

Let There Be Mom preserves memories

Non-profit organization helped dying woman create a legacy for her daughter



'I find peace in all of this. It is very overwhelming. It is amazing you can find volunteers who are willing to do this. They didn't even know Amanda.'

Janet Kennedy
 Amanda Moon's mother

LET THERE BE MOM: This non-profit organization helped Amanda Moon's family create all of the items seen in the picture above, which include cake plates, photographs and scrapbooks. In the picture on top, Amanda Moon poses with her mother, Janet Kennedy.



CAKE DECORATING: One of Amanda Moon's wishes was to decorate a cake for each of Madison's birthdays. In this picture, she is decorating a "Dora" cake for her daughter in 2006.



STILL DECORATING: In 2007, Amanda decorates her daughter's cake in spite of her painful illness.

BY NICOLE JAMISON
 LIFESTYLE EDITOR

"Yes, I miss her."

It is impossible to describe the sadness in Janet Kennedy's voice as she spoke of her daughter, a vibrant young woman who succumbed to recurrent cervical cancer on August 30. She was just 27 years old.

Amanda Grace Moon, a Greer High School graduate and mother of a 3-year-old daughter, was diagnosed with cervical cancer in July 2006. She then had a hysterectomy and began treatments at the Cancer Center of the Carolinas.

In January of this year, Moon was told she was cancer free, but she kept having problems and went back to the doctor. She was then re-diagnosed and told the cancer had spread. On July 11, doctors told the family nothing else could be done and suspended her treatments.

"My world crumbled that day. It's devastating. It has been a time of unspeakable sorrow," said Kennedy, who is now a full-time caregiver to her husband as he battles breast cancer.

On August 3, the family called Interim Hospice to tend to Moon at home. This move did more than just provide quality care during what would become Moon's final days. One of the women who cared for Moon told the family of a unique new organization in Greenville called Let There Be Mom.

This organization is dedicated to helping mothers with terminal illnesses preserve their memories for their children. Moon soon became the first mother accepted into the program.

"Amanda had been very down, but when they explained what they could do for her, there was a spark. It lit something up inside of her," Kennedy said.

nedly said. "She knew this was something she had to do."

Since Moon had very little time left, volunteers from Let There Be Mom got to work very soon after first meeting her on August 10.

Since Moon was known for her beautifully decorated cakes—something she had done since she graduated high school—Let There Be Mom provided the materials to decorate a set of cake plates using Moon's and her daughter Madison's handprints.

On August 14, Suzanne Goodwin, a local photographer, came out to the house to take photographs of Moon, her daughter and her husband Randy.

"Amanda was in so much pain that we didn't think she could do the pictures. At one point she just said, 'Mama, I hurt.' So for the rest of the time I rubbed her back," Kennedy said. "At the end, Amanda said, 'Mama, I'll never get to see the pictures.' I told her everything would be fine. You'll get to see the pictures."

As it turned out, Kennedy was right. The pictures were ready the very next day.

"Between the smiling and the crying, I have never seen someone so happy. They had them bound in the book," Kennedy said. "We were just ecstatic. Not only were they done quickly, but Amanda got to see them, too."

And the timing couldn't have been better. That night, Moon had her first stroke.

"She couldn't respond to us, but I believe she could hear. On Friday, she had another stroke that affected her speech, which made it even harder for her to communicate," Kennedy said.

That same day, Friday, August 17, 22 volunteers got together to compile a scrapbook of Moon's life. Within five hours, two books (a total of 104 pages) were complete.

On Saturday morning, they delivered the finished scrapbooks. Moon wasn't able to look at them, but her family held them up for her to see. "When I woke her up to show her the framed picture, she had a small smile on her face," Kennedy said.

In addition to the scrapbooks and photographs, Let There Be Mom had Moon make an imprint of her thumbprint into a special clay that turned into pure silver when it was fired. This charm will later be given to Madison with a note from her mother. The organization is also making a quilt out of Moon's and Madison's clothing.

"It was a miracle they came into our lives and worked with us before they even opened. This organization is very dear to my heart," Kennedy said. "I find peace in all of this. It is very overwhelming. It is amazing you can find volunteers who are willing to do this. They didn't even know

Amanda."

Although she has been gone for more than a month, Let There Be Mom is not finished preserving Moon's legacy. Moon wanted the organization to create a book containing letters to Madison from family and friends that discuss her life—times they shared with her, things they'll always remember and anything they think Madison should know about her. These letters will then be bound into a book for Madison.

"Let There Be Mom is one of those organizations where you may be sad, but at the end you will overflow with emotions because you've helped someone," Kennedy said. "Hours upon hours we spent getting the pictures together. We laughed and cried. Let There Be Mom has touched our family. It has helped us to heal and recapture memories."

One of the truly unique things about this program is that it is completely free to the families who are accepted into the program. Let There Be Mom is funded entirely by corporate and individual donations.

One easy way community members can help the organization raise money is by eating out on Thursday, Oct. 18 in support of Dine Out for Mom, presented by Cancer Centers of the Carolinas.

Participating restaurants will donate a percentage of their sales from the day to Let There Be Mom. These restaurants are located in the Greenville, Simpsonville, and Greer areas and include:

- Azia
- Baker's Bagels & Deli
- Boston Pizzeria
- Brick House Coffee
- Bruster's
- Chophouse '47
- City Range Steakhouse Grill
- Devereaux's
- Doc Chey's



HER LEGACY: Amanda paints one of the plates during her time with Let There Be Mom.

- The Great Bay Oyster House
- The Lazy Goat
- Lieu's Chinese Bistro
- Moe's (Simpsonville, Wade Hampton)
- The Open Hearth
- Overlook Grill
- Paisanos Italian Pizzeria & Restaurant
- Peter David's Restaurant O
- Salsarita's (Pelham Rd.)
- Soby's

While Kennedy wants the community to know about the service Let There Be Mom provides, she also wants young people to understand the importance of being tested for HPV and having regular cancer screenings.

"I feel like other people may be helped through Amanda's death," Kennedy said. "Her courage, strength and her fight are what I'll remember most about her. She fought until her last breath. She never gave up."

If you would like to see the pictures photographer Suzanne Goodwin took of Moon before she died, visit www.capturedshots.photorelect.com and click on Amanda.

For more information about Let There Be Mom, visit www.lettherebemos.org.

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THE WHOLE FAMILY: Amanda sits with her husband Randy and their daughter Madison.



CAKE PLATES: These are the cake plates Amanda and Madison decorated. The one in the center features their handprints.