

Kessler Foundation Donor Spotlight: Kreitman Family Honors Grandson's Lesson to "ThinkFirst"

Two years ago, Josh T. escaped serious injury. His mom, Gail, always tried to instill in him the importance of safety and wearing the proper protective gear during activity. But when he and his friends were riding scooters, he didn't think to take the time to put on a helmet--not uncommon when people are focused on just having fun. Josh learned the hard way that taking the extra minute to be safe can be the difference between life and death, or serious injury. He fell off the scooter.

Luckily, he escaped with a concussion and was back to himself in a few days. Once his family knew he would be fine, his grandpa had to make sure he wouldn't forget the lessons he learned from his accident. They talked for hours about the importance of "thinking first" and the dangers of risky behavior. "My father had a long conversation with my son about how taking thirty seconds to think before you do something is really important," Gail recalled. "It's important to take the time to think first. Sometimes, there is no second chance."



Josh treasured these talks with his grandpa, Jack Kreitman, a man who had so much wisdom and strength as to survive the holocaust. A year later, however, Jack had a mini-stroke as a result of a previous medical condition. Despite a very positive stay at Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation to regain some of his function, his health deteriorated. Sadly, he passed away last year.

Despite the family's sadness, they wanted to do something to commemorate his spirit. Josh remembered their talks and wanted to find a program that teaches young people helmet safety and to "think first" before engaging in activity to avoid injury. Unbeknownst to them prior to their search, the Kreitman family found [Kessler Foundation's ThinkFirst program](#).

For 19 years, ThinkFirst has traveled to schools and camps around NJ educating students K-12 about the importance of safety, simple lifestyle practices to adopt to avoid spinal cord and [brain injury](#), and the consequences of engaging in risky behavior—including death or lifelong disability. Voices for Injury Prevention (VIPs)—individuals living with [spinal cord injuries](#)—tell their stories of how they were injured, how their accidents could have been avoided, and the challenges of living with a permanent disability. This community injury prevention program has reached more than 200,000 students.

In 2009, however, [ThinkFirst](#) didn't have enough funds to continue the program in the summer. Thanks to the Kreitman family's donation in memory of Jack, the program was restored this summer.

“We went to see and experience firsthand a ThinkFirst program,” Gail explained. “We got involved with the summer program because we learned how many spinal cord injuries happen in the summer through diving. We saw the videos and the power of the people and how they sustain the injury, they wish they had that decision time back, and we saw the responses of the kids. Their attention was so wrapped on the monitor listening to them and what unbelievable advocates they were for changing behavior.”



Approximately 800 more students in NJ camps and summer school programs learned to “ThinkFirst” before diving into shallow water, driving without a seatbelt, or deciding not to wear a helmet.

Josh and Gail look forward to furthering their involvement with [ThinkFirst](#) and [Kessler Foundation](#). On October 16, they attended [Kessler Foundation’s 10th Annual Stroll ‘N Roll](#) to advance rehabilitation research, employment opportunities, and community programs for people with disabilities.

In addition to excelling in school, Josh also volunteers at a hospital for children with long-term illness or disability. While this 16 year old doesn’t know what the future holds, he is sure that he wants a career where he can help others. His grandfather’s influence lives in him.

“Josh now tells all of his friends, ‘You have to wear a helmet,’ or ‘No, don’t do that because you don’t realize what could happen if you do. You have to really think,’” Gail proudly said of her son. “So many things happen that are beyond our control so if anything is in our control, we have to take advantage of that.”

Jack’s memory, strength, and wisdom will always remain with his family and the people they touch. Through their generosity, lives will be saved from lifelong disability as more students learn Jack’s valuable lesson to “think first.”

“My goal is to continue to support ThinkFirst, not just for one year, but to continuously support it because it is so critical to raise awareness,” said Gail. “If we can affect one person to make a different decision that helps them out in life, I will feel that my father’s memory is very, very well-served.”

On behalf of Kessler Foundation and all of those reached, thank you, Kreitman family.
And thank you to their friends who generously donated in Jack's memory.

To contribute to the Jack Kreitman fund or to help us write a new story

