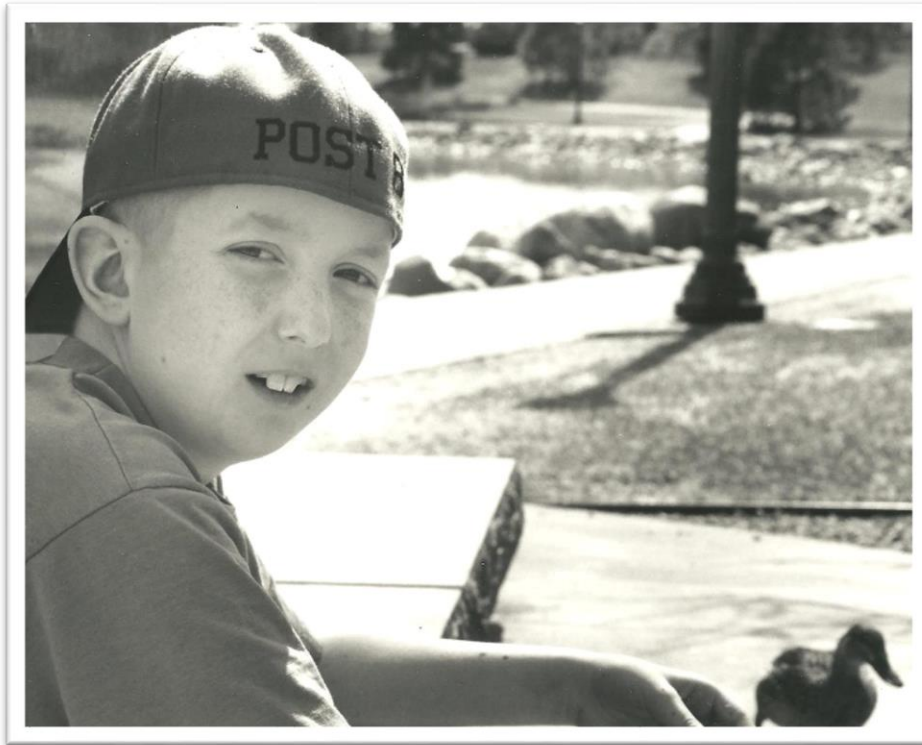


ROBERT'S STORY



From the time he was a young child and all through his long battle with cancer, Robert Disburg was on the lookout for pennies on the ground. He was 12 years old when he died of cancer. At his funeral in 2003 his parents made sure everyone in attendance would have a penny to take with them in memory of Robert. In the fall of 2004 his grandparents – Jack and Jo Mitchell – inspired the “Pennies for Robert” cancer fund that is operated through Countryside Support and Memory Center. From the time that the Mitchell’s brought in their first sack of pennies, until today, the Pennies for Robert Fund has assisted hundreds of central South Dakotans who have cancer and must travel great distances for treatment.

Since 2004, the Pennies for Robert program has distributed over \$1,150,000 to area cancer patients traveling from the Pierre area and traveling to the Helmsley Center for treatments. This program is made possible by the first bag of pennies and 21 years of generous community donations that support our family, friends and neighbors in need.

Jack and Jo Mitchell were recognized in 2015 with a proclamation from Gov. Dennis Daugaard’s office, (story below) for their Pennies for Robert campaign in memory of Robert. Jack and Jo both passed away in 2018, leaving us with a legacy of helping those in need, one penny at a time.



Jack and Jo Mitchell received a proclamation from Gov. Dennis Daugaard in 2015 recognizing them for their charity work with Pennies for Robert campaign.

Capital Journal Article (below)

https://www.capijournal.com/news/pennies-for-robert-couple-honored/article_7ced7e8c-786c-11e5-865d-47eb9bf3ea7b.html

Jo Mitchell didn't know they were about to receive a proclamation from the governor honoring them for their work. Not until they walked through the door of the governor's office Wednesday morning.

Their daughter, Terry Disburg, accompanied them to the Capitol and arranged for the honor — without telling them. The couple were recognized for their "Pennies for Robert" campaign in memory of 12-year-old Robert Disburg, their grandchild, who died in 2003 of cancer.

That effort has now grown into a campaign that gives \$90,000 a year to cancer patients.

Matt Konenkamp, policy adviser for the governor's office, read the statement from Gov. Dennis Daugaard before presenting it to the couple.

"I cannot image how hard it must have been, 12 years ago, to lose Robert, and to deal with what no grandparent should have to experience. Yet in the face of your loss, you thought of others and resolved to help people who are fighting this disease," the statement said.

The letter notes that the charity has given out \$425,000 to rural cancer patients who must travel great distances for treatment.

“There is no question that your devotion to the memory of your grandson is at the heart of it all. You have made a difference to hundreds of South Dakotans and to their families and friends. For that, the people of your community are sincerely grateful,” Daugaard’s letter said.

“Pennies for Robert,” profiled in the Sept. 30 edition of the Capital Journal, began after Robert Disburg’s death. Jack and Jo Mitchell recalled that any time he found a penny on the ground, he would say it was his lucky day.

At his funeral, the pastor used that in his sermon, saying “Today, Robert, is your lucky day.” And when they left the church, everyone picked out a penny.

Jo Mitchell, speaking Wednesday, said that when Robert was sick, the two of them saw how much it cost to travel to be with him.

“When Robert was in Minneapolis, we would go there, of course. And we’d just pack a suitcase, and away we’d go. You never thought about money, or how far it was or anything; we just went,” she said.

This went on for a while.

“One evening, my husband was doing the checkbook, and he was saying, ‘Oh. Well. My.’ These words like that. And he said, ‘You know how much money we’ve spent?’”

That opened their eyes to how much it cost to travel for treatment. Realizing that other people needed help as well, they seized on the image of donating pennies so other families of patients could get assistance.

Originally, the campaign was simply about putting pennies in a candy bowl.

In the beginning, the campaign donated \$4,000 a year. Eight years ago, that grew to \$12,000 a year, and four years ago, it hit \$40,000. Now, it’s about \$92,000 a year, said Liz Stokes, executive director of Countryside Hospice, which runs the Pennies for Robert campaign.

All the money collected goes to travel expenses for cancer patients. Many people have to go for treatment in Rapid City or Sioux Falls or even farther, such as Chicago or the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, she said.

Jo Mitchell said that being recognized was “overwhelming.”

“We’re so thankful that people can use this money,” Jo Mitchell said. “If Robert was here, he’d say, ‘Wowwwww!’”

She added that people were grateful to be helped in a time of need. Later on, many of them paid double back into the fund.

“It’s so great that we could help so many,” said Jo Mitchell.

“She gets weepy,” Jack Mitchell added.

Stokes said it means a lot that this couple has gotten this recognition.

“The fact that it’s a local family, local community, helping local cancer patients, it means everything us. We’re just glad they were able to be recognized officially for their contribution to starting the whole Pennies for Robert program, which is so huge today.”

Countryside Hospice assists about 125 patients a year, within 60 miles of Pierre. Ages range from infants to patients 80 years of age. The money comes from direct donations and the thrift store, Stokes said.

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