaret says. “Deerfield is connected to Gordie, and his story and life continue to impact our community.”

Kris continues, “The most important message about Gordie’s story is that it can happen to anyone. So many teens think they are invincible, they will be fine, it won’t happen to them or someone they know ... but it can. Gordie’s message is more than ‘avoid alcohol overdose and hazing.’ It’s also a message of looking out for people—making good decisions in party environments, how to recognize the signs of alcohol overdose, and how to prevent the situations that lead to alcohol overdose.”

As for the impact Gordie has had at Deerfield over the last 15 years? “We have not had another young alum die from an alcohol overdose. Students have shared their smart decisions to help a friend, so I feel confident that many of our students have taken Gordie’s message with them ... I imagine many lives have been saved by it.” ❀



Gordie, age 3, with his mom Leslie in Greenwich, CT

September 2004

One week after moving Gordie to CU, Leslie and Michael moved Lily from their home in Dallas up to Connecticut, where she began 9th grade at Leslie's alma mater, The Taft School. Having both kids out of the house was an adjustment for Leslie and Michael—they wanted to respect Gordie and Lily's independence, but still wanted to be in the loop. On September 16, Leslie and Michael were driving from Dallas to Austin for a Baylor Hospital board meeting, and Gordie called them to check in. That quick phone call was reassuring as parents—Gordie was finding his niche in a large school, and really sounded happy. The next day, September 17, Leslie and Michael received the horrible phone call that Gordie had died. They were stunned and confused and absolutely devastated. It was pure chaos. They quickly decided that Michael would go to Boulder (meeting Gordie's dad and stepmom there) to deal with whatever needed to be done, and Leslie would go to Lily, who was 14 years old and had been away from home for only two weeks. Leslie couldn't get to Lily fast enough.

"I was frantic to get to her, and I was so worried about her," remembers Leslie. She had to tell Lily about her brother while in the airport—Leslie had called the headmaster at Taft, informed him, and had him get Lily so that Lily wouldn't be alone when she heard the news. Then Leslie made her way through the airport alone. "I had to connect in Chicago, and I walked up to the gate with my ticket ... Gate 4A. Except that wasn't my gate at all—I had misread my ticket, and gone to the gate with the same number as my seat assignment on the plane. The gate attendant had to say, 'Ma'am, that's your seat assignment—not your gate.' I was in the totally wrong part of the airport for my flight—I was just in a trance."

Michael was having an equally tough time in Boulder. He had to identify Gordie in the morgue and collect his things from the dorm room. "Gordie's roommate Steve and friend Jack told me stories about Gordie, trying to help us understand ... but they didn't even understand. They were 18 years old, and Gordie's death was senseless." Michael met with the Chancellor at CU at the time, who told Michael that he, as Chancellor, didn't have the authority to crack down on the fraternities for hazing because the fraternity houses weren't on university property. "I told him that he should resign if that was his response to me when I was there to pick up our dead son. The lack of concern and leadership at the university level was astounding. I can't tell you how angry I was. Being the stepdad, I was a little more removed and had more anger than Leslie."

Michael brought Gordie's body home to Dallas. Leslie and Lily returned to Dallas, and Leslie was able to see Gordie and say goodbye to her firstborn. Fourteen-year-old Lily stood up and spoke at her brother's memorial, stayed home in Dallas for that week, and then returned to Taft to resume 9th grade.



Gordie and Leslie at a Deerfield Academy football game

there every other weekend,” Leslie says of Lily’s decision to go back to Taft after Gordie’s death. Michael remembers worrying about Lily’s ability to focus when she returned to school, because he was struggling at work. “I couldn’t understand what priority I had when I sat at my desk at work—work was very confusing. I couldn’t put one foot in front of the other. It was really good for Lily that she wasn’t home. Leslie didn’t want to get out of bed—Gordie’s death was tough for me as a stepdad, but watching my wife lose her son was so hard. Our family of four had disintegrated.”

“It was perfect that Lily was at Taft. I was so glad she went back. I was really glad she didn’t have to see me every day—it was the right thing. I never wanted her to feel like she had to take care of me, or worry about me. She got to go and grow and learn and have lots of new fun experiences, and she just thrived. We went up

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“Gordie was my best friend from the first days I can remember up until the day he died. I don’t think I have gone more than a few days without thinking about him. I often have dreams where Gordie just shows up out of nowhere and I ask him, “Where the hell have you been?” before we start catching up. I wake up with the same pain that I experienced when I heard he had died.

I know Gordie would have been immensely successful professionally and socially. Whenever I have some sort of milestone in my life, it makes me wonder what and where Gordie would be doing if he were still alive.”

—Gregory Clement, Gordie’s childhood best friend



Jack Gilles

Finding Purpose

In 2004, Jack Gilles was an 18-year-old from California just starting at the University of Colorado (CU) in Boulder, and like every new college student, he was looking for friendships to make his environment feel a little less overwhelming. He found similarities and friendship with a few of the guys on the same hall of the dorm where he was living, especially the guys right next door—Gordie Bailey and his roommate, Steve.

“Unfortunately, Gordie and I really weren’t friends for all that long. Not like his friends from home, high school, and his family. So out of respect for them, I won’t claim to have known him on that level ... but that first month of college felt like an eternity. Every day, there was something going on—class, intramural lacrosse, flag football, student council, and fraternities. Gordie and I became fast friends both by proximity and mutual interest in all of those activities. Also, Gordie was *authentic*. I think that is the best way to describe him. So in some ways, simply to meet him was to know him. He was easygoing and charismatic, with a sense of humor. He was just one of those guys you didn’t need to be doing anything in particular with to be having a good time. He loved his family, and I heard all about his sister, his mom, dad, and stepparents.”



Preparing for the "World's Largest Hug" in honor of Gordie at a CU football game, September 2006

Jack and Gordie ended up pledging Chi Psi together, "in part because we felt the brothers were the same type of people," Jack remembers. "I never really considered myself a 'fraternity' guy like I had seen in the movies. I was on the fence on the fraternity part of college—Gordie rushing was one of the reasons I joined. Gordie was one of the most popular pledges."

Jack was with Gordie the night he died. The fraternity had hosted an event at the fraternity's mountain lodge, where pledges were required to finish 10 large bottles of liquor and wine provided by the fraternity members before they would be allowed back down the mountain. Jack threw up. He took a picture of Gordie, planning to show his friend the next day how drunk he had looked. Gordie needed to be helped to a couch once the group returned to the fraternity house, and the fraternity members and pledges wrote on him and drew pictures with permanent marker while he was passed out. The party at the house continued while Gordie and others were propped on couches in the fraternity's library, with buckets in case they threw up. Jack checked on Gordie in the early hours of the morning, before he left the fraternity house to walk back to the dorms—he heard Gordie snoring, and left his friend to sleep off the events of the night.

"To this day, I remember shock, confusion, and disbelief," Jack says as he recalls the moment he learned that Gordie had died. "It wasn't until I opened my door and saw police in his room that the reality began to slowly sink in. He was dead ... but why? How? I was confused. I was with him last night, I had checked on him somewhere between 4 and 5 in the morning, and he was not dead."

When asked if Gordie and the group had been doing heavy drugs and if Gordie may have overdosed, Jack answered no, because in his mind, "20 shots of whiskey isn't equitable to heavy drug use. I was so far removed from what reasonable behavior was toward drinking that I had not even taken into account that the massive amounts of hard liquor we drank the night before could be responsible for Gordie's death. This, despite me throwing up from drinking that night, seeing how drunk he was, knowing he had to be helped to the couch, and him having his face drawn all over while passed out. I don't like to think of myself as a stupid person, but the main reason I didn't call 911 is because it never occurred to me that it could be necessary. And that is stupid. It's also embarrassing. How moronic we were to think that the primary concern for Gordie that night was to make sure he was on his side in case he threw up?"

Jack wrestled with sadness and guilt after Gordie's death. "I stopped going to class, so my grades went down to the point that I was put on academic probation in spring semester and nearly failed out of school entirely. My parents and family were in California, and my friends from high school just couldn't understand. Also, I just wasn't the type of person to call people up on the phone and talk about problems. This was college, right? It was supposed to be the time of my life. So in some weird way, I didn't want to betray that sort of image, even to close friends back home."

Struggling to move forward, Jack thought about ways in which he could make an impact on his peers in regard to alcohol education. "In high school, I was the guy that 'knew' about drinking. I was the guy who would let his friends crash at his house rather than drive home, or have water on hand, or make sure to give people food. As it turns out, everything I did to 'help' people who had drunk too much really wasn't doing all that much. I just didn't know it, because nobody had actually ever specifically taught it to us."

In Gordie's honor, Jack helped found a peer education group called Guidelines and Objectives of Responsible Drinking (GORD). The idea behind GORD was to dispel myths of drug and alcohol use with facts and science—to provide the education that Jack wished he had gotten before Gordie died. Jack immersed himself into getting the group off the ground, spending over 30 hours a week helping to build a program that eventually became a 501(c)3 non-profit with an 8-member management team and 30+ volunteer student members. The group helped run new student orientations for CU, and also developed peer-to-peer talks which they presented at over 30 universities and Colorado high schools. GORD presentations focused on the signs of alcohol overdose, how the body processes alcohol, what blood alcohol content means, explaining the concept of tolerance—all while being "very real with the

audience. We didn't try to push an agenda other than information transfer." GORD had an office on campus at CU for more than six years.

"I am very proud of all we accomplished in GORD. During my time with the group, we received around 15 letters from audience members crediting us for saving a life. Not just fraternity people, either. They heard our story, heard our message, and ended up taking actions that in the past they wouldn't have normally taken, like calling an ambulance in a situation where peer pressure dictated otherwise. Those letters, those lives, are a credit to Gordie, and to the students who knew him or were inspired by who he was and volunteered their time."

"You don't understand the feeling until you wake up and know that you had six hours to call 911 and you were too ignorant, too scared, too whatever to make that call."

—Jack Gilles, *HAZE*

GORD helped students at CU and around the state of Colorado, and also helped Jack get his college career back on track. "GORD really helped give me purpose. Other things followed for me, like a better focus on my classes, rebounding my grades and academic career, and more stable, healthier relationships." Four years after Gordie's death, Jack was able to graduate from CU on time. "Graduation from CU was cathartic in the sense of letting go. I had a chance to go out into the world and be known as me, and not first as Gordie's friend (to those that knew him or had heard about his death) or the alcohol education guy (to those that had seen a GORD presentation)."

Jack graduated in 2008, and planned three months of travel to South America. Those three months turned into over 4 years, during which Jack lived in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil, where he started a few restaurants that he sold before moving back to the US. "I was ready to move on from CU, GORD, and all the baggage. Perhaps that's why I stayed working in South America so long—I had the opportunity to just be me, and start over."

Before embarking on his life after college, Jack participated in the filming of *HAZE*, the documentary about Gordie and the events surrounding his death which was produced by Gordie's mother and stepfather, Leslie and Michael Lanahan. "I felt, and still feel, that I had a responsibility to Gordie, to support his family in their efforts," Jack says of his decision to participate in *HAZE*. "For me, my role in *HAZE* was for no other reason but the future. Making an impact on the next kid, or the next kid's friends. For Gordie, what was done was done and that story can't be changed. So in my mind, *HAZE* wasn't about Chi Psi, it wasn't about GORD, it wasn't about redemption or demonizing, or public relations. It was simply about finding ways to impact future generations so they didn't have to go through this." Jack

was one of the only people in Boulder who was willing to talk with Gordie's family after his death. "I was so grateful that Jack was willing to step up," Leslie says of his participation in *HAZE*. "I thought it was dear of him to take responsibility as someone who didn't make the call [to 911] himself. I will always be so thankful for him and grateful to him."

HAZE has been viewed by over 1 million students nationwide since its release 11 years ago. Jack has an integral part in the film, and in discussions after viewings, students consistently single him out as someone with whom they have a strong connection. "If my participation in *HAZE* has had an impact, then it makes me feel good. All I have ever tried to be when it comes to Gordie is honest, and I am happy to hear that honesty resonates with people." Jack thinks that Gordie's story remains relevant to students today because "Gordie was, and still represents, a typical teenager, and his death deals with topics still important for current and future generations."

Today, Jack works in the agricultural sector, with the same company he joined upon his return from South America. He travels internationally often, managing strategic projects and business development for global business units. He graduated with an MBA focused on international business last December, and currently resides in California.



Jack publicizing the "World's Largest Hug" honoring Gordie before a CU football game 2 years after Gordie's death

“It’s fifteen years later, and I carry the same regret when it comes to Gordie. I know what happened, what I did, and what I should have done. I didn’t do the right things and he died. There is a finality to that series of events that is particularly harsh for young people—young people who should be able to make lots of mistakes and learn from them. For Gordie, there was no lesson to be learned, because he never got a chance to. And for me, these are not lessons that should need someone to die in order to learn.”

“I understand firsthand the feeling of ‘I wish I had done something.’ That’s not something that ever leaves you. I still think of Gordie all the time—every time I fly into Dallas, or September 17th rolls around, or his birthday in February comes up, or I see a photo from his family or my other college dorm mates on social media. I still choke up thinking or talking about him. It’s a conglomerate of emotions that will never go away—regardless of acceptance, guilt, time, future actions. It’s just there, and always will be.”

Jack thinks back to when he first started at CU, and how Gordie has shaped so much of what came after for him. “Between the dorms and the pledge class, we thought, ‘These are going to be the friends we have for the rest of our lives.’ And in many respects that has turned out to be true. For those of us who knew Gordie, experiencing his death together forged a very strong bond. His roommate, Steve, is still one of my closest friends. In a lot of ways, this speaks to who Gordie was. He made so many fast friends, and people respected him and liked the guy so much that his death left a void. Really, a tangible void in our freshman year college experience. But from that tragedy, our entire floor became like a family, the bonds of which are still strong more than a decade later. So many good things happened after his death, and they only happened because of how he was in life—not because of what happened at a fraternity party. In that sense, I can confidently say that as devastating of a tragedy as his death was, what defined Gordie was his life—too short but very impactful. And for that, I consider him to have been a wonderful friend, and I feel lucky to have known and been friends with somebody like that. Some people live to be 90 and never make an impact on so many people. He did it by 18.” ✨

fifteen

“No one is more surprised to have died like this than Gordie.”

—Leslie Lanahan, Gordie’s mother

“Parents who seek purpose and meaning from their tragedies can go on to do good, which then becomes part of their child’s impact on the world.”

—Sheryl Sandberg & Adam Grant, describing Dr. Joe Kasper’s concept of “co-destiny” after loss in their book, *Option B*

Creating The Gordie Foundation

Very quickly after Gordie’s death, the Lanahans realized that they needed to do something to combat their feelings of helplessness . . . Gordie was gone, but they would work to prevent another family from experiencing a loss like theirs. They formed The Gordie Foundation (TGF) to share Gordie’s story and lifesaving message. Support poured in from family and friends to help get TGF started.

“When we formed TGF, we brought a group of friends together from different backgrounds and thought through different goals and strategies. We wanted to keep the message simple, and focus on educating students and families that alcohol can kill. As parents who have lost a son, we have a responsibility to share what we have learned. We have a responsibility to be out there leading the charge on education,” Michael says of the effort behind forming the Foundation. “I think that if somebody had picked up the phone and made a call, Gordie would be alive today. That’s such a simple thing. He laid on that couch for I don’t know how many hours, and nobody did anything. I think that’s true of all these hazing deaths. Our call to action was ‘Save a Life, Make the Call’—it’s a pretty simple call to action. Gordie would still be with us if someone had called to get him help.”

A major undertaking of TGF was producing a documentary film about Gordie and the factors that led to his death. Leslie and Michael worked with director Pete Schuermann to capture Gordie’s personality, interview his friends, and explore the problem of hazing and alcohol overdose on college campuses. The result of their efforts is the documentary *HAZE*, which was released in 2008 (a new edit of the film, including a stronger focus on hazing, was released on Gordie’s birthday in 2018).

“I love *HAZE*—I think the film has this magical ability to bring Gordie’s personality to life. He is such a presence in the film that you just relate to him. That’s the way he was . . . even if you weren’t his kind of person, you couldn’t help but like him—he was loveable, huggable, and so funny. Everyone can relate to him,” Leslie says of the film. *HAZE* is shown annually at high schools and colleges nationwide.

“Focusing on the Foundation was inspirational and gave us a goal and focus,” says Michael. “It was part of our survival. It was a full-time job. At the same time, we wanted to make sure that Lily was doing as well as she could do, and that we weren’t spending so much time on the Foundation that she felt slighted. My goal was to try to show Lily what we thought the appropriate response to a tragedy was. We were hoping she would be proud of what we were doing on behalf of her brother to educate and change. There are other tracks we could have taken, and we were more right than wrong in the path we took with the Foundation.”

As much as TGF helped Leslie and Michael, their grief was still overwhelming. Leslie remembers, “For the first five years, you just can’t even believe it. You wake up every day and

you think, ‘Are you kidding me? How can this be?’ For me, around year 7 or 8, I started to believe it—he was gone, and he wasn’t coming back. Then it was just trying to figure out how to live with that. Now, I know he’s gone and this is our reality. I had to keep going, for Lily ... if I hadn’t had her, I don’t know what would have happened.”

Leslie and Michael were managing their own emotions while also trying to be there for each other. “We were all lucky to get through it,” Michael states matter-of-factly. “Not many parents lose a child and stay together—many get divorced. Because I was Gordie’s stepfather, I was slightly removed ... so I was able to take care of Leslie more than needing to take care of myself.” Leslie is effusive about Michael. “I’m so grateful for Michael—he did such a great job. I don’t know that I would have gotten through it if it was any different. You can’t really help the other person who loses their child—they are so all-consumed.”

The Lanahans were involved in the day-to-day operation of TGF for over five years. During that time, the family moved to a new house in Dallas, away from the home where they had raised Gordie and Lily—it was too difficult to live where memories of Gordie permeated every space. The new house provided some distance from the constant emotional strain of living among those memories—the move was emotional, but also provided a merciful relief. For that same reason, the Lanahans began actively searching for a new home for their nonprofit in 2010—living every day with reminders of Gordie’s death through their work with the Foundation was taking a toll. Michael attended the University of Virginia’s (UVA) Darden School of Business, and had maintained his connection with UVA since his graduation. UVA seemed like a natural home for TGF, and in late 2010, the Lanahans gifted their foundation to UVA, where it became the Gordie Center.

After the shift, it was necessary for the Lanahans to take a step back—as Leslie put it, “You want to climb under a rock and not hear anything about it for 20 years.” They continued to be updated on the work the Gordie Center was doing, and enjoyed the separation from the daily emotions. A few years passed with less involvement on their part, years spent on healing and finding balance in their lives again. They never strayed far, though, and since 2016, the Lanahans have taken on a more active advisory role with the Gordie Center staff. They consult closely on the Gordie Center’s efforts to ensure that Gordie’s lifesaving message continues to impact students nationwide. Michael says of the Gordie Center that “Gordie’s message is in good hands. We have heard anecdotally about the lives Gordie’s story has saved, and I think there are even more that we haven’t heard about. I think it’s one of the proudest things of my life.” Leslie feels similarly. “I’m immensely proud of the fact that there is still work going on in Gordie’s name. Any parent who has lost a child ... you just want your child not to be forgotten, so the work being done in his name is meaningful to our whole family. I’ve gotten a lot of feedback that Gordie’s story has helped people and saved lives—even still—and that makes me feel really good.”

(continued on page 38)



Gordie with his sister, Lily

A Life Divided

Lily Lanahan was 14 years old when her brother, Gordie, died as the result of hazing. Gordie was 4 years older than Lily, and the two had been best friends for all of Lily’s life. “Gordie was inclusive and we were incredibly close for siblings with a four-year age gap,” Lily remembers. “We adored one another. I completely idolized him and felt so loved as a kid and even as a teenager. He was the big brother who was cool and funny, but self-assured enough to be inclusive to a younger sister. We were technically half siblings (sharing the same mom) but were raised under the same roof and didn’t see that as any kind of barrier between us. In fact, it meant that I got to accompany Gordie on school breaks to visit his dad and stepmom or that we could all spend Thanksgiving together in Sun Valley, Idaho. We were a quirky but solid family unit, and we didn’t know anything different.”

“We spent our childhood running around our house in Dallas, Texas, making home videos, playing with the zoo of animals that our parents let us bring into the house, and spending countless hours in the pool. As we got older, Gordie pursued a love for the guitar and would sit in my room at night playing all of the new songs he had taught himself that day. Before he left for boarding school in Massachusetts, he taught me how to play lacrosse in the front yard. My



Lily and Gordie on vacation

mom and dad (Gordie's stepdad) were supportive and available to us, but also encouraged us to be independent from a young age—whether it be sleep away camp for the summer or some sort of backpacking adventure. We didn't have extended family in Texas, so our friends became actual family and holidays typically included travel to see relatives on the east or west coast."

Gordie attended Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts while Lily was in middle school, and his positive experience there inspired Lily to attend boarding school as well. She chose her mother's alma mater, The Taft School in Connecticut, and was 2 weeks into her boarding school experience when she was blindsided with the news that her brother had died. "My entire world changed the day that Gordie passed. I lost my best friend and only sibling at 14 years old, and without a chance to say goodbye. Words can't begin to describe the grief ... Gordie's death demanded a strength in me that I never knew possible. Friends and family showed up and supported us in the most incredible ways, and after a week at home in Texas, I made the tough decision to return to Taft. I was faced with the challenge of adapting to a new school, in a new part of the country, and with an entirely new support system. I needed to re-discover my identity, which was so embedded in my older brother's personality. Being away from home provided me with a unique opportunity to do just that. I was given the chance to grieve on my own terms and to become my own person. I'm forever grateful to my family for giving me that opportunity; their love, trust, and confidence in me has provided so much freedom."

Lily was left as Leslie and Michael's only child after Gordie died, and the fracturing of their family of 4 was incredibly difficult on all of them. The death of a child can easily destroy a marriage, and Lily was very aware of this from a young age. "I am so fortunate to have two parents standing strong today, and I'm so proud that they were able to make it out of this tragedy together. My mom is the most resilient woman I know, and my dad is our rock. We've come out of this experience stronger and with so much love for life." Lily gave Leslie the strength to keep going every day—she didn't want Lily to lose her mother the same day she lost her brother. "Seeing a parent in their most vulnerable state is absolutely devastating," Lily says. "Although it was definitely not asked of me, I felt the need to be strong for my parents. Gordie's passing forced me to face grief for the first time and to grow up really quickly. I had a difficult time in my teens learning that we all grieved differently, and that hardness probably prolonged a lot of grief that needed to happen. I was trying to get through school and figure out who I was without my brother. If I could go back to that time, I would tell myself to trust that there's light at the end of the tunnel. It's hard to know just how resilient the human spirit is until you're forced to be in that position. I'm so proud of the strength I found as a 14-year-old."

"Life for me has sort of always been divided by this moment — my life before and after Gordie's passing."

—Lily Lanahan

At Taft, Michael says Lily really channeled Gordie—she came out of her shell and really thrived there. Lily was elected school president her senior year at Taft, and chose to attend Trinity College in Connecticut after graduation. At 18 years old and starting college, Lily was in the same position her brother had been in 4 years earlier, and that parallel was not lost on her. "After building such a strong support system in high school, I dreaded the prospect of having to recreate that in college. I was navigating many of the same things that Gordie had just 4 years earlier: new school, friendships, classes, and Greek life. I wanted to live fully and unburdened by my tragedy, but in a way that felt safe and comfortable. I decided to go to a small liberal arts school where I knew several people from my high school, which provided a bit of a safety net that I didn't feel Gordie had at such a big university. I ended up partaking in Greek life, making incredibly close friends, and leading *HAZE* screenings on campus along the way."

While in college, Lily pursued her passion for art and art history, which led her to a graduate program in art and design in London. She began her post-graduate career in New York City at Sotheby's auction house, and then was recruited by a design firm in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Today, Lily lives with her boyfriend Johnny in Sydney, Australia, where she is consulting for several design businesses and launching a home décor brand of her own. "When Gordie died,

I gained an entirely new perspective on life that provided me with more clarity than I ever could've imagined. For the first time, I was able to easily assess what mattered most to me, and this has been a gift that's rewarded me with incredibly special friendships and relationships over the years. As cliché as it might sound, I'm constantly fueled by Gordie's memory to live the kind of life that he would've wanted me to. His spirit has inspired me to summit Mt. Kilimanjaro, backpack through the Milford Sound in New Zealand, and to ultimately start a new chapter in Australia. Regardless of the weather, Gordie always said 'every day's a beach day' and I'm happy to be able to live out that motto."

Michael and Leslie can't hide how proud they are of their daughter. "Lily is really talented and has more of a business mind than I do. She gets out there and does her own thing, and I'm so proud of her for that," Leslie gushes. Michael adds, "I love watching her grow ... I always think about her at 2 years old, and how I wanted to protect her from everything. She has flourished—she determined that she was going to be someone that Gordie was going to be proud of. She was forced into situations where she was talking to large groups, and screening *HAZE* and having to talk about Gordie's death. It was an opportunity to be proud of something rather than being sad. Lily is very happy to be in Australia with Johnny, and that makes us very happy."

"Gordie was a bit of a unicorn to me, and I absolutely idolized him for it."

—Lily Lanahan

Lily has lived 15 long years without her brother and best friend. "It's hard to describe what 15 years means to me. This year's anniversary marks the date that I've lived longer without my brother than I had the chance to live with him. It's really painful to think about, but I think he'd be so proud of where I am today. So much has happened since I was 14 years old, and my grief now is for the life that I so wish Gordie had the chance to live. I wish I had the chance to share all of my adventures with him. For me, it's a constant reminder to love fiercely and to live a life that's fulfilling."

The yearly calendar is full of especially difficult days for Lily, and for all of Gordie's family and friends. Lily focuses on the good when those days roll around. "I like to look back at old photos of Gordie, re-watch some of our favorite movies, and share funny stories with my loved ones. My boyfriend and many of my closest friends never actually had the chance to meet Gordie, so it's an occasion for me to share memories and continue his legacy. After all of these years, I'm still moved by the outpouring of love from family and friends. For 15 years straight, I've received a note and flowers from a former high school teacher and close friend, Pam MacMullen. Her compassion is endless and her thoughtfulness inspires me to pay it forward to others."



Lily Lanahan



Lily and her boyfriend, Johnny

Lily feels strongly that education is a large part of preventing another loss like Gordie's. "Students should enter college aware of the dangers of alcohol overdose to the same extent that they're educated about drinking and driving. It's about recognizing the signs of alcohol overdose so that you can take care of your friends. Everyone needs to know when to make the call for help. I also think students and families should be fully aware of the responsibilities and legal repercussions of leadership positions within sororities and fraternities. Hazing and alcohol misuse is not a new story, and while awareness for this issue has increased, the problem is still very much present. The framework around hazing is complex, and we've seen a lack of accountability at universities and Greek organizations for years. Slowly but surely, individuals are actually being held accountable for their actions in a legal capacity, which we believe will be the most powerful agent of change."

What stands out the most for Lily is the impact Gordie made in his short life, and that he continues to make through the work of the Gordie Center. "Gordie made an impression on people from a young age. He was big, animated, attention-seeking, and had a very distinct optimism about him. Gordie was a bit of a unicorn to me, and I absolutely idolized him for it. As a math wizard, captain of the football team, self-taught guitar player, and lead in the school play, Gordie seemed to do it all. But what I later learned was just how many people he touched while doing so. Gordie's reach was wide and his presence was memorable. I think Gordie's legacy has resonated with thousands of students and families because people can see someone they know in Gordie. I think they are also aware just how preventable a death like his was and how important it is to share his story. The Gordie Center means everything to our family. The work that the Gordie Center does has given us a voice and a channel to continue sharing Gordie's story 15 years after the fact. We find a great sense of peace knowing that we can make a difference out of such a senseless and preventable death."

"The work that the Gordie Center does has given us a voice and a channel to continue sharing Gordie's story 15 years after the fact. We find a great sense of peace knowing that we can make a difference out of such a senseless and preventable death."

—Lily Lanahan

These 15 years have proven to be a long road to recovery and self-discovery for Lily, and Gordie is never far from her thoughts. "I am so incredibly proud to be his little sister." ✨

Demanding Reforms to Protect Student Safety

When Gordie died, the Lanahans sought legal support from a firm that had familiarity with hazing cases. They found a champion for Gordie in Doug Fierberg of the Fierberg National Law Group. Doug's firm had been handling hazing cases for at least 10 years when he took Gordie's case. The Lanahans sued the University of Colorado, Chi Psi fraternity, and a number of fraternity officers involved with the activities that caused Gordie's death. "The Bailey case was important," Doug says. "Fifteen years ago, the majority of hazing cases seeking to hold national, local, and individuals responsible were not successful. The fact that the Lanahans were successful in so many ways changed how fraternities respond." Doug recalls that Gordie died in a longstanding fraternity ritual, and at the time, the public misperception was that he consumed too much alcohol on his own and died. The fraternity also held the age-old attitude that no one but Gordie was responsible for his death.

"I'll never forget Leslie's response to the settlement offers from defendants ... she said she felt like she was at a flea market negotiation over the death of her son."

—Doug Fierberg

Working against the Lanahans was a Colorado law that capped monetary awards at \$320,000 combined from all defendants. CU and Chi Psi would shoulder the bulk of the monetary burden (which would be paid by their insurance companies), leaving the fraternity officers with only small monetary penalties, which would be covered by their parents' homeowner insurance policies. When the individual defendants in Gordie's case entered mediation with Doug and the Lanahans, they believed that, under Colorado law, they wouldn't be responsible for more than a few thousand dollars each—Doug says, "I'll never forget Leslie's response to the settlement offers from defendants ... she said she felt like she was at a flea market

negotiation over the death of her son. The wrongdoers were offering pennies for having caused the Lanahans immeasurable pain and damages." Colorado law at the time was also unfavorable to parents like Leslie and Michael when their loss was non-economic (i.e., pain and suffering).

"Gordie's case was one of the first hazing lawsuits to demand and successfully compel non-monetary reforms to increase student safety as part of the settlement. The fraternity was compelled to make changes as a result of the case."

—Doug Fierberg

For the Lanahans, money wasn't their objective. "It was never about the money for us—money wouldn't bring Gordie back. We wanted to make it as painful for the defendants as possible, so that their business model becomes more expensive. I'm not anti-Greek ... I'm against idiots who continue to lead corporations and don't show any leadership or concern about how dangerous their business is. Financial penalties change the business model and stop the deaths from hazing," says Michael. Doug and his firm discovered a novel way around the Colorado award cap—another Colorado law where wrongful conduct and harm caused could be considered reckless manslaughter. A finding of reckless manslaughter would not be subject to any cap, and the potential for an uncapped penalty was enough to push the defendants toward a more meaningful settlement with the Lanahans. "We pushed hard on the national fraternity because the Lanahans wanted to make changes. Gordie's lawsuit was not just about money—a number of institutional reforms were imposed on the fraternity as a condition of their settlement. Gordie's case was one of the first hazing lawsuits to demand and successfully compel non-monetary reforms to increase student safety as part of the settlement. The fraternity was compelled to make changes as a result of the case." Part of the settlement forced Chi Psi to take responsibility for Gordie's death, and to educate their members about Gordie and the dangers of alcohol overdose moving forward.

Because of Gordie's death, the Chi Psi national fraternity shut down the local CU chapter of Chi Psi, allowing re-colonization six years after Gordie's death. The national fraternity recently provided this statement about Gordie's death and its impact on Chi Psi: "Gordie's death was a shock to the soul of Chi Psi. The immediate response involved taking a program to each of our Alphas (chapters) with information about Gordie's death, and the danger of including any form of hazing and alcohol in the new member program. This program ultimately grew into our Education Responsibility and Action program, which is facilitated annually at each of our Alphas. While core values remain the same, Chi Psi's operations are very different now than they were 15 years ago. Chi Psi is more aware of the warning signs when the culture within an

Alpha is trending in a negative way, and we are less reluctant to close a chapter if that is the best way to address cultural issues. The Gordie Bailey story is included in our new member book, ‘The Chi Psi Story,’ so every new member hears Gordie’s story.”

As for the Greek system at CU, Gordie’s death prompted the creation of a new agreement between the University and Greek chapters to provide increased safety through educational requirements and additional oversight. The sororities signed the agreement and continue to operate as recognized student organizations at CU, but the fraternities balked. Less than a year after Gordie’s death, the fraternities chose to remove themselves from CU’s oversight and discipline, and now operate as a private corporate entity—the “IFC on the Hill.” This corporation is owned entirely by the undergraduate men of the fraternities and operates with a board of directors comprised of the undergraduate presidents of each of the 22 member fraternities. It is the only IFC organization in the country that operates without a connection to the university where the fraternity members attend. The Chi Psi chapter in Boulder re-colonized in 2010, in the same house where Gordie died, and is part of the IFC on the Hill.

“It would be impossible sit down with the Lanahans, hear about their tremendous loss, and then give up the fight.”

—Doug Fierberg

Doug Fierberg, the attorney for Gordie’s lawsuit, is effusive when discussing how the Lanahans and Gordie’s case changed the legal landscape of hazing cases by forcing a settlement that included monetary and non-monetary penalties aimed at education and culture shift. “The Lanahans were in incalculable grief, and were able to help so many families. Hazing is still happening, and it’s hard to deem success in that you don’t know whose life has been saved ... no deaths is not the only measure of success. Many lives have been saved because of the Lanahan’s efforts to raise awareness,” Doug says. For Doug and his firm, working on behalf of hazing victims and families has been at the heart of their efforts for 25 years. “Burnout simply isn’t plausible. It would be impossible sit down with the Lanahans, hear about their tremendous loss, and then give up the fight currently. It’s the right fight, and not a bit of work that my firm is doing is disconnected from Gordie. Lawsuits, strategies, demands, and negotiations are still being carried on in honor of Gordie Bailey and his family. ✨

The Current Legal Landscape around Hazing

Hazing remains an urgent national concern. Since Gordie’s death in 2004, 66 other families in the United States have endured the hazing-related death of a loved one.¹ Some names you recognize from the news: Tim Piazza, Robert Tipton, Jr., Max Gruver, Collin Wiant. Others did not receive widespread attention. Although progress has been slow in the fight to end hazing, noteworthy legal advances have occurred in recent years:

Tim Piazza died after being hazed while pledging Beta Theta Pi fraternity at Penn State University in 2017. Tim’s death captured national attention because of security videos from the fraternity house showing the hazing behaviors and lack of care shown to Tim. A large criminal case was mounted against fraternity members for their involvement in the hazing activities, the majority of whom pled guilty to misdemeanor hazing and alcohol violations, resulting in little punishment. Tim’s parents are suing 28 fraternity members for wrongful death, negligence, and conspiracy, and have settled a civil case with Penn State that included stipulations to increase student safety. Pennsylvania’s **Timothy J. Piazza Antihazing Law** makes hazing a third-degree felony in cases of serious injury or death, and requires universities and high schools to disclose any reports of hazing.

Max Gruver died after being hazed while pledging Phi Delta Theta fraternity at Louisiana State University in 2017. Ten fraternity members were arrested, but only 4 were indicted: 2 pled no contest to misdemeanor hazing and served 30 days in jail, 1 agreed to cooperate with the prosecution and has not yet been charged, and the third, Matthew Naquin, was convicted of **felony negligent homicide** and is awaiting sentencing (up to 5 years in prison). Naquin’s conviction represents the only felony criminal conviction resulting from hazing prosecution in the 4 hazing deaths that occurred in 2017. Max’s parents have filed a \$25 million civil suit against LSU, the fraternity, and the 4 fraternity members. The **Max Gruver Act** strengthened Louisiana’s hazing laws to include jail time (30 days to up to 5 years) and monetary penalties. Louisiana also joins 11 other states (California, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wisconsin) in considering hazing a felony.

Federal legislation to reduce hazing by increasing transparency is being pursued through two bills. The **End All Hazing Act** would require schools to maintain a website listing all student organizations that have been disciplined for hazing or other student safety violations, and to report any hazing allegation to appropriate law enforcement. The **REACH Act** would require universities to include incidents of hazing in their annual Clery Act reporting (campus crime statistics and efforts to improve campus safety). Both bills would allow the public to track problematic organizations and make better-informed decisions before joining organizations. ✨

¹ Hank Nuwer’s Chronology of Hazing Deaths (<http://www.hanknuwer.com/hazing-deaths/>), accessed on August 6, 2019.

15 Years and the Future

Fifteen years is a long time to live without your child. Leslie has tried to balance her grief with the reality that life goes on for her, and for Gordie's friends. "I didn't do a Christmas card for 4 years, and then I finally decided to do it for Lily. There will always be that big hole in your heart. You just try to focus on the positive—celebrate the good and learn to live with the bad. I'm used to living without him. It's terrible, but I'm used to the fact that he's not here. It's not as raw—you grow a pretty thick skin. I'd like to think that there was value in Gordie's short life of 18 years—it meant something to a lot of people. You just can't believe his life was so short. Time goes on. His friends are getting married and having kids. So few people understand—they don't even connect that it would be hard for Michael and me." Michael gives an example to illustrate Leslie's point: "Gordie's high school was playing for the state lacrosse championship recently, and friends wanted us to come out, and Leslie couldn't do it. Even now, watching Gordie's buddies get married, it's really tough. Gordie should be in that picture—he should be getting married, he should be having children. We love to be around Gordie's friends, but it is so hard."

Michael has felt his grief change over the years as well: "In the early years, you feel like there's a stump on your chest that almost won't allow you to breathe and won't go away. As the years go on, the stump is still there, but you're able to put it in a safe place and you deal with the reality that things aren't going to change. Gordie's not coming back. Time is circular. We have his birthday, Mother's Day, the anniversary of his death, and Christmas every year. We have to face these things without him. I always think of this analogy: When you break a leg, you realize how many other people are walking around with casts on. There are so many people who have suffered tragedies, and they just keep on going—that's just what you do in life. Leslie and I have a very healthy dialogue and ability to talk about Gordie, and we try to do it often. Some of our family and friends still don't know how to talk with us about our dead son—they don't want to upset us or make us cry, but it doesn't hurt us to cry in front of people. We had a son that we like to talk about. He was a great son."

On the especially hard days, like Gordie's birthday, Leslie and Michael choose to celebrate who Gordie was. Michael says they ask themselves, "What would Gordie do? We watch a movie that Gordie loved, like *Dumb and Dumber*, we laugh a lot, eat a Philly cheesesteak, and think about all the joy Gordie brought us."

Fall is challenging every year, not only because of the anniversary of Gordie's death, but because the Lanahans watch as hazing continues and more families lose loved ones. "It's hard because, frankly, not that much has changed in 15 years!" Leslie laments. "It can be draining. I think there is great value in numbers—there is a huge opportunity for families who have lost children to join together to raise awareness. We are a club that no one wants to join, and we don't want more members. There's a great opportunity for our families to come together and help make

the world aware of how often these tragedies are happening. They happen one at a time, so it's very hard to build momentum." Michael takes an even more direct stance: "By definition, we have failed in our mission because so many families have lost a child after Gordie died. Every one of those deaths was a failure on our part—why didn't they get the message, why didn't the parents know, why haven't colleges and fraternities tried to implement safer policies?"

Fifteen years has also given Leslie and Michael time to reflect on their efforts with the Gordie Center, and the message they want to give to students and parents. "I think my message has evolved," Leslie says. "In the beginning, it was about taking care of your friends. We were focused on what to do in a tragedy: make sure you call for help. Now, I am more interested in how to prevent the tragedy from happening. How do we make sure hazing doesn't happen? We need to focus on changing the traditions. Hazing is ugly and mean, and there's no need for it. How can we help foster bonding in a more positive way? You don't need alcohol to bond. You don't need to humiliate someone to bond. We need to be talking with these young men and changing the traditions. I think taking care of your friends is always important, but how can we stop hazing before it starts?"

"How do we make sure hazing doesn't happen? We need to focus on changing the traditions. Hazing is ugly and mean, and there's no need for it. How can we help foster bonding in a more positive way? You don't need alcohol to bond. You don't need to humiliate someone to bond."

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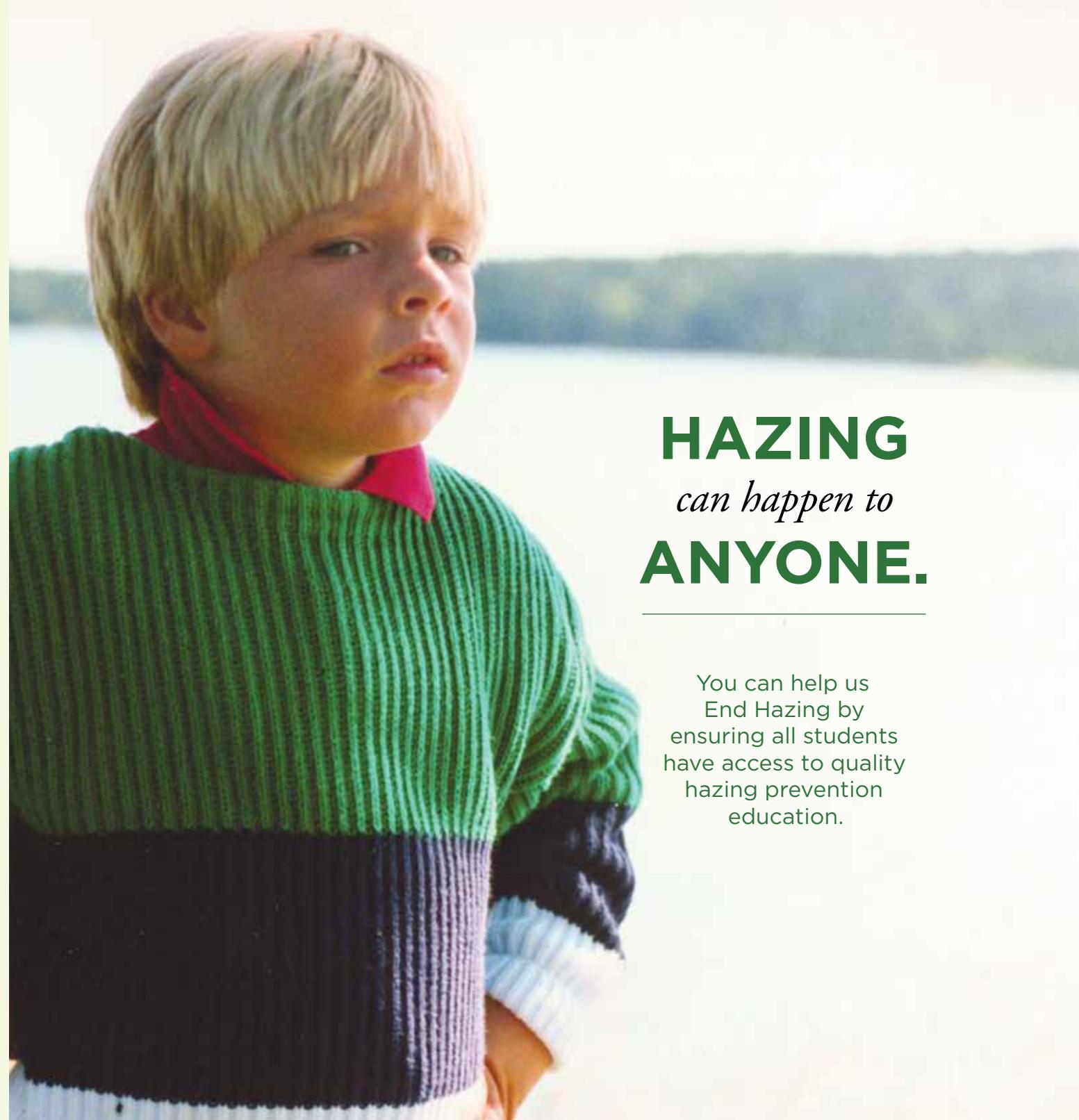
Michael embraces the call to action that started The Gordie Foundation, and expands on it. "If there's a broader context of warning your son—when he joins a fraternity, as he takes a leadership position, warn him. Kids are dying during hazing. They are more susceptible 30 days into college in the fall—why can't we change the system and make pledging spring of sophomore year? If it could happen to Gordie, it could happen to anybody's kid. When you look at the profile of these hazing deaths, they were pretty stand-out kids. They were not shrinking violets. Gordie never got hurt in athletics, so he was more willing to take risks. During the hazing the night he died, Gordie did more than his share because he was looking out for the other pledges—he thought he could handle it. He had an 18-year-old brain and thought he was invulnerable. We talked with Gordie a lot about drinking and driving. We never talked to him about alcohol poisoning, and we failed Gordie in that respect. When you lose a son the way we lost Gordie, it's like—why didn't we get the memo, why weren't we able to give him the right education before he went to college?"

"Part of the answer is education—education about the dangers, what to be on the watch for, but also education about the people who have been killed through this process and what the laws are doing to try to address the problem," Michael continues. "A lot of that is transparency—if

people are able to see which fraternities are killing their pledges, what number, which schools ... there are a lot of repeat offenders. Parents who haven't yet sent their kid to college don't even know what to worry about—that's why transparency is important. I don't think the Greek system even registers for parents at orientation with their son. The reason it's hard to change the system is because all the hazing is secret—you only hear about it if they kill a pledge. And even then, it's hard when you are losing one boy at a time to get the public to say, 'We aren't going to stand for this anymore.' There's so much opportunity for change. My hope is that at some point this reaches a tipping point. *I don't know how many deaths that would require.* Those in a position of authority at universities and in the Greek system nationwide just hope to wake up on a Sunday morning and learn that no one has died, because they aren't really doing anything to prevent it or change it."

Leslie and Michael have spent the last 15 years grieving the loss of their son, pushing for change so that other families don't have to endure what they have been through, and honoring Gordie in the way they live their lives now. Leslie thinks a lot about the impression that her son left on so many. "He was sweet and loveable, one of the funniest kids in the whole world—people just wanted to be his friend because he was fun. Gordie made the most of his life, and he would like anybody to learn to do the same. No one is more surprised to have died like this than Gordie. He would never have wanted to put his family through this type of pain. He always thought he could handle things, and so did I. The hardest part about the 15 years is learning to live with the tragedy—it's something I can't do anything about. It takes so much energy, living with it. You feel so badly about it, but there's nothing you can do about it. Having other people learn through his story and not put their families through the same pain would be important to Gordie."

Michael thinks about what was lost when Gordie died, not just for their family, but for Gordie. "It's hard to put into words the loss, and it's hard to do it in a way that families who haven't experienced it can appreciate. We don't want other people to experience it. We want to make a difference and prevent other families from losing their child. We always talked about when Gordie finally found his passion, he was going to be extraordinary. He wasn't the best student, but he was brilliant. I always thought he would end up behind a camera, directing ... but we could also see him as a football coach. He loved to diagram plays, loved sports, loved kids. I don't think he would have been sitting behind a desk like his stepfather. He was always going to take a different path. It's heartening to think about all those possibilities, and sad that it was cut short." After a pause, Michael adds, "I feel like I was given too much time. I would gladly give up that time to give Gordie 30, 40 more years. He would have been extraordinary." ✨



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You can help us
End Hazing by
ensuring all students
have access to quality
hazing prevention
education.

 gordie.org/donate

You make it happen ...

Students would not hear Gordie's story without you, our incredibly generous donors. This year, thanks to you, we launched a new GORDIEstore to give easier access to schools and communities looking for quality alcohol overdose and hazing prevention resources. We also created a new position at the Gordie Center, the Robert Tipton Hazing Prevention Coordinator, to honor the memory of hazing victim Robert Tipton, Jr., enhance our hazing prevention efforts, and expand our outreach. We are forever grateful to all of you for your commitment to the Gordie Center, and to saving lives. You are a part of Gordie's legacy!

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Gordie overlooking Deerfield Academy

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The mission of the Gordie Center is to end hazing and substance misuse among college and high school students nationwide. We are dedicated to sharing Gordie Bailey's story to prevent future hazing-related alcohol overdose deaths. The Gordie Center empowers students to transform their campus and community cultures through peer education and bystander intervention using our evidence-informed, student-tested resources. Our APPLE Training Institutes are the leading national substance misuse prevention and health promotion conferences for NCAA student-athletes. ✨



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