Foundation helps Tennessee college student fight for his future

After cancer battle, Christopher Hutt II is proud to be his mother's hero

By Andrea Russell for ATSSA



Chris Hutt was 33 when he was killed in an April 2006 work zone incident. His son, Christopher Gordon Hutt II, was born about four months later.

One month after graduating high school, Christopher Gordon Hutt II was diagnosed with Stage IV Hodgkin's Lymphoma.

That meant in June of 2024, as his friends focused on plans to start their college careers, Chris was forced to fix his attention on the start of chemotherapy.

But now the 19-year-old cancer survivor is wrapping up the second year of his studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT). He was able to enroll after deferring for one semester and is now fully integrated into college life and relishing a hard-won, typical collegiate routine. He goes to class, hangs out with friends, studies, cooks dinner and relaxes.

"It's a pretty normal schedule, but that's just what I wanted," said Chris, who was recently awarded a third Roadway Worker Memorial Scholarship by the American Traffic Safety Services (ATSS) Foundation.

Twelve students were awarded scholarships for the 2026-27 academic year. The competitive scholarship program offers up to $10,000 annually for dependents of roadway workers killed or permanently disabled in work zone incidents. Students who demonstrate a strong commitment to volunteerism are eligible to apply for an additional $1,000, given in honor of Chuck Bailey, a roadway safety member who died in 2002.

The scholarship has provided Chris financial support for college, which has been especially helpful given his medical bills. The scholarship also ties him to the legacy of his father, Christopher Gordon Hutt, a roadway worker killed in a work zone crash about four months before Chris was born.

"It's a huge weight that's being lifted off my shoulders and I'm extremely thankful," Chris said. "It's unfortunate that I meet the circumstances for the scholarship, but it's truly an incredible Foundation."

SHARING MORE THAN A NAME

On April 18, 2006, Chris' father, a United Rentals worker, was killed after a motorist struck him as he installed speed limit signs in a work zone on Interstate 465 in Indianapolis. The 33-year-old died later that day.

He left behind his wife, Kristin, who was five months pregnant with Chris, and two daughters—Cameron, a kindergartner, and Katie, 3.

When Chris was born in August 2006, his mother named him after her late husband.

"I get told that I'm just like him in my mannerisms, how I speak. My mom always points out just how weird it is that I never knew him and yet I act just like him sometimes," said Chris, noting his mother said he also gets his intellect, sense of humor and love of sports from his father. "I just hear these stories and all I can do is miss him. Even though I never knew him, I can still miss him."

In 2008, the family moved from Indianapolis to Cleveland, Tenn., to be closer to Kristin Hutt's parents.

"My mom did a great job of raising all three of us," Chris said. "We also grew up very closely with our grandparents, and my grandfather, Gerald O'Dell, he sort of filled in as my father figure in my dad's absence."

The Hutt children excelled academically. Chris, who is pursuing a degree in environmental science, especially loved his science and chemistry classes in high school. He also was active in the marching band.

He was a seventh grader when Cameron, who would receive four ATSS Foundation scholarships, started attending UT, about 70 miles from the family home. The communications major graduated in 2022 and began her work life as a recruiter in St. Louis. She later joined a defense technology start-up in Atlanta before relocating to the San Francisco area in May 2025. She now manages the company's human resources functions.

Katie, who received a Foundation scholarship throughout her 5-year architecture program, is now headed to graduate school. She received another Roadway Worker Memorial Scholarship and the Chuck Bailey Memorial Scholarship for her master's degree studies.

When Chris was battling cancer, she was in Tokyo taking part in a three-month Study Abroad program. She said the distance made it difficult to process her brother's situation.

"Connection with our relatives became the anchor to navigate the fear and stress surrounding his diagnosis," Katie said.

'ONE OF THE WORST THINGS YOU CAN HEAR'

Chris' symptoms started toward the end of his junior year of high school with constant itching of his limbs, weight loss, night sweats and fatigue.

"It was literally like my life was being zapped from my body," Chris said. "It was a nightmare because we had no idea what it was."

Chris was eventually referred to an oncologist, and on June 4, 2024—after a biopsy of one of his lymph nodes—he learned he had Hodgkin's Lymphoma and it had spread to his lungs.

"I was with my mom when we got the phone call. She was crying, of course, because no one wants to hear that their son has cancer. That's just one of the worst things you can hear," Chris recounted. "But I knew that I couldn't just give up."

His treatments meant five weeklong hospital stays throughout summer and early fall.

"It really is exhausting staying in a hospital, especially when you're getting these powerful drugs ... and you know it's killing everything inside you. It really takes its toll," Chris said. "But I still knew I had to keep my head up and I had to keep a positive attitude, so that's what I did.

"Over time, I felt my body get better and I felt my mind get better, but there were some dark times. And those dark times went away, just because I had a great support system and I was good to myself."

He waited a while before sharing the news with his friends, but when he did, they rallied around him.

"In July, me and four of my closest friends, we shaved our heads together and it was a really touching moment. It meant a lot to me," said Chris, adding his cancer battle also brought his family even closer. "It really just reminded me how much I'm loved and cared for."

A FOUNDATION OF SUPPORT

For Chris, beating cancer has become the proudest accomplishment of his young life.

"It reminded me that I should never take anything for granted, including my health, including those I have around me," he said. "And my mom said I was her hero, so that meant a lot to me."

Today, his hair has grown back, he has more energy and recent medical tests have looked good.

He was happy to start his sophomore year on time and enjoyed his classes and campus life. He especially enjoyed his involvement with UTAGS, the university's association for geographers and sustainability advocates.

He and Katie saw each other often this academic year, which recently ended.

"Even something as simple as grocery shopping together feels meaningful because I know those moments aren't always guaranteed," Katie said.

Through every twist and turn, the Foundation has remained a constant for the Hutt family.

"The scholarship has helped me afford both school and studying abroad but has also given me encouragement in ways that motivate me to succeed," she said. "Beyond that, I admire the community the Foundation has built. I am grateful for the Foundation's commitment to the next generation and the larger purpose of safety within construction zones."

"It's hard to put into words just how much [the Foundation] means, not just for me, but my family," Chris said. "They've been amazing supporters of all three of the Hutt children's college careers and it's really a special Foundation. It means a lot that they care so much about my father."

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Above: Chris Hutt is joined by, from left, sister Katie, mother Kristin, and sister Cameron, in January 2025, for his bell-ringing ceremony, which signaled completion of his chemotherapy and radiation treatment.



Left: Christopher Hutt II said he's close to his grandparents, noting that maternal grandfather Gerald O'Dell stepped into the role of father figure for him in the absence of his father.