

Editor [Patrick Ball](#): Heard some news you want us to check out? Let me know: Patrick.Ball@patch.com[Home](#)[News](#)[Events](#)[Places](#)[Marketplace](#)[Q&A](#)[Volunteer](#)Search **About Town**By [Denise J. Dubé](#) [Email the author](#) 5:45am[Opinion](#)

About Town: Remembering Jessica

Shepherd Fund keeps alive the memory of Jessica Colleen Buckley Shepherd, who died Saturday after complications from esophageal cancer.

[Print](#)**0 Comments**[Recommend](#)

11 people recommend this. Be the first of your friends.

[Email](#)[Tweet](#)[View full size](#)

*You now have new orders to protect heaven's shores.
Carry out the plan of the day.
Semper Fi. – Diana Buckley's eulogy to her daughter.*

Jessica Shephard died on Sept. 3, 2011. She was only 31, which isn't long enough for any parent, spouse, sibling or child.

Staying or leaving isn't our call, no matter how hard we fight.

According to her brother-in-law, **Raymond Santos**, who spoke on behalf of the family, Jessica was an extraordinary woman who accomplished more in her short 31 years than most could in three lifetimes.

Her obituary states she was born **Jessica Colleen Buckley**, the daughter of **Edward and Diana**, formerly of Lexington, but now of Londonderry, NH. She was a Marine who married **Staff Sgt. Brandon Shepherd** and a devoted and dedicated sister to **Danielle Santos**. In July 2010, she gave birth to **Keegan Edward Shepherd**.

Those are just facts. Looking further we learn about a woman who achieved every goal and met every challenge -- even in death.

Jessica was born in 1980, grew up in Lexington and graduated from [Lexington High School](#) in 1998. While at LHS, she played ice hockey and helped start and co-captain **the Minute Maids**, the town's first female hockey team.

She went to [Northeastern University](#) and, in 2002, graduated summa cum laude with a political science degree. After finishing college Jessica joined the [Marines](#).

"In boot camp, although she was not the biggest or strongest recruit, she managed to graduate at the top of her class as an honor grad," said Diana, in her eulogy to her daughter.

When she finished training at [Parris Island](#), she received the Marine's [Eagle Globe and Anchor](#). Raymond said she was so proud and happy she cried.

While her mother spoke of her daughter, perfectly uniformed Marines stood outside [St. Brigid](#) Catholic Church on Massachusetts Avenue, guarding her service and paying homage to a fellow Marine who served the country, with two tours in Iraq. There, she was crew chief on heavy-lift Marine helicopters.

In 2005 after Hurricane Katrina, Jessica, then a Marine Sergeant, was deployed to the Gulf Coast. In 2006, when war broke between Israel and Hezbollah, she helped evacuate United States citizens.

She and her husband, Brandon, who served in the same helicopter squadron, married in 2007.

Her mother told those who attended Wednesday's service that, "while Brandon was in Afghanistan, Jessi was determined to complete her Master's thesis. Of course, she did, and received the highest grade ever given to a master's candidate by that advisor," Diana said.

That effort earned her a degree in International Relations from Webster University.

Jessica and her sister Danielle, with only a month difference in pregnancies, carried their babies at the same time. It was a dream come true for both women and they treasured that shared gift, Raymond said. In July 2010 Jessica gave birth to Keegan.

Right after the birth, she spoke of physical problems. That's when the cancer was found. Even then she didn't complain.

"Jessica was a model of strength and self-control ... instead, she bore the pain silently," her mother said in the eulogy. "When her back was so sore she could not drive or lift her baby, Brandon asked me to stay with Jessica while he was away. Jessica continued to go to work every day."

Jessica's esophageal cancer traveled through her body, keeping her in constant agony.

"One rare day, when Jessi talked about her pain, she said it was so terrible that she found herself spending 95 percent of her time trying to control the pain and the remaining 5 percent trying not to scream at everyone because she was in so much pain," the eulogy said. "That was the only time she spoke of how horrific her pain was. A cancerous tumor had fractured her spine in two places. Doctors could not believe that Jessi suffered so long in silence."

Those who knew her believe it.

Raymond said Jessica's son Keegan is being well cared for by Jessica's parents and that he'll go home to Jacksonville where the Shepherds' lived.

Raymond also stressed that the Marine Corps family was "very very good to Jessica." As were her friends and the Brigham and Women's staff where she died.

Raymond said hospital staffers, who said they had never attended a patient's wake, came to Jessica's.

"The last 36 hours of her life, dozens and dozens of friends and family came to visit her," Raymond said. "Jessica condition was dire at that point. Friends and family poured in from all over the world."

Her family, friends and Marines made a difference from the start and stayed until the end.

When she needed to get from Jacksonville to Boston hospitals, the Marines, friends and family helped – and were inspirational to her and them.

When she arrived in Boston, Gunnery Sgt. Jonathan Braca helped coordinate Marine and veterans services and with government paperwork.

"The Semper Fi fund, which helps Wounded Warrior ... has been great to Jessica and the Jessica Shepherd Fund," Raymond said.

The money raised is paying Jessica's hospital bills, but whatever is left – and raised – will help others.

"When Jessica got sick, her good deeds were repaid by a generous donor who provided Jessica with a medical flight so she could come home to Boston," her mother told mourners Wednesday. "Jessica was so inspired by this generosity, that she asked that the [Jessica Shepherd Fund](#) be used to pay this good deed forward to other cancer patients in need. Even at her sickest, Jessica wanted to help. She decided that part of her fund money should be donated to support research in Esophageal Cancer so others would not suffer like she and her family had."

The family and the Marines are mourning the loss of Jessica. Yesterday, Danielle and a friend visited Castle Island, one of Jessica's favorite places – a destination she wanted to visit one last time. That didn't happen, so Danielle went for her.

Life will go on – and the family will continue grieving. But the family has plans, Raymond said, that will keep Jessica's memory alive.

First they will continue raising money for the to Jessica Shepherd Fund to help others with cancer.

"Dozens and dozens of people sent photos of Jessica from the time she was born to a few years ago," Raymond said. The family is assembling videos so that Keegan will know his mother.

They are also keeping letters and notes.

"We're asking friends and family to write a letter to Keegan telling stories about Jessica."

It's the family's hope that those pictures and messages will give him comfort and knowledge of his mother.

"Jessica," her mother said Wednesday, "was the master of never giving up. Even when her tenacious doctors could no longer offer hope, Jessi remained resolute in her plan to fight her cancer. Even on the day before her death, Jessi was trying to make a plan to beat back the beast. She inspired us to keep on fighting and continues to inspire us to live in this new world without her."

Jessica didn't give up. She just had other orders.

Related Topics: [About Town](#), [Cancer](#), [Jessica Shepherd](#), [Jessica Shepherd Fund](#), [Lexington High School](#), and [Wounded Warriors Project](#)

Interested in a follow-up to this article?

11 people recommend this. Be the first of your friends.

[Follow this article](#)

[Submit a tip](#)

[Add photos & video](#)

[0 Comments](#)

Other About Town Articles



[About Town: Notes from the Library](#)

By [Denise J. Dubé](#)



[About Town: 'Lexington is Not an Island'](#)

By [Denise J. Dubé](#)



[About Town: 7th Annual Tomato Festival](#)

By [Denise J. Dubé](#)



[About Town: Officer Delivers Own Baby](#)

By [Denise J. Dubé](#)



[About Town: Laboring Day](#)

By [Denise J. Dubé](#)

[See all About Town articles](#)

Leave a comment

Submit >

What are the common causes of shoulder pain?

Click here to take our quiz at bidmc.org/healthysis

 **Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center**
Official Hospital of the Boston Red Sox 

Running for office?
Get the word out.

[Advertise Here](#)

 **Patch**



iContact



Change the way you do business. **Start for FREE!**

FREE 30 Day Trial ↻

Advertise

Advertise on Patch and reach potential customers in your backyard and beyond. Click here for more information.

[Learn more »](#)

Volunteer

If you want to help local causes, or your cause needs local help, your next click should be right here.

[Learn more »](#)

Contribute

- [Send us news tips](#)
- [Put an event on the calendar](#)
- [Announce something to everyone](#)

Patch Info

- [About Us](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Terms of Use](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)

Get in Touch

- [Help](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Patch Blog](#)

Patch Initiatives

- [PatchU](#)
- [Patch.org](#)

Goodies

- [Newsletters](#)
- [Widgets](#)



Copyright © 2011 Patch. All Rights Reserved.