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# MIZZOU

## Oh, the Places Parker Goes

Mizzou alumnus starts worldwide project to support family member with cancer.



Mizzou alumnus Tracey Outlaw, right, started the Flat Parker Project to support his cousin's son Parker, who was diagnosed with leukemia at age 4.

*Story by Kelsey Allen*

*Photos courtesy of Tracey Outlaw*

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**T**racey Outlaw, BS, BJ '92, has always been one to go to the extreme. At Mizzou, he was extremely busy studying science and agricultural journalism, advertising and Japanese; drawing the Pledge Buller cartoon for *The Maneater*, for which he won the National College Newspaper Association's Best College Comic Strip award; representing Sigma Phi Epsilon on the Interfraternity Council; and earning the 1992 Homecoming king crown.

After running his first marathon through the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's Team in Training Program and raising \$5,000 in honor of an 8-year-old named Stephanie who had leukemia, he became an extreme runner, too. He's run more than 30 half and full marathons, once running the Death Valley Marathon on a Saturday followed by the Las Vegas Marathon on Sunday.

When his cousin's 4-year-old son, Parker Shanton, was diagnosed with leukemia in June 2011, Outlaw only knew one way to respond: extreme philanthropy. Looking for a way to provide some light during a dark time in the Shanton family's lives, Outlaw started the Flat Parker Project, inspired by the 1964 children's book *Flat Stanley*. He created a caricature of Parker



Parker Shanton was diagnosed with leukemia at age 4. "Finish strong" is his new life motto and is featured on T-shirts and on Flat Parker.

and decouped it onto a piece of Masonite about 8 inches tall that could travel across the country via United States Postal Service on the real Parker's behalf.



Tracey Outlaw created a caricature of Parker to make Flat Parker. He credits his love of art from his years sketching cartoons and illustrations for *The Maneater* and designing the 1989 and 1990 Homecoming T-shirts.

“Parker is an incredibly active, adventurous, normal little kid,” Outlaw says. “I wanted Parker and his family to have a fun distraction as they battled this life-threatening disease.”

Outlaw started a website and a Facebook page to track Flat Parker's journey from stranger to stranger, state to state with the goal of hitting all 50 states in 365 days. Outlaw hoped Flat Parker could help tell the Shanton's story while also raising money for leukemia research through T-shirt sales and donations.

From Mount Rushmore to the beaches of Hawaii to the Las Vegas strip to Walt Disney World, Flat Parker traveled more than 70,000 miles. One stop along the way was Tina Heins Fanning's house in Kansas City, Missouri. Fellow Tiger Fanning, BA '95, had followed Flat Parker on Facebook, and her three young children wanted to show Flat Parker around their hometown.

“It was a great opportunity to help them understand the struggles other children go through,” says Fanning of Catherine, 4; Ryan, 8; and Claire, 11. It had an effect on her, too. “While the Shantons are always thanking other people for their support, they’ve also changed all of those people who have been a part of it and encouraged them to be more giving and thoughtful and to live in the moment, knowing life can change dramatically any day.”

Flat Parker completed his U.S. tour in 2013, but his travels were just getting started. “Parker had another year of his treatments, so there was only one more extreme thing for Flat Parker to do,” Outlaw says. In 2014, Outlaw shipped Flat Parker out on a world tour. So far, Flat Parker has been to the Olympics in Sochi, Russia; to where the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy was filmed in Hobbiton, New Zealand; to an ultramarathon in Portugal; and to the World Cup in Rio de Janeiro.



On Flat Parker’s U.S. tour, he stopped in Kansas City, Missouri, home to Mizzou alumna Tina Heins Fanning. From left, Catherine, Claire and Ryan had fun showing Flat Parker around their hometown.

“Battling any life-threatening disease can be a lonely journey,” Outlaw says. “But it doesn’t have to be. And now many around the world are helping.” In addition to seeing the photos of Flat Parker posted on Facebook, Parker receives cards and letters weekly from people offering support. Now, whenever Outlaw

runs a race, he dedicates it to Parker and dons a T-shirt emblazoned with Flat Parker flexing and Parker's life motto: Finish strong.



From left, Madeleine, Mike with Parker, Erica and Harrison Shanton received support from people around the world because of the Flat Parker Project. They hope Flat Parker will complete his world tour as 8-year-old Parker completes his cancer treatments.

“It’s easy to wake up and go for a long run when he’s getting hit hard with chemo treatment,” Outlaw says. “It’s changed how I run. I draw a lot of strength from him.”

Outlaw, a national sales manager at J.M. Smucker Co. in Cincinnati, hopes Flat Parker can make it to every continent and as many countries as possible before returning to 8-year-old Parker in Detroit in December 2014. The Shantons hope that Parker will be in remission.

“At times it’s been a lighthearted journey to places we would all love to go, while other times we use it to simply show the truth about life with cancer,” says Parker’s father Mike Shanton. “The Flat Parker Project has meant so much for our family through Parker’s treatments.”



East meets West when Flat Parker travels to Nepal.

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