



*Dedicated,*  
Memorial Benches  
Provide a Place to Reflect  
and Remember *With Love*



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wo years ago, Daniel Pite was away on business on October 27, the day of his wedding anniversary. He left a card for his wife, Talya, asking that she take a walk to the footbridge at the far end of the loop trail that follows the Deschutes River above Farewell Bend Park. The site—a beautiful stretch of canyon marked by rushing rapids and thick stands of pine—was a common destination for the Pite family, especially during the time that their daughter,

Hannah, had been battling cancer years before.

When Talya arrived that day, she found that a new bench had been installed near the footbridge, marked nearby by a rock and a plaque. The bronze plaque read “Hannah Shayne Pite. Dedicated on October 27, 2009.” Hannah’s mother ended up, not surprisingly, sobbing.

Tears of joy, tears of sorrow. Grief, memories, perspective, a sense of spirit. These are just some of the conditions that Bend’s many dedicated memorial benches inspire.

Most memorial benches are located in a park; each is typically marked with a small plaque bearing a name, a date or two, perhaps some words of remembrance. Not nearly enough, in most cases, to tell us a whole story. And yet each bench, each name, does have a story—one that may remain incredibly important to a few people and virtually unknown by others. To those who know the story, the place can be incredibly meaningful. But even dedications we know nothing about have the power to make us pause and reflect for a moment, whether about the people we have lost ourselves, or simply our everyday sorrows.

The choice to dedicate a bench to his daughter, Pite says today, he made because of Hannah’s love for Bend, the outdoors and, particularly, that stretch of the river. Hannah was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia in 2003 at the age of four. Over a two-year period, the family made regular trips from their home in Bend to Portland for treatment at Doernbecher Children’s Hospital. “She hated the hospital,” Pite recalls. “She loved coming home.”

When they were in Bend, the Pite family, which includes Talya and Daniel’s son, Eli, who is now 14, often walked the trails along the Deschutes River. “That was before the footbridge went in, so we’d pick a side to walk. Hannah would take everything in from her stroller. She loved these nature walks.” One beautiful day on the river trail, Hannah got the family’s attention and announced, “Don’t you think we should give thanks for the river and trees and even the bugs?” Says Pite, “She was an amazing little girl.”

The bench and marker gave the Pite family a place to go to remember those times, which were hard, but also powerful. As so many people who have lived through trauma and tragedy know, extreme stress can bring the things that matter sharply into focus—a focus that can fade as time passes.

“This is not meant to be a memorial,” says Pite, whose daughter died in 2005. “It’s meant to be a place to reflect. Everything that happened (during Hannah’s illness) was about forced reflection. This is about choosing to be reflective.”

STORY BY *Kim Cooper Findling*  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Steve Tague*



### A GOOD CAUSE

When Pite first inquired into the process of dedicating a bench through Bend Metro Parks and Recreation District (BMPRD), he was pleased to learn where his money would be going. One hundred percent of the funds for bench dedication are placed in BMPRD's Recreation Scholarship Fund, which helps local financially needy children participate in recreational programs. "I wanted to support those programs," says Pite. "It was another way for Hannah to be part of Bend, to create a permanent reminder that Bend was in Hannah."

Jan Taylor, BMPRD community relations manager, says Pite's reasons to choose bench dedication are common. "Families who dedicate benches are often looking for a place to honor a person," she explains. "Often there hasn't been a burial, and so maybe they choose a place that was meaningful in that person's life." The cost, \$1000 to dedicate a bench that's already in place, more if a new bench needs to be installed, all goes to the Recreation Scholarship Fund. "It's a place to celebrate the life of a person in perpetuity, and help neighbors at the same time."

Not all benches are dedicated to the deceased, and not every story is as heart-breaking as the Pite family's. Still, Kim Johnson, Parks Foundation administrator, who helps manage the bench dedication program, says fielding incoming bench dedication requests can be intense. "Every single phone call is a story in itself," she says. "Some are sad, some are heartwarming. Each is amazing."

### A PLACE TO REMEMBER

Eloisa Chavez dedicated a bench to her son Justin Burkhardt in September of 2010. As a child, Justin participated in many BMPRD programs while Chavez, a single mother, was working. "I appreciated knowing that while I was at work, he was having a good time," she recalls. When she chose to dedicate a bench, Chavez was happy to note that her dollars went to help other children have similar experiences.

Chavez chose a bench for her son in Pageant Park, near the Drake Park footbridge, which was the last place Burkhardt was seen on the summer night he disappeared two-and-a-half years ago. His body was found ten months later, in the river downstream. Despite her own extensive efforts and a thorough investigation by the police, no one knows exactly what led to Burkhardt's death, which fills Chavez with anguish. Still, the bench and memorial plaque are helping her to find some peace with her son's death.

"Justin loved it here, he loved Oregon. He'd been in Bend since he was seven months old. The bench has a beautiful view of the footbridge," she says. "I don't have a headstone. Justin's bench is a beautiful, peaceful place for me to think and reflect."

Chavez also hopes that the bench will serve to remind others of her son. "I don't want anyone to forget. I hope that maybe people will remember his story when they see his name."





## A PERMANENT PLACE

When Bay Area resident Beth Jordan decided to dedicate a bench to her longtime friend, Jim Bradfield, after his death last year, “I simply couldn’t imagine just sending flowers or making a donation to some charity,” she recalls. “I really felt the need to have something more permanent. Maybe I just wasn’t ready to let go of him entirely.”

Jordan, with the help of Bradfield’s wife, Carole, chose a bench in Drake Park, in the row of benches that faces the Newport Avenue bridge. The plaque reads “In Loving Memory of ‘Lucky Jim’ Bradfield. March 8, 1942 - September 30, 2010.” Carole Bradfield and Jordan held a gathering at the site this past September, a year after the bench had been dedicated, to which about 40 of Bradfield’s friends and family attended. “It was really heartwarming,” says Jordan. “We were able to share our thoughts and memories.”

Jordan and “Lucky Jim” Bradfield met 25 years ago, while attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in the Bay Area. They became good friends. “Jim was exceptional. He was just a show-up kind of guy—someone you could always rely on. He never made a fuss, just showed up to lend a hand, whether emotional or otherwise.” Jordan recalls, “The name ‘Lucky’ Jim was one that Jim actually chose for himself. A large part of the AA program is about becoming grateful for the things in your life, and learning to live consciously. Jim liked to remind himself often how lucky he was. He truly was full of gratitude.”

Later, Bradfield became a sort-of father figure to Jordan’s son, Alex. “This was really precious to me because Alex’s dad died when he was five, so Jim was a great role model—big, strong, ethical and sensitive.”

After Bradfield retired, he moved to Bend, regularly leading hikes

for BMPRD. “I liked the idea of a bench outdoors because Jim loved the outdoors. When we sat on the various benches, there just wasn’t a doubt that the one we picked had the most wonderful view of the river. It was beautiful, and felt very spiritual. I couldn’t think of anything more special than folks just being able to sit on Jim’s bench and know that he was so special to someone—actually, to lots of people.”

## FEEL THEIR SPIRITS

Stephanie and Lindsey Jackson knew well the area of Drake Park where the bench dedicated in their names sits today. The sisters lived near downtown Bend as children, says Johane Vancamp, a friend of the family who helped orchestrate this particular bench dedication. “They used to play in this park.”

In 2007, at the ages of 21 and 18, the Jackson sisters were killed, along with their father, Scott Jackson, in an airplane crash in Indonesia. “The flight went down on January 1,” explains Vancamp. “Their bodies were never recovered from the China Sea.”

For many years, Vancamp has been part of a tight group of female friends that also includes Stephanie and Lindsey’s mother, Felice DuBois. “We call each other ‘my personal board of directors,’” she explains. After the sisters’ death, “I proposed to the group that we devise a way to bring the essence of Felice’s daughters to Bend,” says Vancamp. “We wanted her to have a place to go and reflect on her daughters, to feel their spirits and to touch them.”

DuBois collected water from the China Sea to carry home with intentions of planting and watering a tree in her daughters’ memory. But Kim Johnson, of BMPRD, suggested a bench as a more permanent





**Hannah Shayne Pite**  
Dedicated on October 27, 2009

memorial. “Felice and I selected a bench, and it was installed within a few months,” says Vancamp. “The Parks District doesn’t usually allow two names on one bench, but in this case, they made an exception.”

The Jackson sisters are well-remembered in Bend—they were excellent students and greatly admired during their time at Summit High School, and 1000 people came to their memorial service. Still, for their mother, one purpose of the bench is to anchor their memories, for herself and others. Says Vancamp, “Felice wants people to know who her daughters were.”

## QUITE AN HONOR

Last summer, BMPRD dedicated a bench in Pioneer Park to Barney Duberow, who for 14 years was the dedicated caretaker of the park near downtown Bend. Duberow had the honor of enjoying the dedication ceremony himself, at the ripe old age of 91.

“It was quite an honor,” says Duberow. “I guess Parks and Rec was pleased with the work I did.”

One of the city’s oldest, Pioneer Park was once one of the main campgrounds on the Dalles-California Highway. After Duberow retired from a 41-year career with the U.S. Forest Service, BMPRD hired him as Pioneer Park caretaker.

“Oh my, he loved that park,” recalls Barney Duberow’s wife, Roseanna, who joined him at the dedication ceremony in July. The plaque on Duberow’s bench reads “for dedication and care of Pioneer Park.”

“He had such a dedication to that park and to the community,” explains Jan Taylor of BMPRD. “He’s elderly, and we wanted to make sure that he could enjoy his own bench.”

“Everybody made us feel really special,” says Roseanna.

## LOVE THE PEOPLE AROUND US

Since that day in October of 2009 when Hannah’s bench and the plaque bearing her name was installed, the Pite family has developed a tradition. “When we visit, we leave pebbles on the rock,” says Daniel Pite. “Sometimes we find that other people have left beautiful little rocks or pebbles there, too.”

Some of Pite’s friends and family know about this tradition. But the family never knows if the rocks and pebbles they see were left by folks who knew Hannah, or people who simply want to honor the little girl whose name is on a bench at a beautiful spot on the Deschutes River. To Pite, it doesn’t matter.

“I appreciate that this bench gave me the perfect way to be reflective, and that the act of seeing her name inspires others to do the same,” he says. “I would love to know that people have been reminded to live while we’re alive and to love the people around us.” ☺



## Bend Metro Parks and Recreation District Foundation Bench Dedication Program

The dedicated bench program is managed by the BMPRD Parks Foundation. The cost is \$1000 to dedicate an existing bench, which includes a bronze casting installed in the pavers in front of the bench if it is located in a park, or in a nearby boulder if the bench is located on a trail. One hundred percent of the requested bench dedication dollars go to the Recreation Scholarship Fund, to support the enrollment of financially needy local children in recreation programs.

BMPRD prefers to dedicate benches that already exist, as there are so many parks with installed benches that have not yet been dedicated. However, if a person has a truly meaningful place in mind, the District will consider the installation of a new bench. Cost for new benches is \$1400 to \$1700.

For more information, contact Kim Johnson at the Bend Parks Foundation at 541-706-6127.