

Remembering Luke

A Life in the Light

“Being carried off in the rushing
river; heading downstream, rolling
with the rapids; I will reach my
friends and drift to shore.
Find another bridge; they won’t
stop this living.”

North of Here, “July,” *Make Hay
While the Sun Shines*

TEXT **JONAH DUNCH**
PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE HARVEY-JANSEN FAMILY

On Thursday, August 10, 2017, Luke Murray Jansen stood on the mainstage at the Edmonton Folk Music Festival, singing and strumming his banjo between his North of Here bandmates, Will Holowaychuk and Ian St. Arnaud. Two months earlier, Luke had stood on a different stage — the Jubilee Auditorium — for his convocation. A talented musician and sincere leader, he had spent the previous four years in the rushing river of undergrad. Now, with his political science degree behind him and the world ahead of him, he enjoyed North of Here’s Folk Fest performance with no doubt in his mind that many more would follow.

Yet this was not to be. Luke’s life was tragically cut short on October 6, 2017, when he was struck by an LRT train at a pedestrian crossing near South Campus.

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The Harvey-Jansen home in Sherwood Park is filled with family photos, capturing slices of time in the entangled lives of Brad, Z’Anne, and their two sons, Luke and Ethan. I visited their house this summer to talk to Brad and Z’Anne about Luke’s life — and his absence.

I followed them to the dining room table, which is big enough to fit the family twice over. We sat and I pulled out my notebook, listening as the Harvey-Jansens recalled memories of their son.

Luke was born in the U of A hospital on March 9, 1995. He lived in Edmonton for the first three years of his life before the family moved back to Z’Anne and Brad’s hometown: Sherwood Park. The boys grew up with both sets of grandparents nearby.

As a child, Luke was friendly, boisterous, and always curious to try something new. Evidently well-liked from an early age, four-year-old Luke was the only boy in his preschool dance class. Once, Luke told Z’Anne, “Mum, I like dance class, but all the girls kiss you!” Luke was also a voracious reader. As an eight-year-old, he eagerly read the entirety of the newly released *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* in one day at the family’s cottage.

Luke sang in the Elk Island Honour Choirs from Grade 2 to Grade 12. He also played basketball in junior high and refereed the sport in high school.

While the three of us were talking, Luke’s younger brother Ethan came home. We shook hands, and he left to study for his upcoming chemistry midterm. He was taking the class to make up credits, having dropped a course when his big brother died.

When I met with him later on campus, Ethan

reflected on his life growing up alongside Luke, who was four years his senior. Attending the same junior high as their parents, Ethan was often known as “Luke’s brother” by teachers. The pair were rivals as kids and fiercely competed in one-on-one basketball — until Ethan’s skills eclipsed Luke’s. “I whooped his ass,” he said with a grin.

But as the Harvey-Jansen boys grew up, they grew closer. Their common interests in sports, music, and food — and their shared desire to “escape suburbia” — strengthened their bond. If Luke had lived, Ethan said their relationship would have gotten better and better.

“He was going into his prime years of pushing out, and I was just kind of finding myself too,” he said. “And I would have just been interested to see... where he would end up, and where the band would end up.”

Ethan wondered whether North of Here would have taken off, and if Luke would have had to choose between his music and his political science career. But, of course, those questions will forever remain unanswered. “A lot changes quickly,” he said.

“He seemed to get a confidence that, ‘It’s okay to try things that are new, that I don’t know how to do,’” Z’Anne said.

In 2010, Luke left Sherwood Heights Junior High behind to start Grade 10 at Bev Facey High School. He was a high achiever, but Z’Anne said she was most proud of her son when he worked hard behind the scenes and stood up for other people.

“In elementary, if he felt that something wasn’t just, he would challenge it,” she said. “Then what was beautiful was that as he [became an adult]... he was doing his own things to make a difference in the world.”

Z’Anne said Luke’s risk-taking attitude grew in high school, and his classmates grew with him. Among them was Meryn Severson, who joined forces with Luke to revamp their high school leadership group. Together, the pair took the reins from the teachers who had previously been in charge.

“Luke and I went through an entire revisioning process,” Severson said. “There were some bumps along the way for sure... but Luke and I, I think, were able to move it to a place where it was much more student-led.”

Beyond the power plays of the high school teachers' lounge, Luke grew to love the world of politics thanks to High School Model United Nations (HSMUN). He would fiercely debate policy points with his classmates. One time, he and a friend wrote a tune presenting their diplomatic argument, which they played for their peers to get them onside. "He would come out on top," Brad said, laughing, "even if he was totally wrong!"

Surrounded by music at Sherwood Park United Church, Luke learned to play every instrument he could get his hands on. By the time of his death, he had mastered the piano, baritone saxophone, banjo, and bass guitar, and dabbled in playing the tenor saxophone, accordion, harmonium, melodeum, and harmonica. He even tried to convince Brad to let him bring the church's retired organ home.

In Grade 11, Luke's creative music teacher Michelle Engblom took her students on a weekend retreat

to Camp Nakamun to create, rehearse, and perform their music in different groups. Some groups gelled and decided to stick together, including what became North of Here — though this was not the band's original name.

"They were gonna name themselves 'Mediocre at Best,' and they thought it was hilarious," Engblom said. "[I told them], 'You're never gonna get a gig!'"

Luke, St. Arnaud, Holowaychuk, and original bandmate Caleb Sinn took Engblom's advice. She would connect the band with local events around Strathcona County. Soon enough, the North of Here boys were playing at their high school graduation; three years of high school had rushed past them.

While Sinn left the group on good terms in January 2017 to focus on other goals, the remaining trio continued to write songs, practice, and perform in venues around Edmonton. 2015 was a year of growth for the band; Luke and his friends began playing at

“[The lesson of Luke’s life was to] be immersed in your campus and find those little holes you can fill that you know you’re good at,” Ethan said.

licensed venues and opening for established artists like Craig Cardiff. Listening back to recordings of the group's early shows, Brad said he could see how they became better musicians over time. Ethan interrupted with a laugh and said, "If you're listening back, you're like, 'Oh, they're not that good!'"

"It's all relative!" Z'Anne said, coming to the then-teenage band's defense.

While the band's profile was growing, Luke found a whole new slate of risks to take: the highs and lows of campus life. In 2013, Luke began the first year of his political science degree. For the four years that followed, he made campus a second home.

Having friends from Sherwood Park by his side helped; Severson and Luke both got into student

governance and shared its "joys and tribulations." Throughout their respective degrees, they routinely caught up with thoughtful conversations about urban planning, politics, books, and concerts.

"Luke was always that person who was there with me at all of those major steps of my adult life," she said. "[He valued] making time to connect with the people that are important to you and not putting as much pressure on the things that seem important but actually have less weight."

Luke made many close friends in his program as well. Ben Throndson, Jessica Van Mulligen, and Mia Bottos met Luke in a Canadian politics course in their first year, forming a "poli sci crew" that stuck together for the rest of their time on campus. Throndson and Van Mulligen recalled a time long before that August 2017 Folk Fest concert, when North of Here played at Dewey's and several political science friends came along to see Luke the musician in action.

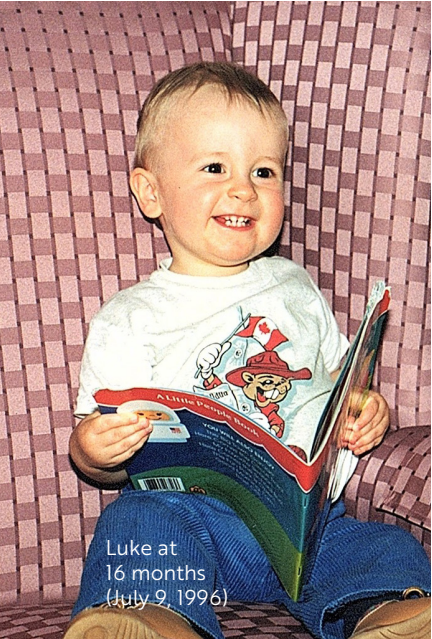
"The band was a bit younger, and... we were all sitting front-row, watching Luke with the rest of his guys play," Van Mulligen said, chuckling. "It was very typical campus life, but it was fun."

Luke introduced Throndson to the world of live music festivals. At the Seven Music Festival in St. Albert, far away from the Tory Building lecture halls where they spent most of their days, Throndson saw Luke light up in a new way. "[Luke] had a joie de vie that really expressed itself most clearly when he was at a music festival," he said.

Professor Steve Patten saw these two sides of Luke too, having first watched North of Here perform at the 2016 Canmore Folk Fest. Patten was pleasantly surprised when Luke walked into his fourth-year political science honors seminar about a month later.

"The unique thing about Luke was his ability to be involved in so many things — and to excel in them. I think he did it by enjoying everything he was doing," he said. "He did fun things, but he did them well."

Patten remembers him as an affable, bright student and the de facto leader of the honors cohort. Once, when Luke and his classmates didn't want to





Edmonton Folk Fest (Aug 13, 2017)
Photograph by Risa Witten

go to Patten’s seminar, Luke emailed him to announce the students had “decided” that class would be cancelled this week. Given his good-natured rapport with Luke, Patten didn’t mind this cheeky move. The students used the time to catch up on their thesis-writing instead. Van Mulligen was in the seminar, and she was grateful for Luke’s leadership and support in the class.

“He was really good at checking in with all of us to see how we were doing. He was always the guy to go to to bounce ideas off of,” she said. “I’ve kept more than a few of his sentences in my thesis because he [phrased] it much better than I could write it!”

Luke found a way to bring music into his study of politics; his honors thesis discussed how public policy influenced Edmonton’s live music venues.

He also returned to student leadership. For two years, he was the vice-president events (fundraising) of the Political Science Undergraduate Association (PSUA). In his final year, he served as PSUA president while also holding down a job as a deputy returning officer at the Students’ Union.

During his tenure with the PSUA, Luke co-founded the Poli Sci Bonspiel, an annual curling tournament open to all students, staff, and faculty members that’s now been renamed in his honour. While he brought new students into the fold, current PSUA president Micah Leonida — who served as a vice-president during Luke’s presidency — said Luke never wanted to burden students with extracurriculars if they couldn’t take them on.

“Luke was very welcoming of my ideas,” Leonida said. “He was good at listening and trying to understand where his members had their strengths and weaknesses.”

In January 2017, Luke curled in his final Bonspiel surrounded by friends. Not long after, the winter ice thawed and gave way to spring. When April rolled around, Luke submitted his honors thesis, wrapped up his courses, and looked forward to graduation.

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With his undergrad over and professional life just beginning, Luke moved out of his family home to a rental in Parkallen. While he was excited to live in the city with his friends, he made time to go out for dinner with his family and visit his grandparents back in Sherwood Park.

“He had been out of the house long enough to realize how important [connection to family] was,” Brad said. “[He valued] enjoying his freedom but also where he came from.”

Ethan remembers the August 2017 weekend at the Edmonton Folk Fest well. He was behind Luke and the boys, taking pictures while they played their Thursday “tweener” set between acts on the mainstage, standing next to Shakey Graves as he looked out at the hillside of folk festers.

“Watching other artists who he idolized watch him — that’s pretty cool,” Ethan said. “I think that’s what Folk Fest is all about, and it totally [suited] Luke’s personality as well.”

After a six-month contract as an election assistant with Strathcona County, Luke applied for new jobs in September. He interviewed to work as the Constituency Assistant for Premier Rachel Notley, whom he had met at Folk Fest. Notley and her personnel were looking forward to welcoming Luke to their team — but he died before hearing about the job offer.

“He was super engaged, thoughtful, and kind, and very interested in politics,” Notley wrote in a statement. “He had a very bright future ahead of him and I know he would [have] excelled in any role he would have worked in.”

Come September, Ethan watched North of Here play at his first Week of Welcome, and he looked forward to his brother’s guidance as he charted his own path around campus.

“He was making sure I wasn’t in a shell at university,” Ethan said. “I’m sure he would have helped me a lot more.”

The night before his death, Luke and Van Mulligen went to a Reuben and the Dark concert in the Myer Horowitz Theatre.

“It couldn’t have been any better because... it was such a beautiful, fun night and something Luke totally loved,” Van Mulligen said.

If Luke were still alive today, Z’Anne said he would have toured a new album with North of Here and gotten more experience in the world before pursuing graduate studies a couple years down the line. He had also said he wanted to have children, preferably when he could have been a young, active parent. Luke was brimming with ideas for his future, from lists of grad schools and festivals he had in mind to starts of songs and album cover concepts.

“Definitely, I saw him in his prime, finding what he loved,” Ethan said.

The Harvey-Jansens have started a website, lukejansen.ca, to log reflections and photos of Luke and host their planned “Mentoring and Music Making” legacy fund. The website includes information about “Do You Love Your Song?,” an October 4, 2018 concert celebrating the Edmonton music scene Luke loved, which was organized to mark the first anniversary of his death. In addition to the concert, the family has produced a self-titled album of Luke’s recordings, which can be ordered via the website.

Z’Anne also started a newsletter on June 3, 2018 — a year to the day after Luke moved out. The newsletter captures precious moments from the four months after Luke’s move to cherish with family and friends. Brad said these reflections are reaching extended family across the country who, while they can’t be in Edmonton with the Harvey-Jansens, can enjoy these looks into the past.

“There was this natural interest in... connecting with his story,” Z’Anne said. “It’s become a way of sharing [his life with the world].”

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As Luke and his friends sang intricate harmonies on the Folk Fest stage, the sun and the future were bright in equal measure. And like the summer sun, Luke illuminated the lives of those around him.

“By what he did, our world was always changing and growing,” Z’Anne said. “That’s hard to lose.” **g**

“He was just on the verge of doing so many more amazing things,” Engblom said. “He’s missed by many, many people.”