

# Charity Poker Run Honors Man's Memory

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The roar of motorcycles grew steadily louder as one after another nearly 50 engines fired up in the parking lot of a Phoenix Motorcycle shop Saturday morning. They were gearing up to begin a five hour charity poker run dedicated to Darrell Ashford Jr., a young man who lost his life unexpectedly seven years earlier.

On December 5, 2001 Darrell Ashford Jr. was shot while standing outside of his parents' house near Guadalupe and Price roads in Mesa. The shooter was a teenager showing off his newly purchased gun, said Cathy Ashford, Darrell's mother. He fired what Mrs. Ashford described as a "lucky shot," and Crystal Newbrough, Darrell's sister, described as an "impossible shot" from the end of the street. The bullet went through his temple, killing him instantly. He was 24 years old.

In life Darrell never let danger stop him, whether he was skydiving, river rafting, four wheeling or squirrel hunting. He was not afraid to help people, and always broke up fights even if they were strangers, said Mrs. Ashford. His carefree attitude sometimes upset her, and she would tell him "people do not just fight anymore; they stab and shoot each other." Darrell's response to this was: "Oh well then Mom, that's what's going to happen because I'm not just going to stand by and watch that."

His big heart, sense of humor and carefree attitude was what friends and family remembered most. Friend Adan "Spider" Robles called him a wild, outgoing prankster who loved to party and have fun.

To some he was known as Tank, to others he was Bear, Sweet D, or JR., and to his 12-year-old cousin Tyler he was "Oink Oink."

He was a "macho boy" who had a kind and giving heart, Mrs. Ashford said. While most people look the other way when a homeless person approaches them for money, Darrell would give his last dollar.

Ron Christen, Darrell's grandfather, recalled a time when Darrell gave his last five dollars to a homeless man instead of filling up his empty gas tank. Christen was concerned they would run out of gas, but Darrell told him the homeless man needed it more than they did. He knew they could always find a way to get by. Christen now keeps ten ones in his ashtray, "If I see a homeless person, I give him a couple dollars and say it's from my grandson," he said.

Crystal Newbrough said her brother would do everything he could to help children in need. He would randomly pick stars on the Christmas Angel tree and "spend his entire paycheck buying the kids everything they wanted," she said. On his last Christmas he found a child who wanted a bike and bought him one, she said.

The Darrell Jr. charity has helped children in need for seven years. All of the prizes, t-shirts, refreshments, and lunches are donated by an extensive list of sponsors, so they are able to give 100 percent of the proceeds to the children, Mrs. Ashford said. She said since the charity began, they have helped two children with XP (allergy to the sun) by buying them protective space suits. They also buy food, clothing, prescriptions and glasses for children in need, and will provide Christmas dinner and presents to five families.

Mrs. Ashford said they did their first "make a wish" charity last year and sent a young man born with half a heart to enjoy his first rodeo.

They do not line anything up in advance. She said they place the money in the bank until Darrell brings the children in need to them.

Mrs. Ashford said they are a very spiritual family and know that Darrell is still with them. “He leaves us feathers and pennies from heaven,” she said.

Darrell was number 55 on his school football team, said his cousin Corinne Reising, who wore earrings made into 55’s at the event. Since his death, they see 55’s everywhere, she said.

The event started at Chopper King’s in Phoenix. The group of motorcycles followed a route around the valley, stopping in North Phoenix, Scottsdale and Mesa before ending at McKenna’s Tavern and Eatery in Phoenix. At each stop the participants received a hole punch in their poker card. At the final stop the person with the best hand won \$1000. The cost to enter was \$25 per bike, and \$10 for a co-pilot. Mrs. Ashford said they normally raise around \$8000.

Mrs. Ashford said Darrell taught them so much about giving that they wanted to give something back in his memory, so they began the Darrell Ashford Jr. Annual Charity Poker Run. “It has really been a healing process for us because it keeps his name alive. We are very open about what happened and want people to learn from it. We want people to learn to give and love,” she said. For more about the Darrell Ashford Jr. charity, go to <http://www.darrelljrscharity.com/>.

**Guest article contributed by Andrea Ervin**