

Like many children who visit Bald Head, Claire Elise Miley loved everything about this special island. She grew up spending holidays and summers with her parents, Allison and Robert, at their island home; first as just the three of them, then joined often by dear friends. They spent time walking the beach with her dog, Stella; riding the waves and enjoying activities at the Bald Head Island Conservancy. She loved the ocean, laying in the sun, and Claire loved sea turtles. She watched a green sea turtle nest near Access 42 in the middle of the night, gazed at shooting stars and marveled at bioluminescent sand.

Claire's beautiful life was cut short at the age of 15 on July 21, 2019. She was hit from behind in a tragic jet ski accident on the lake near her hometown of Davidson, North Carolina. As Robert and Allison's only child, and as a friend to many across schools, dance and volleyball teams, Claire's passing was and continues to be heartbreaking for her family and friends.

As a way to honor Claire's life, the Mileys requested donations be directed to two of her passions – dog rescue and the Bald Head Island Conservancy. Donations quickly poured in to us. Donations from family, teachers, her beloved travel volleyball team, a friend who only knew her from 'turtle' camp many years ago, and friends of the Mileys from all over the country. As part of their gifts, our beaches this past summer hosted 23 turtle nests named in memory of Claire. The love and desire to honor her has been far-reaching and extraordinary.

As shared by a favorite teacher, Chris Sturm, "Claire had charisma and potential as bright as the sun and stars that shine over the turtles and island she cared so deeply for. I often joked that a paperless classroom would save the sea turtles, and Claire always looked at me with that unique, agreeable smile".

While meeting with Allison and Robert throughout the past few months, members of our staff fought back their own tears as we saw pictures of and heard stories about Claire; stories that made us feel as though we have always known her...the turtle in the kindergarten ocean play, the nine year old who signed her emails "Claire the turtle girl," and the teenager who couldn't wait to drive to the beach with girlfriends and "just be." Working together with the Mileys, our board, and staff, two paths were determined to remember Claire ongoing.

First, a bronze legacy turtle was purchased in her honor, hand crafted with the gentle care of sculptor Dumay Gorham, who thought of Claire's story as he created the piece. The sculpture symbolizes Legacy Turtle Claire, who is now part of our legacy

turtle program of moms who consistently return to the island to nest. Identified through research by our Sea Turtle Protection coordinator, Paul Hillbrand, we hope she will return to Bald Head for many years to come.

Second, Allison and Robert wanted to use remaining and future funds in an effort to promote young adults' love for the work of the Conservancy; encouraging them to pursue their environmental interests and to do so at our unique campus. Each summer more than 15 interns make the conservancy their home and their classroom, but their common room was both outdated and negatively impacted by recent hurricanes.

*That will now change.* The goal is to turn this meeting space, study hall and lounge area for our interns into a state-of-the-art gathering hall to use to work on projects and further their studies at the Conservancy. It will carry Claire's name, and represent her passion for animals in and out of the water, and her desire to protect their environment.

We at the Conservancy believe...that just like our island's amazing turtles who return to Bald Head each year...Claire's love and spirit will always be here: in the stories we'll share with our interns, in the photos we'll display in the newly renovated space, and in this beautiful room to be created in her honor. Claire's brief but meaningful life will change the experience of our college student interns for years to come.

As shared by her parents, "The magic of the island gave her love, laughter and a place to fully live life. We hope this gift continues to Give Claire's Love to the World." The Conservancy staff are humbled to help the legacy of the young girl who loved turtles come full circle.

If you are interested in honoring Claire and assisting with the renovation of the common area and dorm, please donate by clicking on the following link

[Give Claire's Love to the World Bald Head Island Conservancy](#)