

# An answer that never comes

*Six years after their son's death, Jim and Julie Silcock have grown accustomed to the question: How many children do you have?*

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**H**ow many children do you have? A simple question. Unassuming. Perfect for small talk.

But Jim and Julie Silcock stumble.

Dec. 29, 2002 flashes in front of them. And they don't know what to do.

Haltingly, Julie responds. *We have one son named James. He's a junior at Princeton.*

But the questions don't end there. For the past six years, they never have.

They have come from strangers. From friends. And from Jim and Julie themselves.

*Why does this happen?* Jim wondered, as he sat in attendance at another Marksman's funeral three years later. *Why wasn't it me? I should be gone, not him.*

However, no matter how hard they try, the answers never come. For there is no right answer. Their other son, Hunt Silcock, who died from an inflammation of his heart muscle, is not coming back.

Today, memories of Hunt's vibrant life still reverberate throughout the Silcocks' home. Pictures of him in soccer jerseys and Halloween costumes fill walls and bookshelves. In his room, almost untouched since 2002, his seventh grade school I.D. card lies next to the lamp on his bedside table. Across the room his beloved Manchester United poster watches over.

And then there's the dry-erase board where Hunt wrote-out his seventh grade soccer schedule, complete with game results and how many goals he scored in each match. The six-year-old ink has yet to be erased. Hunt scored seven goals in his last seven games.

While these keepsakes invoke the expected sadness, the Silcocks believe that the small memories they preserve keep them smiling.

Like stories of him joking around with a hotel security guard in Bermuda or singing the song *Blue* with six friends in the backseat of their car.

"He was just a prankster," Jim said. "He just had a way with people. He had that charisma."

But even with so many positive memories, as a mother, Julie admits she endured many tough times before finding a certain solace.

"After about two years for me," Julie said, "the rain cloud lifted a little bit and I gained some perspective and could look at it and appreciate him for what he was without mourning whenever I thought about it."

For Jim, the experience has been a little different.

"It's still hard to believe he's gone today," Jim said. "I still miss him. He was one of my best buddies, if not my best buddy. And it's just, he's gone and what can we do as individuals to emulate that. Because he taught me a lot."

Those lessons, stimulated by passion and flavor for life, earned Hunt the reputation as the glue of his class.

"He connected," Julie said. "He was a connector of a lot of different people and different groups in the class."

To honor Hunt's class of 2008 and his many friends and classmates, the Silcocks decided to attend last year's graduation ceremony May 23, 2008.

"Graduation was very difficult," Julie said. "Just because it makes you think, 'Gee, he should be graduating in this

class.'"

"He kind of did," Jim continued after a short pause. "It was a great graduation. That was a great class with a bunch of really, really good guys."

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There were plenty of other questions. Why us? How did Hunt deserve this? What about James?

But there were still so many fond memories of Hunt fresh in their minds. They realized the best thing they could do was preserve his passion for life. And the new question became, What can we do to sustain his memory?

They started with renovating the back field area behind Hunt Family Stadium.

"That whole back area was very messy, so we decided to put Silcock Field in before James graduated so at least he could play one game on it. And I think that helped move the whole project along."

Next, they purchased World-Cup-approved soccer team benches, complete with a canopy covering that compromises the cold of winter.

And then, one year and one month after Hunt's death, they started Hunt4Soccer, a non-profit organization that provides children the opportunity to learn, play and enjoy the game of soccer.

The program hosts clinics and provides soccer balls for its participants, many of whom are underprivileged.

"It's a program we started to help get into the community," Jim said. We started off the first year helping a few hundred kids. We're in 12 cities and with some of our other coaches who go to Puerto Rico and Mexico and Central and South America, we'll hold clinics for over 6,000 kids this year and hand each kid a soccer ball."

Most recently, the Silcocks, with the help of Soccer Coach Cory Martin, have launched the Hunt Silcock Memorial

Tournament. The second annual tournament was played last Friday and Saturday on Silcock Field and in Hunt Family Stadium.

"The tournament validates soccer being an important passion, which it was of mine and the kids who participate in the tournament," Julie said. "Hunt loved soccer and it was a big part of his life. It validates their interest as being something important, meaningful. It preserves his memory and his legacy."

But beyond the grandeur of the stadium, Hunt4Soccer and the tournament, one more thing serves as a reminder of Hunt's legacy.

Nestled in the corner of the Mullen Family Center, a framed St. Mark's soccer jersey rests on the wall. And below it a small passage:

*Hunt, whose love and passion for the game of soccer transcended the field of play and inspired all who knew him to emulate his zest for life.*

"That kind of epitomizes the way he was," Jim said with a father's proud grin. "I would describe him as the energizer bunny with a big heart. He just loved doing everything, loved being with people."

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As late December approaches, the Silcocks prepare themselves for their most difficult time of the year.

"During Christmas, he was Santa in our family. He distributed all the presents," Julie said. "Christmas Day and around that time we think about him a lot and it's very difficult."

So this year, like always, the Silcocks will be out of town skiing Dec. 29.

But wherever they are, as they raise their glasses for Hunt's annual toast, it's evident that he will always be with them.

"We'll never consider James an only child," Julie said.