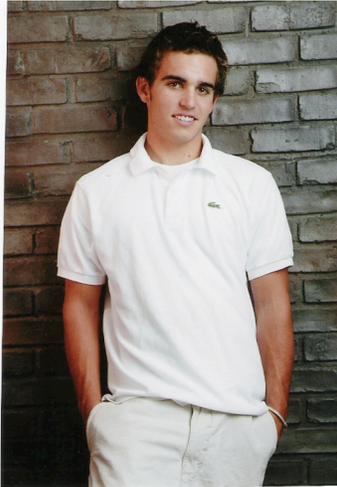


## Christopher's Story



February 15, 2005, was an exciting day for us. Our son Christopher scored the winning goal in the Arizona High School Soccer Championship. We were on top of the world, as were all the members of his soccer team, friends, and families. Little did any of us know that two weeks later Christopher would become ill with bacterial meningitis and succumb to the disease less than 24 hours after experiencing the first symptoms.

Christopher was 17 years old and a senior in high school. He was looking forward to graduating and attending the University of Arizona. A talented athlete, Christopher loved soccer, lacrosse, baseball and swimming. He had recently taken up the sport of snowboarding and spent February 23-28 in Durango, Colorado, with his friends and one of their families enjoying the "fresh powder" and improving his snowboarding skills. All the boys were coming down with coughs, but that didn't stop them from having a wonderful time on the slopes.

On March 1, 2005, Chris went to school and had his state soccer championship pictures taken. Christopher seemed fine and prepared to leave for soccer practice. The only hint he gave that he might be getting sick was feeling lightheaded. After about an hour of practice, around 8:00 p.m., the coach noticed that Chris didn't seem to be feeling well and sent him home. Christopher took a hot bath because he couldn't get warm. When he got out, he had a fever and I gave him some Tylenol and an extra blanket. I knew he was really sick when his friends called later that evening and he didn't want to speak with them. I thought he was coming down with a flu that was going around. I heard him get up a few times during the night to take a bath and vomit. When I checked on him, all he said was, "I can't get warm."

The next morning I left to teach my kindergarten class. I knew my husband, John, would take our son to the doctor if he got worse. When Chris got up at 8:00 a.m., he came out and had some water. He still couldn't get warm, so John ran a bath for him. When he got out, John suggested they go to urgent care, so Chris went to get dressed. When John went to check on him, Christopher was laying on his bed. John asked why he wasn't getting dressed and Chris' last words were, "Dad, I can't feel my feet."

At 9:40 a.m. John immediately called the paramedics and then me. The paramedics arrived two minutes later and Christopher was not breathing. They rushed him to the hospital where they tried to find out what was wrong with him. The doctor suspected he had a problem with his heart, a problem some athletes have. Meningitis was never mentioned. We tried to reach our daughter, as well as other family members, in calls that would change their lives forever. About noon, the spinal tap showed that Christopher had bacterial meningitis. As we all put on masks and watched CPR being performed Chris, we couldn't believe what was happening. Finally we had to give permission for CPR to be stopped and let go of our beautiful loving son.

About two weeks after Christopher died, John and I went to a presentation on a new meningitis vaccine, which had just been recommended for adolescents and students entering high school, as well as those going to college and living in dorms. We never knew there was a disease that could kill our healthy athletic son in less than 24 hours. If we had known about the vaccine then, we would have had Christopher immunized and possibly have prevented his death. We will love and miss him forever but are hopeful we can prevent this loss from happening to another family.