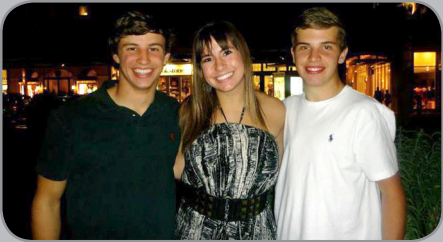


WHAT HIS VIDEOS MEANT TO OTHERS



Seniors Ben Breedlove, Meredith Trank and Parker Medford

“I had never been moved like that before. I was literally moved to tears because of his faith that I had never seen expressed in him before. Ben never talked about his beliefs, and to see them expressed in such a real way — it just made me so happy to know he believed and was from that moment he left this earth inspiring others to believe as well.”

meredith trank, 12

“When I first saw them, I was still in denial that this was actually happening. I watched them Christmas night at my grandparents’ and didn’t watch them again until I got home the next day, and that’s when I broke down the most. However, I realized that he was sending a message to the world and was comforting all of us by letting us know he was blessed to be in Heaven.”

parker medford, 12

“I am so sad about Ben Breedlove. I watched the video he left for the world to see, and him seeing me in detail, in his vision really warmed my heart. I broke down, I am to tears because I hate how life is so unfair. This has really touched my heart in a way I can’t describe, this is why I do what I do. Why I write my life, and why I love you all so much ... I know Ben is at Peace, and I hope he gets a chance to sit and talk with my Dad. We love you Ben. Forever. Thank you for loving me. To Ben’s family, you raised a real hero, he’s definitely mine. You have my love.”

scott mescudi (kid cu-di)

editors’ note: This post is printed as it appeared on Kid Cudi’s blog without changes to spelling or mechanics. As dictated by our editorial policy, the staff removed a section containing an obscenity.

TO HONOR AND SERVE

1 During a meeting on Dec. 14, the EISD Board of Trustees recognizes nurse Holly Hubbell for her help in reviving senior Ben Breedlove after he collapsed at school on Dec. 6. School nurse Merissa Garcia, security officers Gayle Morris and Aaron St. Clair and seniors Taylor Martin and Fallyn Leahey were also honored for their services. “Even though I didn’t feel like we needed to be recognized,” Hubbell said, “it was a very meaningful time for us, and even more so now looking back.” **2** Senior Ben Breedlove greets board members Rob Hargett, Ronna Martin and Beau Ross. **3** Security officer Gayle Morris, senior Ben Breedlove, school nurse Holly Hubbell and first responders Michael Kittok and Eric Gordon pose for a photo after being recognized at the board meeting.



courtesy of Austin-Travis County EMS



1 Seniors Caroline Furst, Steven Wilbanks and Mehul Mehta are interviewed by the *Picayune* and *KXAN*. “I thought it was very special that our student body came together through Facebook and other social media over the holiday to spread the word to wear white for Ben on the first day back,” Furst said. **2** During fifth lunch, Student Council members juniors Emily Sweet and Sruthi Reddy sell “RIP Ben Breedlove” bracelets. All donations went to the Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy Association. **3** Students wear white to honor Breedlove on Jan. 4. “Our goal was to show how Ben’s death united people around the world,” senior Lucy Ellis said. **4** Sophomores Chloe Cheek, Brittany Pearson and Erica Holley sell “Mr. Rager” shirts at Mozart’s. “We felt like we were helping out his family and keeping his spirit alive by selling T-shirts and remembering him,” Pearson said.



1. bril flint 2. casey simmons 3-4. david oliver

THIS IS HIS STORY

Senior leaves behind a message that speaks to the world

Christmas night, Twitter and Facebook exploded with shocking news. Senior Ben Breedlove had died of a heart attack that evening after suffering from a chronic heart condition throughout his life. Through social media, news quickly reached the entire Westlake community and, ultimately, the entire world.

Many of the tweets and status updates remembering Ben shared links to two YouTube videos Ben had made titled *This is my story (Part 1)* and *This is my story (Part 2)*. After a life-threatening experience at school where he passed out in the Commons earlier in December, Ben felt compelled to share his story with the rest of the world. He created these two videos in which the song *Mad World* played in the background while he silently held up note cards sharing how he lived with his condition, and he posted them on an alternate YouTube account.

“He didn’t tell any of his friends about those videos,” said senior Jamie Buchsbaum, close friend to Ben. “I believe that God brought him back to make those videos and deliver the message that Heaven exists and the overwhelming peace he felt is coming for all of us just like the Bible says.”

In the videos he made just a week before his death, Ben described a vision he had while unconscious in the Commons where he stood in an all-white room with a mirror. His favorite music artist, Kid Cudi, was also there, and Ben said he felt complete peace.

“I then looked at myself in the mirror, I was proud of MYSELF, of my entire life, everything I have done,” Ben said in the videos. “It was the BEST feeling.”

Ben didn’t tell anyone he made the videos. It wasn’t until after his death that those closest to him saw them.

“We had always known about all of his videos on his YouTube channels as he was making them, but these last two videos were not disclosed to us,” Ben’s mom, Deanne Breedlove, said. “We are so thankful he chose to share his story through these videos. We are so proud of him for choosing to be vulnerable with his fears and disappointments in life, but we are so grateful that he chose to remain joyful and positive even through his challenges.

“We believe he made the videos for a variety of reasons; one of which is to encourage others. Ben has always been a very compassionate person who desires to help and inspire others, which is one of the reasons I think he made these two videos.”

Many said they felt sad, then comforted, after watching the videos.

“I first saw the videos after his sister found them on YouTube,” senior Grant Hamill said. “She didn’t know he was making them either and wanted me to see it. This was pretty shortly after his death. When I saw the videos, I broke down with sadness. Seeing him again was so hard, but I can now watch them with a smile on my face.”

Through social media sharing, the videos reached thousands of views overnight, and within two days his story had spread around the world, first appearing in Australia’s Nine Network’s ninemsn.com website. From there, his story went on, being reported in many major news outlets, such as *People Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times* and more. The videos reached Kid Cudi, who responded in his blog. (See sidebar).



youtube.com

“When his story spread, I couldn’t help but be overjoyed,” Hamill said. “I wish I could tell him that he made it because his one major goal was to have a video of his ‘go viral,’ and it finally happened. He has inspired so many people here at Westlake, and to know that his story has affected people all over the world is nothing less than amazing.”

Ben’s funeral service was held on Dec. 29 at the Gateway Church in Austin. More than 1,400 people attended, and another 11,000 watched the memorial service online through a live stream via KXAN.com. At the service, his sister, Ally Breedlove, gave a moving speech about his life.

“Unfortunately, I was out of town so I couldn’t attend it, but I watched it online when it was released, and within the first two minutes of Ally’s speech I was in tears,” Buchsbaum said. “It was a beautiful service — the turnout was incredible. There wasn’t a single person I knew that disliked Ben, and the love that the whole community showed him was just amazing. I really loved when Ally said, ‘Our life is eternal, and that is God’s gift to us. And this life is our gift to God,’ because it’s so true, and Ben was blessed with an incredible life; he was all about just living.”

The support for Ben’s family continued throughout the winter break as students planned to wear white on the first day of school after the break. The Student Council also communicated with the Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy Association (HCMA) to make wristbands with “RIP Ben Breedlove” on them, mirroring the trending hashtag that swept across Twitter, “#RIPBenBreedlove,” and donating the money raised to the HCMA.

“After hearing about his passing, my mind just started going, trying to think of a fitting way to memorialize him,” student body vice president senior Mehul Mehta said. “The bracelets stuck out to me because not only would they give students a concrete way to remind themselves of him and his message, but they would also provide a way for students to donate in his honor.”

The video Breedlove made touched the hearts of many, both in the Westlake community and all over the world. His message left people feeling differently than they had before. One thing Breedlove made clear through his videos was that he didn’t want anyone to be sad about his death.

“He understood that leaving earthly desires behind to live peacefully in paradise was going to be okay,” Buchsbaum said. “So even though we’re all still hurting and missing him, the last thing we should do is worry, because I would bet anything he’s probably up there wakeboarding and having the time of his life, just waiting until he gets to see all of us again.”

GOING VIRAL

