

Gwenlyn Gregory Matthews Mother of three

**SELF
 PORTRAIT**

Date and place of birth: Dec. 9, 1965, Siloam Springs
My favorite place in my house is the kitchen, where the whole family gathers.
My favorite place in the world is home.
My greatest strength is my faith in God.
My greatest weakness is being impatient.
My prized possession is my cross necklace that Terry had made for me after Beau passed.
I want my children to remember that I love them more than anything.
The book I've been recommending lately is *Open* by Andre Agassi.
My favorite piece of artwork is my children's preschool hand prints.
My all-time favorite movie is *Pretty Woman* — I love a fairy tale.
My worst habit is procrastinating.
My best asset is my husband.
My husband wishes I would organize our office and clean out the junk drawers in the kitchen.
How would you most like to be remembered? As a person with a compassionate heart for others.
If I had more time I'd golf.
If you could change one thing about my past it would be: Nothing. My past has gotten me to where I am today.
Most recent achievement: The success of the Beau Foundation
One word to sum me up: Happy



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/JASON IVESTER

"I feel that talking and listening to their fears is my talent. I try to be positive and let them know you do get through it. Most people want to talk to someone. ... Everybody looks for hope."

ROGERS — Gwen Matthews devotes most of her time to her three children. She volunteers at her daughters' school several days a week, and her afternoons and evenings are filled with overseeing homework, running to and from practices and listening to Brooke and Brittany's stories from school.

"She is the ultimate mother," praises Dr. Scott Bailey, an obstetrician and close friend of the family. "As tirelessly as she has worked for Beau, she works that tirelessly for those two girls."

Beau, her third child, is with her in spirit as she calls on corporations to ask for donations and sponsorships, acquaintances for support and friends for time. His legacy touches the lives of expectant mothers who otherwise would not have been able to afford prenatal care.

His namesake is the Beau Foundation, which helps fund prenatal care for uninsured and low-income mothers in the region. Without prenatal care, babies run a much higher risk for health problems and pre-term delivery.

**LEIGH NELMS
 ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE**

Gwen had prenatal care during her pregnancy, and Beau was diagnosed with a fatal birth defect. There was nothing to be done for him, but because so many other fetal maladies can be corrected or avoided with early medical care, she and her husband, Terry, devote their energy to turning their tragedy into a triumph for nearly 2,000 babies born in Northwest Arkansas every year.

ONE OF MR. HUNT'S FAVORITES

Gwen Gregory grew up in Decatur, where she learned the value of working hard from her parents. Her father, Hank, was a construction worker and professional boxer. Her mother, Glenna, stayed home with Gwen and her younger brother Eric until Hank's fall off a ladder left him disabled and unable to return to either job. After that, Glenna supported the family with her job at the Peterson Farms processing plant.

Gwen began working in high school, first at the Peterson Farms plant and then at Decatur Discount

Center, a general store.

After graduating from Decatur High School in 1984, she went to Arkansas Tech University at Russellville for a year, then transferred to the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. That was when she applied for a job at J.B. Hunt Transport.

It took some convincing for Bryan Hunt, then director of personnel, to hire her.

"He didn't want to hire me," Gwen recalls with a laugh. "He said, 'She is so young.'"

Gwen set goals and moved up through the ranks in the growing company. She held numerous positions, from switchboard operator to regional marketing manager.

"She was a hit with the customers," says Tom Williams, a senior vice president at J.B. Hunt. "She was always happy and smiling and saw the silver lining in everything. She was a great influence on everyone around her."

Gwen's work ethic gained the attention of the company's founder, the late Johnnie Bryan Hunt.

"She became one of Mr. Hunt's favorites," Williams says. See **MATTHEWS**, Page 2D

SPOTLIGHT CHRIS CROSE

Boys and Girls Club is family event for leader

**LEIGH NELMS
 ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE**

GRAVETTE — Growing up in the small town of Gravette, Chris Crose couldn't get out of line or people around town would tell his parents. Now "Mr. Chris" is one of those adults who is making sure Gravette kids stay on the right path.

A 1991 graduate of Gravette High School, Crose started out as a volunteer at the Gravette unit of the Boys and Girls Club of Western Benton County in 2003, when his two oldest sons, Devin and Chris, became members.

"If you're not part of the solution, you are part of the problem," Crose says, throwing out one of the inspirational quotes with which he generously peppers conversations.

In 2005, Crose was hired as di-

rector of the unit, which is half of the Boys and Girls Club of Western Benton County. The other is in Siloam Springs.

The two units share a corporate board and fundraising, but each has its own board of leaders from the community. The club in Gravette offers a daily after-school program, a full-day summer program and seasonal team sports for younger children.

Crose is always offering spirited encouragement to the kids.

"Communication is what they want. They want to feel important," Crose says. "That is what I do here ... make a kid feel important and show him that he can have fun doing the right things."

"Chris really develops a strong relationship with those kids. His dedication is amazing," says Chris Shimer, executive director for the



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/RYAN McGEENEY

Chris Crose is director of the Gravette unit of the Boys and Girls Club of Western Benton County. Crose, a 1991 Gravette High School graduate, began volunteering at the club in 2003.

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Their son's death was impetus for three clinics

• MATTHEWS, from 1D

says. "He would come by her desk and ask how things were going with the company. He used her as sort of a barometer for how the company was doing."

Johnelle Hunt recalls her late husband's matchmaking efforts.

"[J.B.] tried to get Gwen married to every young man he met," Hunt recalls. "He teased her all the time about that."

J.B. would often encourage Gwen to date Terry Matthews, who was vice president of the company's international division.

Over the years, other friends tried to set the couple up on a date. After five years of prodding, Terry invited Gwen on a group canoe trip on the Buffalo River.

Gwen accepted, and soon they were dating.

And dating. And dating. "I thought, 'This guy is never going to ask me to marry him,'" Gwen says.

He finally did, and the two were married on Aug. 21, 1997.

BEAU ALEXANDER

On Aug. 21, 1998, the Matthews brought Brooke home from the hospital. After 13 years with J.B. Hunt, Gwen quit her job to stay home and care for their newborn.

"Looking back on that, it was the best thing and I am so glad I did, but it was actually kind of hard," Gwen says. "I felt like I had lost my identity. I got married, quit my job, and had a baby."

"For about a year I kept asking myself, 'Who am I? What am I doing?'"

In 2001, Brittany was born.

"I started thinking that I was probably not going to have any more kids," Gwen says. "I kept praying and asking God, 'What is my purpose in life? Give me some direction.'"

She found out she was pregnant again in the fall of 2002.

At 16 weeks, the doctor suggested she have an alpha-fetoprotein test because she was over 35 and her pregnancy was considered high risk. The test screens for chromosomal abnormalities and spinal defects.

The results of the test showed elevated levels of the protein, indicating the baby might have a birth defect called trisomy 18.

Trisomy 18 is a chromosomal defect causing serious medical and developmental problems. Many babies with trisomy 18 are stillborn; others may live only hours.

The doctor scheduled an ultrasound a few days later, and the couple got their first peek at their baby boy. The doctor didn't see telltale signs of trisomy 18, such as malformations of the head, hands and feet.

"I will never forget, just a few days before [the ultrasound] we were trying to come up with names, and Brittany said, 'Let's name him Beau,'" Terry recalled.

Still concerned about the blood test, the doctor ordered a level 2 ultrasound that would provide a more detailed view of the fetus. This time they saw a hole in his heart. After a trip to Little Rock's University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences and days of waiting, tests confirmed that it was trisomy 18.

"They told us he probably wouldn't make it through delivery," Gwen says.

Genetic counselors told her that she had the option to terminate the pregnancy, but she never considered it. "That whole time I prayed for a miracle, that the baby would be OK and we would get to keep him. And I was praying for courage and strength to get through this," Gwen recalls.

She was also concerned about her daughters and the effect his death would have on them. She was especially concerned that he could be born on Brooke's birthday. His due date was Sept. 8.

"I prayed, 'Please don't let him be born on her birthday,'" Gwen says.

In the early morning of Aug. 21, 2003, Gwen's water broke.

She recalls a flurry of nurses and doctors doing everything they could to make it as easy on her as possible.

Because they had been told that if Beau did make



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/JASON IVESTER

"It has been wonderful. It has been very healing. When I saw that [first] clinic open I said, 'Wow, that is why we had to go through all that.'"

it through delivery he might live only minutes, Terry had gotten permission from their priest to baptize Beau as he was being delivered. He sprinkled the baby's head with holy water Terry's parents had brought from Lourdes, France.

Beau had a heartbeat but wasn't breathing.

The medical team massaged his little body in an effort to get him to breathe. The minutes were ticking by and Gwen remembers hearing a doctor say, "One more minute and we are going to stop."

"All of the sudden I heard everyone gasp. He took his first breath and I heard his faint little cry. I said, 'Let me hold him!'" Gwen says.

They handed over the 3-pound, 11-ounce bundle.

The Matthews' daughters were brought to the hospital, where 5-year-old Brooke said, "Oh, he's my birthday present!"

"Another prayer I kept praying was, 'God, just let me hold him and hand him to you,'" Gwen recalls. "I know we can't keep him, but just let me hold him."

She got to hold him for 11 days. He passed away peacefully in Gwen's arms with her soft voice telling him, "Beau, you do what you have to do. Momma loves you."

MAKING BIG PLANS

Even before Beau's birth, Gwen and Terry were thinking of ways to honor his memory.

Once he passed away, they started asking what they could donate to the neonatal intensive care unit at Northwest Medical Center in Springdale where Beau had been transferred after delivery. The staff

had given the family a room where Gwen could stay with Beau around the clock. They thought they would donate a fetal heart monitor or ultrasound machine to the neonatal intensive care unit.

"Dr. Bailey said, 'We don't need another machine. We need to get these women in to the doctor during their pregnancy,'" Gwen says.

Bailey was referring to the region's uninsured and underinsured women. At the time, in Northwest Arkansas, one in five pregnant women would deliver without having seen a doctor.

Terry spoke to members of the board of the Northwest Arkansas Community Foundation in Springdale, an organization that provides guidance for individuals and corporations who want to create charitable foundations. They told him that prenatal care was one of the biggest needs in the community.

That was all Terry needed to be off and running. Just weeks after Beau's death, the Beau Foundation was born.

Terry wanted to establish the foundation and have a charity golf tournament within seven months.

"I thought he and Dr. Bailey were crazy," Gwen says. "But he needed that. I am certain I wouldn't have done it without him. I don't think I would have been that organized and that driven."

"When men grieve, they want to go do something, create something. Women are more internal and emotional," Terry explains. "I wanted to take all the emotional energy I had and turn into a positive."

With the help of a tireless team, the couple pulled off their first golf tournament

at Pinnacle Country Club in Rogers in July 2004 and raised nearly \$100,000, less than a year after Beau was born.

In March 2005, Prenatal Pathways opened at St. Francis House in Springdale with the seed money raised by the foundation, said director Kathy Grisham. Since then, two more Prenatal Pathways clinics have opened, one in Rogers and the other in Siloam Springs, funded partly by the Beau Foundation and federal grants.

The clinics saw 1,758 pregnant women in 2009.

"It is easy for a baby born early or with problems to quickly become a million-dollar baby with the cost of the health care needed. Good prenatal care removes the likelihood that will be necessary," Grisham says.

When a woman comes into the clinic, she's given tests designed to detect early anomalies in the pregnancy. If a problem is detected, she's immediately assigned to an obstetrician. If everything is going well, the woman sees a nurse practitioner until her 28th week, and then she's assigned a physician to see her through to delivery.

Expectant mothers who come to the clinic are given a year's supply of prenatal vitamins, which are provided through funds from the Beau Foundation.

Prenatal care decreases the risk of early delivery, retardation and infant death, Bailey says. It is important to catch problems early in pregnancy, so that they can be treated if there is treatment available.

In July, the golf tournament and luncheon hosted by the Beau Foundation raised \$115,000 for the three Prenatal

Pathways clinics.

"It has been wonderful. It has been very healing," Gwen says. "When I saw that [first] clinic open I said, 'Wow, that is why we had to go through all that.'"

"She is always so positive," says friend Kelly Brain. However, she has witnessed times when Gwen's smile has faded as she remembers milestones.

"She has said, 'Instead of planning a golf tournament I should be planning a birthday party [for Beau]," Brain recalls.

"Everybody goes through down times," Gwen says. "None of us get a free pass to a rosy, beautiful life. There will be obstacles. It is how you react and how you pick yourself up during those down times that makes you either a better person or takes you the other way."

Gwen is often contacted by friends and family members with loved ones who have received the devastating news that their baby has trisomy 18. They ask Gwen to talk with the parents about her experience.

"I feel that talking and listening to their fears is my talent," Gwen says. "I try to be positive and let them know you do get through it. Most people want to talk to someone. ... Everybody looks for hope."

"She has a certain gift for consoling, an uncanny ability to be able to touch people," Terry says. "She is the most approachable person you will ever meet." Most of them are reassured by her advice and support, but there have been a few who are "bitter and mad at God," she says.

Pam and Chris Raben of

Rogers found out their baby had the disorder when Pam was only 14 weeks pregnant.

"The thing I remember most about Gwen was her smile. She just radiated happiness. I thought, 'How can someone be like this when they have lost a child?'" Pam says. "Then she told me that having Beau and going through it all was the greatest blessing of their lives and I thought that was the craziest thing I had ever heard."

"I brought me to a whole new place spiritually. I don't take little things for granted any more," Gwen says. "If my kids are driving me crazy — and they do — I take a step back and say to myself, 'This is a good thing.'"

Raben's son Jacob passed away in utero just after Beau's birthday in August 2007. He is buried next to Beau.

"I really leaned on her during that time, and we still get together for lunch to talk about our boys," Pam says. "One of the biggest blessings out of this is my friendship with Gwen and the greatest thing I got from her was the attitude that everything is going to be OK."

After Jacob's passing, Pam asked Gwen if there was ever a day that she didn't think of Beau, hoping that she would tell her yes, the constant thoughts of her son would subside. Gwen told her, "No, I think of him every single day. But it makes me happy to think of him."

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Cröse

• Continued from Page 1D
get excited about seeing new faces, and he gets satisfaction knowing the kids are exposed to many role models.

When the kids come in after school, they spend up to an hour in the learning center doing their homework. Then they can turn their attention to recreation, shooting pool, boxing, taking guitar lessons or playing the popular game *Minute to Win It*.

Younger kids can join the flag football team that kicks off just after the school year begins. Later in the year, they can sign up for basketball.

Older kids can join the Keystone and Torch clubs, giving them a chance to learn leadership skills and community involvement. The clubs elect officers and come up with ways they can help others, like having food and toy drives.

"We keep the positive flowing," Cröse says. "We let



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/RYAN McGEENEY

Chris Cröse of Gravette directs children at the Gravette Civic Center, home of the local Boys and Girls Club. On a typical day, 130 children ages 6-18 can be found there after school.

them talk about [what is going on in their lives] and help them through any struggles they might be having."

Cröse is encouraged by the progress he sees in the kids, whether it's raising their grades or showing respect to others.

Most of the students' parents have given permission

for the schools to release grades to Cröse, so he is able to track who needs tutors, who are regularly available at the club.

"Honor roll is a big deal to me. But if a C is the best you can do, then let's get the best C we can get," Cröse says.

A Student of the Month award goes to the child who

shows the most effort in improving their grades and attitude. The Student of the Year is named during the annual banquet at the end of the school year.

Working at the Boys and Girls Club has turned into a family affair for Cröse.

His mother, Rose Cröse, greets the children as they enter the club every day. "Ms. Tina," Cröse's wife, won a presidential volunteer service award two years in a row for putting in more than 1,000 hours at the Gravette unit. Sons Devin and Chris help out at the club daily, pitching in as needed.

"I know this is what I was meant to do," Cröse says. "I do this because I love doing it and I love the kids. I think of them as my own, and you take care of your own."

For more information on the Boys and Girls Club of Western Benton County, call the Siloam Springs unit at (479) 524-4174 or the Gravette unit at (479) 787-6524.