

Chapter 3 - Simply Born

Noah

*There was this pine thicket where I would go,
Only reason was to hear the wind blow.
Like the voices of ancients, it would sigh,
Tickling the pine needles as it went by.
I listened closely; secrets it would share,
As it blew through the trees and rustled my hair.
Since my last visit, it's been many years;
Much ground I've covered and conquered many fears.
With each mile I traveled, I'd feel my heart grow,
Many things I learned and from this I know:
Though great distances I roamed to find peace within,
Twas always in the thicket where the journey did begin.*

Loran Smith (Athens Banner Herald (June 29, 2005)

Prior to the service, I sat on the porch of the mountain home of Earl Leonard, retired from Coca-Cola, and listened to the whisper of the Cartecay River, flowing gently by. It is a river in which Noah Harris swam as a boy. "He often tubed by here," Leonard said. "When I heard the news of his death, I came out on this porch, broke down and cried profusely. I didn't know that I had that much crying left in me." But you could hear Noah whispering, "Don't cry for me."

Rick (scrambling to establish a home, quickly...)

With a \$79 miter box, a \$99 portable table saw, and a chainsaw we had been building our "telephone pole house" for the last year, surviving the winter by wearing our coats in the house and sitting on the wood-burning stove in the evenings. These were not the best of circumstances, but this beat the early days in which we slept in the bed of the truck with a piece of plastic over us as the rains came down. Things were definitely improving, but I couldn't get the house warm because I had just completed the outside walls and had not yet installed the insulation, and the windows in the great room only had plastic over them. One of the door openings was covered by fiberboard insulation. Literally, we checked the temperature every morning by sticking our heads out from under the warm piles of blankets and blowing to see if our breath would turn white with frost. There was no one to blame since I was the sole builder on the site and the chief director and architect of what can only be called the grandest construction project of our lives. Lucy would always encourage me, telling me that living in an "object d' arte" satisfied her restless spirit.

Now we sometimes feel that civilization is encroaching, but back then, building in the middle of the forest had its challenges since there were no lumber yards or supply houses nearby. Highway 400, a major thoroughfare into the mountains had not been completed. I used a third-generation locally owned sawmill "down the road" for my wood, so most of the house structure was made of rough-sawn lumber. In other words, every board has a story; and nothing is square. In short, what I did was bury 10 telephone poles in the ground in a circle around one big one in the middle. Lucy will tell you that she tamped down the poles for 21 long 12-hour days and discovered

that fingers have muscles that could be stretched to the point of throbbing. I determined where I wanted the first floor and banded the outside poles on this level and worked toward the middle. I ended up with a circular, 10-piece pie-shape that, when it was braced off, looked like a spider web.

Lucy

To hear Rick tell the story, it sounds simple and easy, but I remember the day that he called my name loudly and I came running to find that he was up on a ladder with the claw of a hammer stuck in the side of his nose. "Luce, you are going to have to pull it out." was all he said. I did and though the blood sort of gushed, he went right back to work as I ran for the well-used peroxide bottle. Everyday brought a smashed fingernail or, at the very least, an award-winning blister.

On this level, two sections of the pie on the backside of the house became kitchen and two became bath/laundry room. This left a nice, large, six-slice living area. I went up nine feet on the center pole to create another level which I situated over the kitchen/bath area. This became the loft bedroom which I built over the lower four sections. Thus, we had a very large bedroom with a small deck off the back. I raised the roof in the bedroom area to give us windows on the sides and lots of headspace. Working mostly alone, I cut the tops off all the telephone poles to yield the roof line and laid huge 4" x 8" x 18' rough-sawn beams from the outside poles to the center pole for the roof. *That* was a job. After getting the walls up, I built a deck that wrapped around the front six sections of the house and overlooked the creek. What's funny and amazing to me in retrospect is that I built this house with no blueprints and little or no prior experience in carpentry, plumbing, electrical, wells and pumps, drain fields, chainsaws, or living outside in the forest for months at a time; I grew up in Miami.

Lucy

Speaking of chainsaws, many a mountain person will understand why I always will cherish my oil-besotted memory of a day when, having executed the shoulder-wrenching jerk that is required to start an old chainsaw no less than 25 times, Rick finally succumbed to the stubborn will of the machine, and realizing that it was simply not going to start "for him," threw it down the mountain in a shower of wood chips and expletives. At which point, I made a hasty exit and went for one of my long walks in the peaceful woods where I prayed for a miracle and later was delighted to return to the familiar buzz of that ornery piece of equipment. Thank you Lord!

As for the design and layout of the house, I made it up as I went along and have continued to add to it to this day using my "tried and true" *creative* methods of building. I suppose I had to prove to myself that where there is a will, there really is a way. We have since erected an addition to the front 6 sections where the original deck was. On the east side, we added a covered front porch and an entryway with Noah's bedroom—which he helped to build, off the foyer. Adjoining Noah's room, we added my office; but to get to it, we have to walk either around the outside walkway/gangway or through the house to the outside, west side, screened-in workout porch. I enter my meditation and writing sanctuary from this room.

We wrapped the house with a large deck on the east, and added a small deck for the hot tub. From this, we step onto the aforementioned walkway that wraps around the creek side of the house. This scenic route leads to the deck on the west side of the house which we call the "Cosmic Lounge" because of the whispering wind song and

the deep shade that repels even the heat of August. The bottom line is that this adventure has worked for us because we love to be outside and because we have always had faith that if a person strives to live a virtuous life, allowing for guidance from the divine inspiration, then all things are possible. When we were worried we always said, "God's got us covered."

Noah (college journal)

Life is a journey, but for a journey to truly get somewhere, there must be a direction. Without direction, it's just walking around. For some, walking might be a purpose; but, is a purpose a purpose if it is not recognized as such? It is our purpose and beliefs that guide us, our character that allows us to make decisions, the correct decisions.

Mom

I remember when I was in high school, my brother (Uncle Po Po) called me *the mystic* because I got so excited about brilliant colors in the sky and water-berries dripping from rain-drenched tree branches. When I was growing up, Thoreau's term "different drummer" often had been applied to my suggestions as I sometimes chose to walk the two-and-one-half miles to and from high school in Delaware in the winter so I could experience the frosty cold. In college, I never minded that my old red bike caused many a bemused smile, for, like Noah, I have always *preferred* the rustle of the wind through my hair. I suppose even then, I was plotting to live in my favorite place, the great outdoors. When I first started teaching, I remember how my Granny, always one of my best friends, was appalled when I bought six acres in the mountains of Georgia though I could barely pay my rent in Atlanta. She said, "Honey, you're a little different." My response was, "Aren't we all?" She just grinned.

I suppose if I hadn't embraced a slightly alternative direction, destiny still would have arranged that I meet the love of my life, rather than as I did on a blind date in Roswell, Georgia. The initial meeting was promising, and when Rick and I discovered on our second or third date that we owned nearly adjoining properties on the same ridge top near a waterfall, the term "purpose" took on a whole new meaning. It wasn't long before we joined our hearts and spirits and moved out of our all-the-conveniences apartment lifestyle to the banks of what the children in our extended family named Ticklebug Creek. We live so far out that when my high school students would threaten to roll our yard with toilet paper, I would draw them a map and tell them about our love of *big* dogs. Needless to say, we've never had the yard draped in white tissue because the roller-coaster curves in the road make it seem farther, more dangerous, and more costly than it actually is. Both of us always had the dream of living in the woods, at a spot where you could do a "360" and see very little that was touched by man.

Fifteen miles from the nearest town, we turn off the pavement and gently climb a half mile through the forest, snake to the right almost all the way around the small mountain church for which the road is named, cautiously execute a hairpin turn to the left, and for another half mile weave down through the majestic pine trees, tangled laurel thickets, and soaring oaks and poplars that line our road until reaching the waving American flag at the top of the driveway. Proceeding down the crunchy gravel path which curves through a tunnel of arched greenery, we cross over the cheerful burbling of Ticklebug Creek and our ears are joyfully assaulted by the cacophonous

symphony created by the hawks, nuthatches, cardinals, and finches. Noah always loved the haunted laughter of the red-headed woodpecker and the way the “shadow-casting” buzzard gracefully rides the wind currents in the wild, blue yonder above the emerald canopy.

Noah (Scrap of paper)

Penetrate my skin and soul, O bountiful sun, warming my happiness.

Spring and summer, we often “hushed” in our tracks listening to “crow parties” erupting in the treetops; in still moments, we submerged ourselves in the lingering green aroma of the seasonal moisture burbling against the stream bank, washing winter leaves away, sucking up the light of the sun and bouncing it back into our eyes. Warm and dazzling, the fluid purity is a constant that continues to melt the little ice crystals still hiding in the cracks of our mending hearts, and we find ourselves emerging, breath fluttering like the iridescent, gossamer dragonfly wings that wink and ride the fresh, free air.

Uncle Stu Glenn (Fort Worth, Texas)

I am truly inspired by the grace, beauty and love Noah brought into this world. His spirit shall always live on in those magnificent Georgia hills and in all our hearts. He will always be there.

We stroll to the left of a thick Japonica hedge and climb the moss-chinked steps onto the wooden walkway that leads to the first level of deck extensions that surround our decagon (10-sided) mountain cabin. Lucy’s dad (Pop Pop) the engineer, used to stare at the multi-angled, split-level umbrella roof and shake his head. He’d tell his friends and engineering students, “You have to see it to believe it.” We can feel a cooling breeze that seems to whisper, “Consider the lilies of the field.” Here the pioneer spirit wells up, and we often pause and grin as we think of friends Donna and Lloyd who call this kind of solitude in the wilderness “true luxury living.” Crossing the deck to the left, it’s up two steps to the covered “country” porch of what Noah figuratively labeled *his* “Mecca” soon after he went off to the University of Georgia. If the tiny Yorkie, Dooley, and the extra-large Golden, Dubya, are not too friendly, we can pause and listen to the water one more time before entering the foyer where we often stop to remove muddy boots as we peruse the memorabilia collection that has resulted from twenty-nine years of family life as well as from the constant trolling for Mother Nature’s artifacts through the heavily wooded peaks, valleys, and streams that surround our home.

Bobby Ray Toon (Noah’s commanding officer in Ba’quba, June 25, 2005)

Thank you, Ellijay, because the community, the church, the elementary across the street, his friends, and neighbors...All of you are the sum total of who Noah Harris was and the difference that he made in Iraq. He was a mountain of an LT and I could get into statistics of how many people we captured, how many weapons we found, but the one statistic that there is no way I could ever tell you is how many lives of the Iraqi people Noah touched in the five months he was on the ground and where the love that he showed to those people will ultimately lead. When I worked out with Noah, I’d say, “Brother, it looks like you have legs comin’ out of your shoulders.” But what I didn’t know at the time was the largest muscle that Noah Harris had was one you couldn’t see, and that was his heart. The night before I was to come back home for R and R, I was talking to Noah, and he was telling me not to spend too much time hunting, to spend some

time with my wife and daughters; and I planned to do both. I looked down at his laptop at his screen-saver; the picture wasn't a super model or a car. It was a house with azaleas in the yard. When I asked him about it, he said, "*Sir, that's why I'm here. That's my parents' home back in Ellijay.*"

The commanding theme of every room of the house since 06/18/05 has slowly emerged as a shrine of celebration for a life well lived. Noah's exuberance seems to fill the open, sun-lit space with happy green eyes and toothy smiles. We often gaze at our favorite snapshot of him, snuggled up with the sweet love of his life at Christmas time, 2004, just one month before he went to Iraq. We love the slippery feel of the extra large, purple, number 27 football jersey. We still can see him blasting through the defense of one of our local rivals and busting the game wide open.

John Pettit (One of Noah's favorite high school coaches, June 25, 2005)

When Noah was in the sixth grade, he went to his first wrestling camp in Boone, North Carolina. His mom was worried that he was the youngest in our group, so I kept an eye on him. At the breaks of the workout sessions while others were resting, I'd look over and Noah'd be doing back handsprings... Noah was intense. He was gonna give you 100%... always sitting on "ready-ready." Energy was always bubblin' in him. He always went beyond the call of duty. I remember one time when we were on an annual hiking trip. As I was climbing down the side of the mountain, I stopped and commented on the beauty of a particular rock. Noah saw me looking at it, but I wasn't going to carry it down. When we all got down, I wasn't surprised that there was Noah with the rock... I want to leave you with Philippians 4: 6-8.

Philippians 4: 6-8

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

There's a memorial guide-on from Sgt. Jim Wilson's Humvee that commands attention, flanked by a patriotic quilt, hand made by the *Quilts of Honor* crafters from Deepstep, Ga., who continue to make good on the goal to deliver a hand-made quilt to the family of every Georgia hero; golden sparkles reflect from numerous plaques and various patriotic and inspirational statuary, given to us by family, friends, and even strangers who feel compelled to respond to the celebration of Noah's life—all speak volumes of the love of a community for its fallen son. A framed replica of the bronze memorial that hangs in the Harris Weight Room at the University of Georgia ROTC building features the picture that Rick has dubbed "Captain America." Best of all, there are many photos, lovingly enlarged by many of his wonderful friends for whom Noah has grown larger than life. Each item is too precious to be tucked away in a box somewhere collecting dust. So we polish them and display them just as we honor the knowledge that an American hero walked here.

1Lt. Adam Aderholt (3rd ID Ba'Quba Buddy)

Noah brought nothing but smiles and a positive outward look to our mission at hand. He was an outstanding platoon leader and led his platoon bravely into combat. I personally could count on

him for anything; he was always doing the right thing which led to many successes. Because I knew Noah on a personal level, I know he is another Guardian Angel watching over us.

We cross the foyer to the left and step into the great room which we have always called the cathedral of our home. Our eyes often travel upward to the glowing light filtering through the stained glass windows that adorn the now-completed, center-piece cupola which, like a many-sided tent, sits open-eyed, atop the ten-sided vaulting, knotty pine ceiling. Whenever we look at it, we remember the week when Noah agilely crawled from beam to beam, manning the nail gun to finish the trim. On the right, a Rick-crafted staircase, supported by what we wood butchers call “character” beams, rises to the loft which bisects the house in such a way as to make the upstairs overwhelmingly attractive to children and mountain cabin enthusiasts. On the once blank wall at the first step, reside the quilt presented by the "Home of the Brave Project" as well as the Atlanta Fine Arts League portrait of our UGA cheerleader, painted painstakingly by Keith Barnett. Underneath the stairs in the exact center of the house, a Chambers portrait of Jesus reminds us of the way to live, heart and soul. Noah passed that centering image multiple times every day—it’s not too far from the refrigerator! Perhaps that is why his favorite Iraqi expression quickly became, “*Inshallah*.” Noah said it means “*The will of God*” or “*If God wills it*.” He often pondered what it exactly meant to the Iraqis because he wanted to understand about their culture and embrace it; but I think to him it meant put first things first, do the right thing to share love with the world.

Pop Pop (Noah’s grandfather, June 25, 2005)

I don’t have the words to tell you how much I loved Noah or how much he loved me. From day one, we were special to each other. The thing I want to remember the most about him was that love that he gave me and everyone else he came into contact with. I think of Noah as being the example of love, and it’s hard to think that love is not going to be with us any more, but as I stand here today, I feel that love coming from you folks who are here to honor my grandson. Noah loved his country and he loved this community.

To the left of the top of the stairs is a prominent white wall that has become the Noah Harris Wall. Our eyes sweep across the exhibits with great joy, some of which are the 1999 Georgia State Scholar Athlete of the Year Award, three framed United States Congressional Records, a bronze replica of the dedication plaque that hangs in the Gilmer High School Noah Harris Center, and a framed UGA cheerleading uniform. The apex of what seems to us to be an immense, exquisite fractal that begins somewhere out in the infinite universe, spiraling our imaginations along an all-inclusive cosmic pattern of visual perfection to a culminating point, is the Anne Marie Oborn portrait of Lt. Noah Harris in his dress blues. We look at the radiant spirit of optimism—that was always in Noah’s eyes—captured by the artist and think, “Yes, we will see him again.” Functioning as an exclamation point is the last Christmas present to Noah from the artist in the family, Aunt Mona, whose prolific drawings and paintings grace the walls of so many of our homes; ironically, it’s not her signature splash of color, but rather a *Fallen Heroes* emblem that warns, “The nation which forgets its defenders will itself be forgotten.” Beneath it, on the forest-green tiled buffet, next to the memorial flag presented to us by the Army at his birthday celebration, is a stack of pictures of our Hero son; we give them to all who ask for a memento of their American friend.

Vicki Thompson (wife of Ronnie, Ford dealer, Ellijay, Ga.)

Noah was my Hero long before he went into the Army. I fell in love with Noah the first time I met him. And my love for him burns until today. He could talk me into supporting whatever new adventure he was pursuing. He made me feel like the most beautiful and special person. He could come into my office and give me my hug and that smile. I would just melt. I often asked him when he thought he would run for president. He could have been president. He just had it. He knew what life was all about even as a teenager. Noah has been such an influence on my life. He changed me. He taught me what it means to give back, to just give because it is the right thing to do. "IDWIC!" He said that to me so many times. I made him a promise. I promised to send him care packages. I never did. I never got a package to him. I could go through all the times Noah was here. I could tell you all about his charms and his wisdom. I could tell you stories of his eating whole batches of Toll House cookies. But I need to tell you what Noah has done for me since he left. He renewed my faith in mankind. I believe a man can do something just because he feels it in his gut, even knowing it may cost him his life. I saw this young man grow and become what God meant for him to be. He never wavered in his decision to join the Army. Not once did he ever say he could change his mind. He simply kissed my forehead and told me, "*Miss Vicki, there comes a time in your life when you have to serve a purpose higher than yourself. Trust me; this is my purpose.*" What do you say to that? I just cried and let him see me smile before he walked out of my office.

Noah's Birthday – June 25th, 1981

I often travel back to a day all moms remember. It was approaching high noon and the pinnacle of an exciting year of learning about the mountains and teaching at a new school. The house was dried-in ("Dried-in" is construction talk meaning a house is sealed, but none of the finish work is done), and I was nine months and fifteen days pregnant. All through the previous night, Rick and I had laughed and said that Noah was taking his sweet time coming into the world. My friends kept telling me I needed to at least think about a girl's name, but Rick and I were positive all we would ever need was "Noah." Now, after thirty-two and one half hours of labor, Jenna's face was creased with worry as Rick and I pushed as hard as we could. It was hot and we were all perspiring, but I knew that the tiny beads of sweat on this stalwart midwife's upper lip were a result of her concern for me and my baby. Down by the branch in the mountains of North Georgia, air-conditioning was mostly not a necessity. Today was definitely different. It seemed even the atmosphere was conspiring with intense humidity to make this event as challenging as possible, but that seemed normal. Just as we had hand dug and set the foundation of our post-and-beam home, we were determined to maintain a personal experience with this momentous occasion.

Granny (Lyda "Buck" Glenn)

Honey, You guys ain't got enough brains to wad a shotgun with. I am just horrified, especially in this day and age when modern medicine can provide such wonderful advantages...

We wanted our baby boy to be born "au naturel." We wanted to be in the experience, and an experience we had; but I will offer the rejoinder: "Always be mindful of what you wish for." We tried warm showers, long walks, standing, and sitting. I would have been frightened, but with true American ingenuity, experience, and inspiration shining in her eyes, Jenna kept us going, and she had one more idea up her sleeve. "Lucy, maybe if you saw what was happening, you'd know what needs to be done. Rick, do you have a mirror, at least twelve by twelve?" Rick jumped up from his position behind

me where he had steadfastly been supporting and helping me to breathe. He ran to the bathroom, and calling, "I've got just the thing," proceeded to jerk the oval, vanity mirror off the wall. High above my head, the midday Georgia sunlight seemed to cast a golden glow over the whole scene. Everyone was tired, but no one was ready to give up and head to the hospital.

Just as the pressure started to pick up speed on my contraction, the mirror was placed so that everyone, including me, could see the crown of the baby's head. I remember saying to Rick, "I sure am glad I've seen *The Hulk* on television." When I said it, I was serious, but everyone burst out laughing, probably because at that point, Rick's face was kind of science fiction green and mine was probably tomato red. Teamwork and intuition ruled and after one more push, our beautiful son burst forth and spread his arms wide with the confidence of an Olympic diver executing a perfect angel dive into the world. Donna took pictures as Jenna caught him and placed him in my arms, and in that moment I understood with crystal clarity that I was going to sacrifice everything to guard and protect this amazing treasure. He was gurgling audibly, and all 10-and-one-half pounds were wiggling. The exuberant expression of his birth images proved to be a premonition of his *modus operandi*. For the next twenty-four years with his mom and dad and family and friends somewhere nearby, he was always plunging into life with his commentary flowing; and, invariably, he was moving and shaking the earth around him and using those immense widespread limbs to hug the people. Like our home, his birth was a challenge, but our life together was always as idyllic as that first moment on June 25, 1981, when Noah Harris was simply born—without the aid of doctors, nurses, and high technology. After one talk with friends about their places of origin, Noah developed a ready quip to explain his entrance into life.

Young Noah (To friends)

"You may have been born in a hospital, but I wasn't. I was born at home. For real... I mean in the house, in the living room... right over there."

Even the phones had gone dead that day and service hadn't been returned until a late afternoon thunderstorm had growled across the ridge line with refreshing rain that cooled and cleared the air; it seemed in honor of Noah's birth. We didn't actually see a rainbow, but to us it was a promise, as though even the weather had conspired to acknowledge the advent of a courageous, adventurous, trailblazing spirit, an attitude that Noah would maintain and nourish along with his hunger to be in the present and make the most of every moment. The details of his momentous birth were to stay with him for the rest of his life as a clear bellwether.

I will always remember how I stared at his beautiful, chubby, angel face for the next two months as I learned the fine points of being a mom; I loved them all and have written in my journal that I didn't even go out of the house for two weeks because I was just having too much fun. My teacher's summer vacation was over too soon, and before I was ready, it was time to do the hardest thing I have ever done. I handed my precious joy off to Rick, who, like a professional fullback, was ready to grab him and run—all smiles and delight.

Joshua Archer, ROTC buddy, Guestbook Entry–June 25, 2005, Memorial Celebration

I met Noah through ROTC at UGA, and from the moment I met him until the moment he left, the man changed my life. I'll remember everything he ever taught me about, from lifting weights and eating properly to just living life and loving people that you don't even know or see on a consistent basis. The last thing that Noah said to me on May 13, 2005, when he was home on R&R was, "If I don't come home from Iraq, I want you to cry for me for ten minutes and then Drive ON because I realize I am doing what I love. I wouldn't change it for the world... Noah... I read articles about you and feel so proud and honored to have known you. Looking back at our time together makes me realize how precious life is and how important relationships are. You were always so modest about your accomplishments; I never even knew you were a wrestler! You gave your heart to every person you ever came in contact with and very few people can say that about themselves. Your legacy challenges me to become a better officer and man. I will miss you so much and I will never forget the lessons you taught me.

Rick "Mr. Mom"

This beautiful adventure was an inspired dream which became possible only after we cut our ties with the world in 1980. For me, that was a piece of cake because I was never at ease in the city; I preferred sitting by the creek with my beautiful lady. We moved from our apartment to the mountains to live in the blue tarp tent-like shelter. We started to build our home with about \$10k, the sum total after pooling all our assets. We worked hard and sacrificed a lot to get our peaceful oasis, and we believed that life would unfold as it was supposed to. I was at the point of having the first stage of the house about finished just as Noah was due on the scene. Although we had made arrangements with a nearby hospital in case of an emergency, I remember feeling thrilled that it was going to be the mid-wife, a couple of lady friends (for backup), and I who would welcome Noah into the world. It was a 20-minute drive to the nearest town, but Lucy and I had faith in our vision.

Stella Sullivan (Terry College, Leader Scholar Buddy)

... On our first day of class, Melanie (Dr. Lankau) had each of us take a personality quiz. She paired me up with Noah and two other students, I think mainly because we had such different personalities...Noah was "the performer." This suited him because at the time he was captain of the cheerleading squad. Well, I am glad they paired me up with Noah because this allowed us to spend lots of time together. We did lots of projects together. One was about the qualities of leadership. Each of us interviewed someone who we felt embodied certain qualities of leadership. Noah chose to interview his dad. Mr. Harris, I remember that in the interview you said the hardest part of being a leader was taking risks. You had built your house with your hands. I also remember Noah talking about his mother. He truly admired you... he said you were an amazing teacher. When I read about all the great things he did in Iraq, I can't help but smile. He was compassionate. He led his men and built up morale...He became a man.

We had made a family decision to have me stay home with Noah since Lucy had what she considered a great, stable teaching position. When we married, we knew we were together for the long haul which meant to us that Lucy's seamless development as a teacher was an important thing. Teaching has always been her calling. We were thinking that I would be able to keep working on the house, and that I could keep an eye on Noah as I hammered and sawed. Logical, right? We thought that maybe I could pick up some work on the weekends if we needed additional money. At that time, no

one had ever heard of a Mr. Mom experience, but we weren't worried about it; we were inspired and enthusiastic.

Well, almost immediately after taking Noah in September when Lucy went back to school, I realized that caring for a baby was a much more time-consuming venture than I had realized. There was no way I was going to be able to work on the house and take care of a baby at the same time. When I was not feeding Noah, I was changing a diaper, rocking him to sleep, playing with him, walking him, or cleaning the house. There was no down time except when he would sleep, and then I had to tip-toe around the house. So much for my logic!

Aunt Betsy Mitchell (She corrupted him with his first bowl of Fruity Pebbles!)

An American Hero...Heroes aren't born; they are raised and nurtured daily with love, respect, honor, and dignity. Heroes don't happen by chance, they are taught to love God, country and humanity. Heroes don't realize their greatness, but the people around them realize how great they are.

Time slowed to a creepy crawl. Days went by unnoticed. I did not see another person other than Lucy for weeks at a time. I thought I was going to go bonkers with boredom while Lucy was struggling with missing her baby boy. It was the most quietly stressful experience I had ever endured. Maybe I was stressed because my broad life had become so narrow. After having worked throughout my life, occasionally holding down three jobs at a time, I found that now I was stuck in the middle of nowhere all alone, babysitting, and unable to accomplish anything. I would see day after day, staring me in the face, all the remaining work in my unfinished house.

In 1981, in our neck of the woods, there was no Internet, no cable ; desktop computers were just coming out, and we had no TV reception because of the height of the mountains. I experienced a few moments of desperation when I realized that Noah was only three months old and I had committed to seeing him through to kindergarten. This was stacking up to be a very long and trying Mr. Mom ordeal!

To make it worse, I was having guilt feelings about not appreciating the opportunity to live my dream; I knew that all I had ever wanted or needed was right in front of me, but I just didn't know if I could make it through. However, the one bright spot that still seems to illuminate even the darkest moments is that we did live in the middle of a beautiful seasonal forest with a gentle but ample creek that ran beside and around the house and then twisted its way through the lower property. This is one of the few flat areas in this mountainous region as most of the surrounding terrain is steep right down to the sweet, babbling waters; whereas we have a small spring-laden valley that opens out. It may be one of the reasons the original horse and buggy road between historic, small towns lying to the east and west of us runs through the lower property alongside the creek. Noah and I often imagined that settlers and Native Americans alike stopped and rested beside Ticklebug Creek.

Noah (UGA tattered note card)

I let go of all my ego agendas that attempt to control my destiny. I fly the path of life effortlessly and confidently to my true destination. I accept that there will always be an

ideal to guide me, yet it will not make me anxious or impatient because I know I am perfect in this present moment.

As three months turned into one year which turned into two, I settled into Mother Nature's open arms and Noah and I played in the forest every day. Being close to the weather, we learned to read the signs of the wind and sun. I felt a deep calm begin to well up within me. Noah would be in the creek when it was warm enough, and I hiked him around the property in the backpack every day; this was our entertainment, so it's no surprise that his first word was, "Ouk!" Rain or shine, at nine months of age, he would stand at the front door and twist the brass knob. He always loved nature and I became his playmate who helped him walk beside the "falldarall" (waterfall) and chase "flutterbies" (butterflies). Experiencing the wonder and joy of the natural order of nature through Noah's innocence renewed my faith in the hand of Providence that had always guided my life. Though our routine changed as Noah grew older, we were always roaming around our part of the forest in the mountains of North Georgia.

In retrospect, I guess Lucy and I were pretty adventurous at the time. We often talked about how it felt to live life out on the end of a limb over a gaping chasm of imminent failure, but I will always consider earning my motherhood badge to be the personal growth experience of which I am most proud. I often suggest this role to young fathers. Over the years, watching Noah grow up, and seeing his character and confidence develop, I have come to realize it was the perfect blend of rough and tumble in nature with Dad, and a little tenderness in the evening from Mom, that enabled him to unfold his life, fearless, pure, and unadulterated.

Noah (College Journal)

Devotion: When I lose purpose or devotion in my life, my emotions run amok. Devotion. Without a doubt, a large portion of my time should be spent finding greater spirituality so that my weak thoughts don't control me. I am what I am for a reason; I am where I am for a reason. I will let go of my attachments and gain control of my life. I am a Christian, but I must explore what I believe. I will illuminate my unconscious thoughts by working on it.

For Noah, it was an Abraham Lincoln experience living in the forest. He didn't have to walk through the snow to get to school or learn to read by fire light, but through his exposure to the struggles of building a home in the elements and from struggling with and finally embracing the solace that can be found in solitude, he developed an unbreakable connection with the earth, the creek, the wind, and the light. It made my job as his father, the one granted the blessing and responsibility of raising and giving him to God, very easy because Noah grew to be grateful, humble, and solid in the presence of the beauty that surrounded him. From the balance and peace of nature, he learned to listen for the truth and confidently turn in the right direction. When he heard the call of his destiny, he honored its demands, refined and perfected his life, and followed his path, no matter where it led.

Joe Cavalli (UGA Cheerleader)

Noah was so real! From the day I met him up at my grandmother's lake house on Lake Burton when he was a freshman at UGA and we hiked up Dick's Creek together with Clay and he was so selfless and interested in me and not in himself, to seeing him on the sidelines cheering and

how his eyes would light up and he would run over to shake my hand across the hedges. He was such an incredible guy. But what is most impressive to me is all that I learned about him after his death such as being a State Champ Wrestler. He knew I was a very good wrestler myself, but never once told me he was a State Champ! He once more impressed me when he ran into me a little over a year ago in Atlanta last Christmas. He was his personable passionate self, only this time, he was sporting a crew cut and excited about going overseas. I couldn't believe it at first because my first thoughts were of how much he has to offer here as a smart and good-looking guy, but then it dawned on me that his view of doing for others first is what made him so special!

Mom's Dream

In the steamy, sunlit days following Noah's death, Rick and I threw open the doors of the house and welcomed the constant stream of visitors who came to love us and share with us and be with us. They seemed hungry to touch and see the parts of Noah's life that so many had only heard about. Rick spent six hours preparing a scrapbook of our lives by adding pictures to his good old notebook that depicted the construction of our home. This is something he had always planned to do and at the end of June, 2005, it was a task that could not be added to a list. As so often happened in those days, I would be sharing with one group of folks and Rick would be with another. I hadn't really taken a look at the pictures he had added until the day I was walking through the foyer with some friends, and I overheard Rick in the kitchen saying cheerfully, "That's the picture of Noah's birth. You know he was conceived right out there under that giant maple where we lived in a tent for six months as we built the house." As I stepped into the great room, I was greeted by expressions of awe and wonder on the faces of some of Noah's high school friends. In the alternate universe where we now reside, our lives must be an open book, pictures and anecdotes of a woman's most vulnerable moments included. I could almost hear Noah chuckling and telling his friends as he so often had, "Mom and Dad are just a couple of old hippies." I would always correct him and say that Rick *was* a wild child, but that I was a *flower* child, meaning that, to me, life would be greatly enhanced if we all heeded the line from one of my favorite poets,

William Blake

To see the world in a grain of sand, and to see heaven in a wild flower,
hold infinity in the palm of your hands, and eternity in an hour.

That would always make Noah laugh even more because it confirmed his suspicions about me, and it seemed to delight him that I so loved and quoted poems that reflect the undeniable messages of oneness that manifest from encouraging an abiding connection to the outdoor wonders of our planet. As a youngster, he saw the trees "dance"; as a leader, he heard them whisper words of gratitude, solace, and inspiration. To our nature boy, life was a book of love whose pages guided best when they were turned, caressed, shaken, and earmarked by the competent fingers of the wind.

Noah (College journal)

*Sitting on my knees beneath a moonlit sky,
Watching the silver lining as the clouds are pushed by.
Alone I am in body, but in spirit presence feel;*

*My eyelids drift together and in the dark I heal,
listening to cold dancing music that blows so high,
rustling are the leaves from the breeze that whispers by.
My face is kissed by chill but a warmth glows inside,
On my lips the sweet memory of the angel by my side.*

So, when the guys who were gaping at the open book of Noah's birth turned to look at me, without hesitation, I smiled and told them the details of a dream I had had just three days after Noah's death. I was rocking gently, at first under a dark, starlit night sky, kind of like the one you can see from our front deck on a moonless night. It was different in that I felt as though I were floating on a gentle sea. Then, as I gazed in wonder, the sky became a vast plain that had no beginning and no end which morphed into a moving mass of shimmering lights that became a myriad of angelic beings swaying as I was, in time with a celestial harmony. To my surprise, as I peacefully stared at the undulating, glowing waves to which I seemed connected, the face of an old friend who had died a couple of years ago loomed forward, urgently commanded my attention, and said, "Don't look back. It'll hurt your eyes." As I stared at her beautiful face amid the vast sea of glowing beings, wondering that she knew about my new eye surgery, from on high somewhere behind me *boomed* an explosion of light like white fireworks on July Fourth. Reflected in her face was the brilliant sputtering of innumerable sparklers; a sweetly hissing cascade of light flowed down over me and all of the beings in front of me. In slow motion, as though part of a well rehearsed, joyous ceremony, the quadrillions raised their arms simultaneously, and my departed friend looked into my eyes, arms up-stretched and said, "There's Noah." Noah and an entourage of white knights, insisting, "Don't despair; Repair!" It was like seeing the great patchwork quilt of being to which we all belong, but from a distance, and I was looking in the opposite direction.

I told his dearest buddies that, though Noah might have died in a huge explosion, and though some may worry about the impact of such force on a soul, I believe it was in that moment he was born again to an even higher purpose which is served whenever we do as Noah, the servant leader, did and risk ourselves for a vision of a better world. In their eyes I could see he had become their avatar of freedom, hope, and joy, and at that moment, I was so proud that, because of the vision of America that inspired my son and the over one-and-a-half million fallen heroes who came before him, each of us has the opportunity to stand up for freedom and protect those who cannot, simply by living with deliberation and consciousness. Rick has called him a shooting star, and I know him as our shining star.

Noah (Noah doing a Johnny Cash lip sync for the "Hee Haw Hoe-Down")

*I fly a starship
Across the universe divide.
And when I reach the other side;
I'll find a place to rest my spirit if I can;
Perhaps I may become a highwayman again;
Or I may simply be a single drop of rain;
But I will remain.
And I'll be back again and again and again and again...*