

Jake Panus, of Southport, CT, passed away at the tender age of 16 on Sunday, August 9, 2020 in an automobile accident in Rhode Island on Block Island. Jake joyfully arrived on this planet in the early morning hours of May 13, 2004 in New Orleans, Louisiana with a full head of hair that quickly spiraled into beautiful golden curls. People often commented that he resembled an angel. His infectious and perpetual smile, charismatic personality, supreme confidence, selfless sense of compassion and kindness, and true and unique authenticity emerged early in his formative years. He was both an old soul and, equally, an über-social being, whose quest to be among and surrounded by many was endless. He was the life of any gathering, whether in the classroom, on the athletic field or at the beach. Jake simply made anywhere he was better, brighter, more fun, and happier.

Jake was a rising star with a gravitational pull stronger than Jupiter. He was adored by and attracted a circle of friends from coast to coast. From an early age, Jake was confidently adept conversing with adults in ways beyond his years. His friend group spanned generations, and his heart and sense of humanity welcomed all comers. He was empathetic and caring, capable of understanding and relating to others' joys and pains, trials and tribulations, and always there to help or listen with an optimistic ear for those who needed it the most.

There were no boundaries to Jake's adventure of being alive and living life to the fullest. When he learned he was going to be a big brother, he jumped for joy, bounding across the sofa, arms raised in victory, bellowing screams of pure ecstasy. He adored his little brother Liam and cherished their brotherhood. He loved his family dearly and was our rock and roll, always offering up the joke, and making his mom, dad, and brother roar with laughter. Jake lived life "his way."

Jake was naturally gifted in so many respects. He valued being a kid and being with his family, friends and teammates more than anything. He was a natural athlete who excelled in all sports, from soccer, which he began playing at age 3, to baseball, football, and lacrosse. Skiing in Vermont winters quickly became a true happy place for Jake. He was entrepreneurial, driven, motivated, and possessed an uncanny ability to make people smile and laugh.

He was a member of the Fairfield Ludlowe High School football and lacrosse teams, a proud member of the Southport Congregational Church Youth Group, a counselor-in-training at the Wakeman Boys & Girls Club, and a cherished volunteer at the annual Pequot Library book sale. He aspired to attend the University of South Carolina, in his father's footsteps.

In the summer of 2019, Jake participated in his first church mission trip to Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in Oglala Lakota County, South Dakota to aid and assist the children of Red Shirt Table. The indelible and powerful experience of connecting and teaching the young children how to read, as well as instructing them on crucial life skills and sharing his boundless energy left Jake yearning to help more. He often spoke of the children with whom he bonded, proudly sharing the many photos of the beautiful young children, and he was looking forward to returning there this summer and beyond.

Jake is survived by his parents, Kellie and Stephen, his younger brother Liam, 11, of Southport, CT; his grandmothers, Carol Whitmyer (Marco Island, FL) and Joan Panus (Melbourne Beach, FL); his uncles, Michael Whitmyer (Byfield, MA) and Mark Panus (Mendham, NJ); an aunt, Sarah Panus (Boca Raton, FL); cousins, Matthew and Michelle Fanelli and Jamie-Leigh and Max Whitmyer, as well as many other cousins and dear friends and classmates.

In lieu of flowers, a memorial scholarship fund will be created in Jake's name to provide post-secondary education financial assistance to the children from Red Shirt Table on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. To donate you may send a check, made out to the "Southport Congregational Church" ref: *The Jake Panus Scholarship Fund*. C/O Southport Congregational Church, PO Box 366, Southport, CT 06890. For online donations visit the website [southportucc.org](http://southportucc.org) or call 203.255.1594.

Those who knew Jake, even just a little, lost a shining light in their lives. We love and miss you so much, Jake.

A Celebration of Life service will be held at 2 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 15 at Southport Congregational Church. Due to Covid-related reasons, the service will be private and by invitation only. A live stream video of the 2 p.m service will be available online via [www.southportucc.org](http://www.southportucc.org) At 3:30 p.m., the family will greet the community on the lawn of the Pequot Library in Southport. Masks are mandatory and social distancing is requested.