

Peyton Parker Lane Playground: The Stories Behind the Name



Peyton and Parker Hoffman

Brothers, Peyton Jerry Hoffman (born May 20, 1998) and Parker Steven Hoffman (born August 6, 1999). Parents are Julie and Chad Hoffman of York, Nebraska. Both boys were born with a rare genetic disorder. Pelizaeus Merzbacher Disease is an X-link (only affecting males) neurological disorder that affects the central nervous system. Peyton and Parker were never able to hold their head up, sit up, walk, talk, or eat on their own. They were G-button dependent and relied on tilt-in space wheelchairs to move in their environments. They were incredibly smart and fully aware of their surroundings and did their best to interact with those around them. They laughed, squealed, smiled, and at a young age they could reach out to touch computer screens to say yes/no, maybe, answering questions and making their own decisions. This is how they were able to learn in a school setting.

Their parents requested that the boys were 100% in their classrooms and have no pull out into the special needs rooms — that any accommodations and therapists come to them in the regular classroom setting. This took some convincing but worked out beautifully. They made so many friends and came out of school each day smiling and happy.

Because they had this opportunity to be in the classrooms and make friends, they were invited to birthday parties, had birthday parties, sleepovers, weekends at the lake with friends in tow. They joined Cub Scouts and participated in all the activities, including the Pinewood Derbies, and won many trophies and medals in competitions. They had pride in their lives and friendships. They felt valued!

Peyton, 11, unexpectedly passed away on March 19, 2010, the spring of his sixth-grade year. His parents and siblings were devastated, as were his friends. They started the Peyton Hoffman Memorial Scholarship Fund. Through the remainder of his classmates' school years, his parents and classmates held many fundraisers to

add to the fund. When Peyton's class graduated in 2016, his parents gave 18 scholarships to his class totaling \$13,000.00. The class president spoke about Peyton in her graduation speech. She said to her classmates, "Let's remember what our dear friend Peyton Hoffman taught us, without ever speaking a word. He taught us JOY! We must always have joy in our lives."

Parker, the younger brother, remained a guiding light for his parents and older sister, giving them purpose and reason to heal from losing Peyton. It took some time for the family to find their way through grief. Parker continued to go to school and had some amazing experiences in middle school. He was in the band, with friends helping him play the drums hand over hand. He marched in the Yorkfest and Homecoming Parades. He found an amazing unexpected friend in shop class. The shop class teacher also teaches Animal Science Class at the high school. Mr. Hirschfeld was bringing bunnies to the middle school to visit the kids. Parker and one bunny in particular took a liking to each other. PB (Parker's Bunny) and Parker maintained their relationship all through Parker's high school years. Parker attended classes with PB on his lap most of the time. Parker and his parents donated the last of the Peyton Hoffman Scholarship Funds (\$5,200.00) to the Animal Science Lab at the end of Parker's senior year. Although Parker was suffering through many health issues, he attended his last few years of high school very sparingly. Parker graduated in 2018 to a roar of clapping, whistling, and a standing ovation. After a valiant battle with kidney issues and respiratory illnesses, Parker passed away March 16, 2019, at the age of 19.

Peyton and Parker's parents and older sister and her family continue to heal and treasure their wonderful life experiences and memories of both boys. With the life lessons the boys taught them, the passion of inclusion does not stop with the boys being in heaven. Julie is now a Lay-Advocate for families needing assistance with the IEP (Individual Education Program) process — and together with several other families in similar circumstances, have partnered to bring an all-inclusive playground to York, Nebraska. The family is honored to have their sons' names as representation of the playground.

