



Loss to Legacy

About the Perry J. Cohen Foundation

Written by Susana Baker



TRAGEDY STRUCK HOME for Pamela Cohen and her husband, Nick Korniloff, in the summer of 2015 with news that every parent fears the most when they were told that their son Perry was lost at sea. On July 24, 2015, 14-year-old, Perry and his good friend Austin Stephanos were last seen aboard a 19-foot boat doing what they loved most, being out on the water, fishing and looking for marine life.

The United States Coast Guard (USCG) conducted one of the largest search and rescue missions (SAR) in recent history to find the boys. Two Days into the SAR Austins vessel was found capsized, and sadly neither boy was with the boat. The USCG suspended their SAR after eight days, covering 55,000 square feet of nautical miles with every air and sea asset available. For Pamela and Nick, the search for their son was not close to being finished. With the support of both families and private funds donated by friends, the Art World and the public from around the globe the parent's steadfast determination to find their children continued.

Their search and rescue efforts eventually ceased without the ending they had so desperately hoped for and life as they knew it, changed forever. Perry was not just any ordinary child, say his parents. He was extraordinary, with an infectious laugh, a passion for marine life, animals and most of all the special relationship he shared with his family. Pamela and Nick could have chosen to grieve in isolation, and as a family privately mourn their unimaginable loss. Instead they united in strength and in the eternal presence of their son's love and chose to honor and celebrate his life by establishing the non-profit 501©(3) Perry J. Cohen Foundation (PJCF) to carry out Perry's legacy and support what he was most passionate about.

In a private, exclusive interview with Pamela Cohen, I asked several questions about the Perry J. Cohen Foundation (PJCF), its mission and vision. The answers Pamela provided for this interview gave me such inspiration and admiration, showing how much a mother can love and how a family can move forward through the acts of kindness and programs the PJCF provides. Pamela Cohen lives her life without Perry's physical presence, but his spirit and love are felt through the works and educational programs that touch so many children and families, with a mission to save children from disasters similar to that which befell her son.

When did you decide to honor your son's legacy with charitable endeavors?

Since Perry's disappearance, it has been the love and support of our family, friends, and community that has sustained us. In our hearts, we have remained steadfast in our belief that Perry was meant to change the world. Far from selfless, it is what keeps our spirit afloat and has truly given us the will to press forward. In our most difficult hours, the Foundation has been a rock that has provided purpose, direction,

and meaning. We have worked tirelessly to honor Perry by having the foundation's core pillars represent what he was most passionate about. We are simply taking this horrendous mess we were dealt and making a positive message that will hopefully educate and provide experiences and access to people about the things Perry loved most. We also want to make sure that others learn from Perry's story at many levels and save lives.

What were the challenges you've had to overcome?

Perry was larger than and filled with life. He was a very happy teenager who was very loving, caring and funny. He had many interests and was in tune with the world on a real-time basis, but he also had an old soul. His not being here with us physically on a daily basis continues to be debilitating at times. As his mother, I have had to develop a new relationship with my child and figure out what my world is without his physical presence.

What are the highlights of the foundation?

We established the foundation to carry on Perry's legacy and reflect his passions in life: The ARTS; Environmental, Marine & Wildlife Education and Preservation; Teenage Entrepreneurship; and Boating Safety Education.

Through the Perry J. Cohen Foundation, we hope to facilitate a connection between our youth and the community in which they live. At night, we close our eyes hoping that our day's work has further preserved the legacy of our son, Perry, by educating the public and financially supporting and advancing the issues he cared about so deeply.

What programs do PJCF currently provide?

To date, Phase 1 of the Perry J. Cohen Wetlands Laboratory at his hometown high school has begun. Throughout its 40 year lifespan, this laboratory and outdoor classroom will educate tens of thousands of students and



Perry was accepted into and was to start this program, two weeks after he went missing at sea. Our community is very much involved in the fundraising project and on Dec. 4th, world renowned graphic designer and street artist Shepard Fairey (he created the PJCF Portrait Logo) will be painting a 10'x 30' outdoor mural on the classroom wall featuring elements of the environment and Perrys' portrait. The project has been uplifted by received grants from The Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, The Miami Dolphins Foundation, and Art Miami. We have additionally established the Perry J. Cohen Endowed Scholarship in Marine Science at the Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science at the University of Miami, offering continued education for talented and devoted students. The Foundation has put more than 80 underprivileged children through Environmental Studies Camp and Sailing School as well as putting over 650 students through Boating Safety Courses since Perry's disappearance.

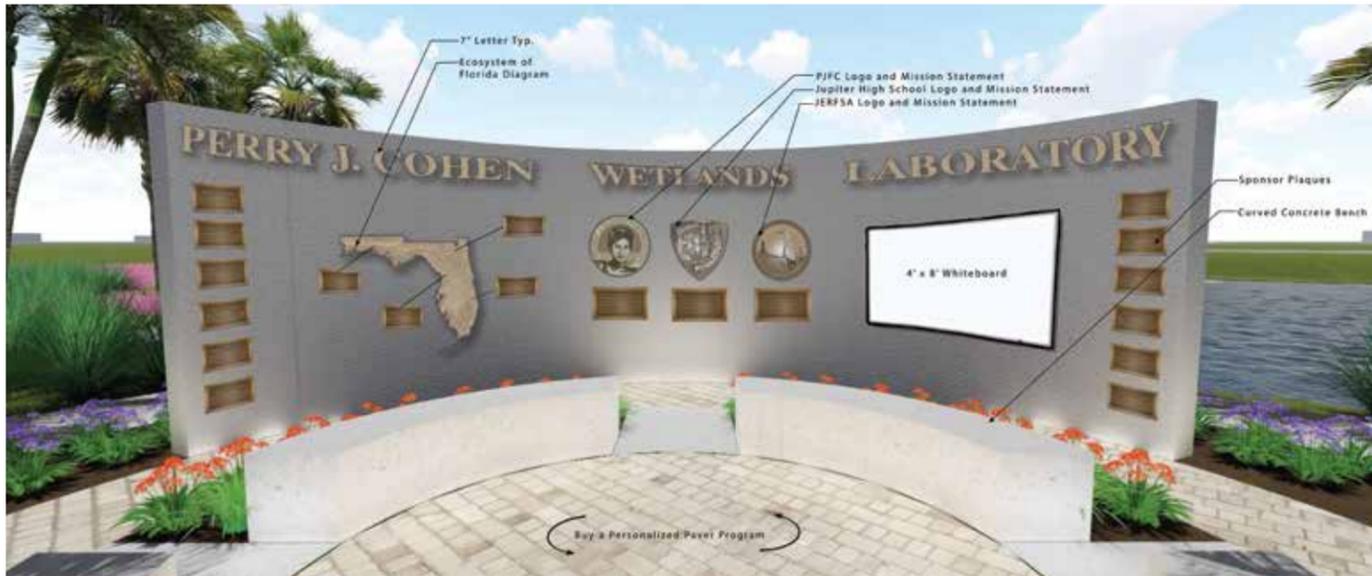
I understand that one of the pillars of the foundation is the Arts. What art programs and events will contribute to the awareness and donations to PJCF?

Perry loved doing arts and crafts by himself or with his sisters in his spare time. We have countless doodles and drawings of his passion of fishing and boating. He also loved coming to the art fairs that my husband owns, which I have worked with since he was a little boy. Since his disappearance, we have worked with numerous visual artists to promote the foundation with proceeds of their work benefiting the foundation. The foundation has provided grants to the Dreyfoos School of the Arts and this spring will fund the first chapter of Little Kids Rock (LKR) in Palm Beach County. We have worked with well-known visual and multi-talented artists like Udo Noger, Sipros, Shepard Fairey, ABH, Bernie Taupin, Kevin O'Leary, and Jason Newsted. Our next art driven event is

become a template for dozens of other high schools to educate students on the environment. The wetlands will feature plant life from the five eco systems and is supported and backed by an AICE Curriculum and academy that has been in place for 15 years.



Rendering provided by WGI - Land Design Services Division, Austin Scott West Palm Beach. Mural art work by Artist Shepard Fairey (not actual size).



Newsted Immersive retrospective exhibition entitled "RAWK" that celebrates the 40th anniversary at the Cultural Council of Palm Beach (CCPB) with 50% of the proceeds of his paintings, drawings, collages & sculptures benefiting the PJCF, LKR and The CCPB.

What are the PJCF Champions?

PJCF Champions come from all different backgrounds. They all remarkably have some deep connection to subjects or activities that Perry really liked or enjoyed. For example Perry loved aviation and one of our champions is a young man by the name Isaiah Cooper age 17 from Compton, California, who is the youngest African American to pilot an airplane across the United States.



All Champions are familiar with Perry's story and the initiatives of the foundation and have uplifted our family by personal interaction, activation, their talent and their sincere sentiment for us to succeed and create an

important legacy, purpose and message for our son. Our first PJCF Champion was Joe Namath, our neighbor and dear friend. He was the first person outside of our immediate family to contact us and ask how he could help in the search for Perry and his dear friend the morning after they went missing. A champion is someone that helps his fellow man. Joe is a true champion first and foremost as a selfless caring human, parent, grandfather and neighbor, and secondly he won the Jets only super bowl . A champion is really an individual who has succeeded down his own path with originality and more positive impact than negative during their journey. They are also not perfect. Perry was his own individual and had his own style and

flair – a champion is open to others' thoughts and creativity and has respect, tolerance and patience for others and their beliefs, but they remain uniquely individual.

Our second was Kevin O'Leary from Shark Tank who we basically met head on at our Art Miami Fair. He embraced our son's legacy and helped us create the initiative for teenage entrepreneurship. Coincidentally Perry was a huge Shark Tank fan and was a huge fan of Kevin and Mark Cuban. Mr. Wonderful and his wife are very special to our family, Kevin is an accomplished photographer and we have had multiple exhibitions featuring his work in which he has donated 100% of the proceeds to the PJCF.

Then there is Jon Bon Jovi who came to visit our Art Miami Show on its last day, last December when my husband Nick and I were exhausted and very depressed. We received a call that he wanted to come and see the show. We were so down that the first thing we thought of was how much time we spent together with Perry and his sisters playing rock bands on the Wii to the Bon Jovi song "Dead or Alive." You see when you lose a child it all becomes difficult, everything is a memory or a reflection and Nick and I were big Bon Jovi fans. Nick took Jon and his wife Dorothea on a tour of the show for a few hours and I followed along. Something interesting happened during their visit. Nick, who has always been very reserved, noticed what artwork was appealing to the couple. He opened up about Perry and the foundation as many people were stopping to say hello to them and were asking how Nick and I were doing. It's very difficult to be in the public spotlight professionally and then have your personal tragedy known by everyone as well. Nick and I never had that in our lives. Perry's disappearance created a whole new spectrum of exposure that we were not used to. We used to be as public as possible for our business, but ten times more private personally. Jon and his wife were very



gracious to Nick and me, and also took the time to visit the foundation stand at the show and lend their support in multiple ways since. The most interesting and valuable takeaway was the positive energy that transferred from the encounter. Nick realized that all the artwork that they looked at together during their tour was colorful, bright, high quality, not decorative or dark, and had really positive energy. When Nick inquired that he noticed this and asked why, Bon Jovi's answer was very simple. "The world has a lot tragedy and darkness and I try to look and spend time around things that make me happy and feel positive." Jon and Dorothea are two of the most caring individuals when it comes to others and the couples positive energy

& philanthropy towards those who are less fortunate or in need is very admirable and something we hope to mirror and learn from. They are helping those that see darkness and tragedy on a regular basis.

As simple as that was, it helped us. We were in our darkest hours then and truly believe that all these encounters we mentioned and many more were gifts from Perry. Ever since, we have tried to adopt the same philosophy and surround ourselves with what makes us most happy and positive, and try to take this life altering tragedy and make an important message in honor of our son and to help others. □

Pamela Cohen and Nick Korniloff are the power-couple, husband-wife team behind Art Miami, Palm Beach Modern + Contemporary Fair, Art New York, Context, to name a few of their national fairs which bring hundreds of thousands of attendees to these shows. They are known by artists, dealers and collectors for running some of the country's most popular art festivals and breaking attendance and records in sales, year after year. They take shared pride in their continuous efforts and long hours to present the most amazing art fairs, uniting the art communities, but undoubtedly Pamela Cohen and Nick Korniloff's greatest accomplishment is the parents of their daughters Miranda and Renni and of Perry J. Cohen - knowing him, loving him and keeping his legacy alive.

To learn more or to donate visit www.pjcf.org

About the author: Susana Baker is an award-winning Tourator (historian tour guide/art curator). Creative Founder of The Art Experience, the number one company in South Florida to privately curate group or individuals through Miami's Art Districts. For more information visit: www.theartexperiences.com or for Art Basel go to www.artbaseltours.com or call 305-767-5000.