

Price's legacy lives on through scholarship

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By KEN BECK, *The Wilson Post* On Aug. 6, 2009, three weeks shy of his 36th birthday, Lebanon's Chris Price was gliding down Interstate 75 South with six other members of the Nashville Steel Horsemen bike club.

About 30 miles from their destination, the National Biker Round Up in Atlanta, Price lost control of the show bike he called "Da King," a candy-apple red 2004 Harley-Davidson Road King, and smashed into a guard rail. He was pronounced dead a few hours later at Atlanta's Grady Hospital.

The pharmaceutical salesman and custom-home builder left a wife and four children and a world of friends behind, but they refuse to say goodbye. Those who knew him best keep his memory and legacy alive with an annual Chris Price Memorial Benefit Ride and Bike Show, which connects with the hobby he enjoyed the most and assists orphans with education funds.

This year's all-day and into-the-night celebration of Price's life rolls Saturday, Aug. 13, with the festivities taking place at The Mill at Lebanon. And Aug. 15 has been deemed Chris Price Day in Wilson County.

"The memorial foundation was something that my children and I thought would justly honor Chris's memory as well as give back to the community at large," said Marsha Price, Chris's widow. "Chris was huge in the community. He always gave back."

"The event represents all the things he loved—Harleys—and he just had a real joy about life. He lived life to the fullest. These are things that are a resemblance of who he was, and also it has been very therapeutic for us, to redirect the loss we felt into something positive."

Price was devoted to his children: Trey, 19; Frankie, 8; Morgan, 6; and Kristin, 4.

“He was a wonderful father. Provider is the word that keeps coming to mind. We were fortunate that Chris was a provider. That was his first priority. No matter what he did, he made sure the family was taken care of. He loved Harleys. He loved to ride. He knew that possibility of something like this happening, so he prepared,” said his wife of 10 years.

“The mission or purpose of the foundation is to give back to children that have a lost a parent to a bike ride. I can't tell you how many families and individuals have come to me and told me how they lost a parent or a child or brother to a bike accident. Obviously it's a tragedy you don't anticipate happening to you, but also financial loss is another outcome.

“This fund was set up to give a thousand-dollar scholarship to children, no matter where they live, as long as they are under the age of 18 and have lost a parent to a motorcycle ride. The money is to be used for education,” Marsha said. “Last year was our first year, and a scholarship was not given. We have not had one applicant, and we have done so much to try to get the word out.

“Last year the event was targeted to the biker population, but this year we have tried hard to make sure people know that it is not just for bikers. It includes a silent auction and gala, a celebration of Chris' life, with food and drinks and a great evening of dancing and fun.”

Murfreesboro businessman Robert Morris, a fraternity brother and bike club brother to Chris for 12 years, is coordinating the event at The Mill.

“We will start with a commemorative ride through the city of Lebanon and around the county,” Morris said. “Last year we had over 100 bikes in the ride. We will have a bike show with 14 different classes. That was Chris' main thing. He had the most beautiful bikes. The bike show will be held inside, and there will be a car and truck show outside. They will run from 9 a.m. to about 4 p.m.

“Then we're going to have a wine and cheese silent auction 6-8 p.m. with a lot of nice donated

items, and we will cap the evening off with a party with the band Higher Ground from about 9-12:30 p.m.," Morris said. "During the day there will be vendors selling goods and services inside, such as food and beverages. We're trying to make it a really festive event that all family members can attend."

Morris describes his late friend as "genuine, cordial" and a man with "great charisma" and "a magnetic personality." He was not witness to the accident that took Chris' life but was close behind on the ride.

"They were half a mile ahead of me, going down 75. We were all together, about seven of us riding motorcycles," Morris recalled. "Chris' bike went into a high-speed wobble. What happens is that the front end gets to shaking uncontrollably. Somehow or another when you have high speed and rotation of the front tire and wind dynamics and all, it lifts that front tire so that it has a shimmy like a washing machine in the spin cycle. It shakes violently. He was unable to gain control of it."

Marsha has not only kept the bike Chris lost his life on but has restored it and continues to enter it in shows.

"He just put a lot of work into his two Harley-Davidsons: a Softail and a Road King. He just prided himself on having the best bike anywhere. When I say anywhere, I mean anywhere," Marsha said.

"He'd take them all around to different bike shows and consistently win best of show. I have a room full of trophies and awards. He had a lot of time and work and money in these bikes. They are beautiful bikes.

"They were just his passion, and I knew that I would want something to celebrate his life, and I knew his bikes would be part of that. With the Road King, he wanted to turn it into a Road Glide, so I had it built into a Road Glide. I continue to show both of them, and he continues to win, and every penny that those bikes win go straight into the scholarship fund."

William "Mike" Price, the father of Chris, remembers his son as "very outgoing, very determined and a high achiever. Whatever Chris Price done, it wasn't 100 percent, it was 150.

"His funeral—you never seen anything like that before. It was held at the College Hills Church of Christ sanctuary. So many people were there. That church was packed, and they were still waiting outside," Mr. Price said.

"The funeral procession stretched from Five Oaks to the Square. There were 500 motorcycles in it, and that's not counting the cars. They circled the whole subdivision of Five Oaks. The people there didn't know what to think about it."

Beside his father, wife and children, Chris left behind step-mother Rochell Price and brother Jamil Price. Chris graduated from Lebanon High in 1990 where he was a point guard on the basketball team. He was an invited walk-on on the Middle Tennessee State University baseball team, and by the end of his freshman season was batting cleanup.

"His senior year, he hurt his arm, but he tried out for the pros in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and out of 300 guys, he was one of three that made it with a Kansas City Royals farm team," his father recalled. "He played for a season in Fort Myers, Fla., and Springfield, Ill., and said, 'Well, Daddy, I proved my point, I can play professional ball.'"

Chris holds a special place in the heart of MTSU head baseball coach Steve Peterson.

"He was a guy who had a wonderful personality. He had such leadership qualities that he could say things after a good day or after a bad day that would either pick somebody up or put somebody back in line in a way that didn't offend anybody. It was a natural, God-given ability," Peterson said.

"He had a good family and was just a neat guy who lived a very full life. I had no idea of his enthusiasm for motorcycle riding. I never knew how much that meant to him until I went to his funeral and saw the celebration of his life and how much he meant to that club. He'll always be one of my favorites, and I miss him," Peterson said.

Marsha, who holds a master's degree in organizational leadership and works in health-care administration at Vanderbilt Emergency Services, was a member of the sister sorority to Chris' fraternity.

"I went to Vanderbilt. He went to MTSU. He was in Alpha Phi Alpha, and I was in Alpha Kappa Alpha. We met at an Alpha Phi Alpha meeting," she recalled. "He stopped me, and said, 'Hey, I would love to get to know you. Maybe we can go get some ice cream.' It was freezing outside. We always laughed about his line later, but it worked.

"Chris was full of life. He had a wonderful personality, full of charm. He had a smile that would light up the room. He was so talented. He had a natural athletic ability which he passed on to his daughters.

Frankie and Morgan are competitive gymnasts, and both are state champions in gymnastics. It's so amazing to watch his daughters grow up and display the same characteristics.

"He knew how to enjoy life, even though his life ended way too soon. He probably did everything he wanted to do by the age of 36. He never let anything stop him from doing what he wanted to do. He lived life, and he touched so many lives in so many different ways," she said. "He was a very special man."

Writer Ken Beck may be contacted at [This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it](#)

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