

Greg Williams remembers his son Nicolis who died of meningitis while attending Texas A&M University

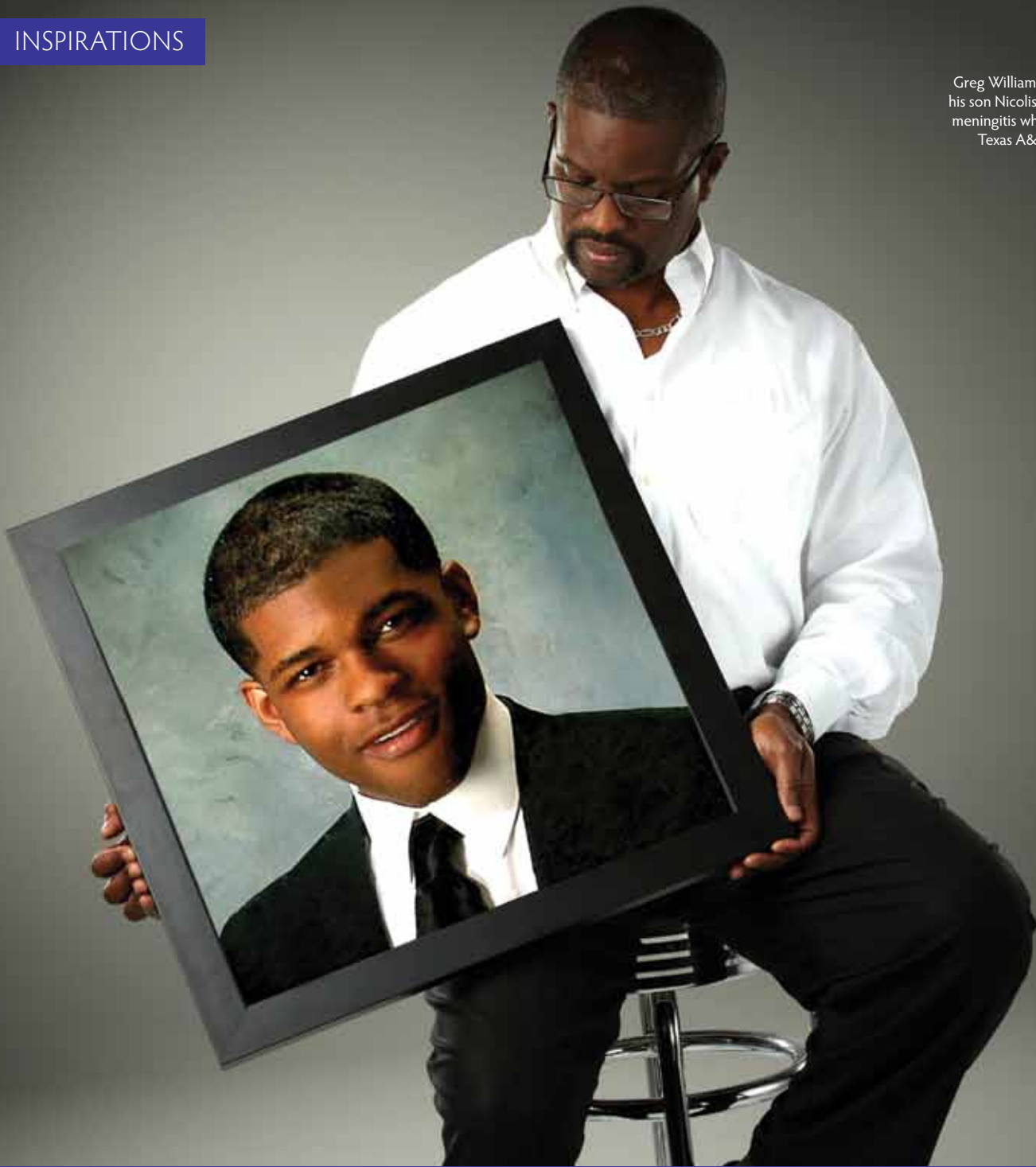
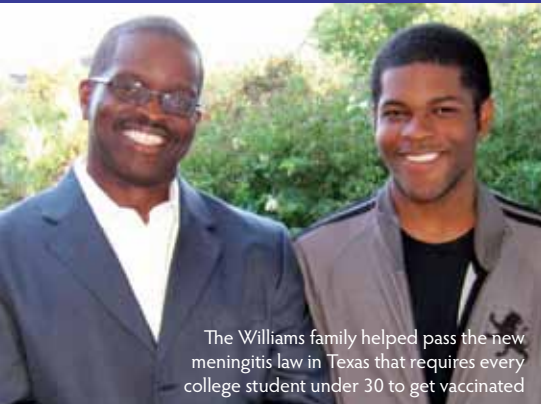
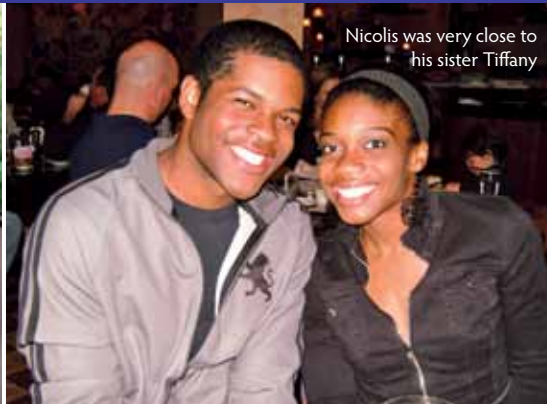


Photo Courtesy of Meningitis Angels



The Williams family helped pass the new meningitis law in Texas that requires every college student under 30 to get vaccinated



Nicolis was very close to his sister Tiffany



Nicolis' mom Arlene relied on prayer to help guide her through his loss

In Memory of Nicolis

The Williams family works to educate others about the importance of the meningitis vaccine after losing their son

Written by Jennifer Heath

Nicolis Williams was known for his smile - he even won the Best Smile award voted on by his Kempner High School classmates. His family tells stories of how he would make people grin based on his contagious look alone. On Feb. 8, 2011, Williams woke with nothing more than flu-like symptoms. Three days later, his smile - and his life - were gone forever, taken by a sudden onset of meningitis.

"As parents, we all have one common objective and that is to protect our children from any danger, regardless if they are 8 months or 18 years old," says Greg Williams, Nicolis' father. "Because I wasn't aware of meningitis, I didn't protect my son from the disease, and I will carry that guilt with me until the day I die. My whole purpose in life now is to bring awareness to this issue and hopefully prevent another parent from having to bury their child from a preventable disease."

Never Met a Stranger

Nicolis had an outgoing personality, loved being around people, and never met a stranger. After high school, he decided to attend Texas A&M University to study engineering. "He loved A&M," says his mother Arlene. "He was an Aggie through and through."

He was part of A&M's freshmen leadership team, became a youth counselor, and volunteered with a campus organization that helped students arrive home safely if they'd been drinking. He always lived off-campus in an apartment or house with friends. Nicolis eventually changed

from studying engineering to economics. "This past summer, he was planning on going to Ireland," says Greg. "After graduating, he wanted to go to law school."

Praying for a Miracle

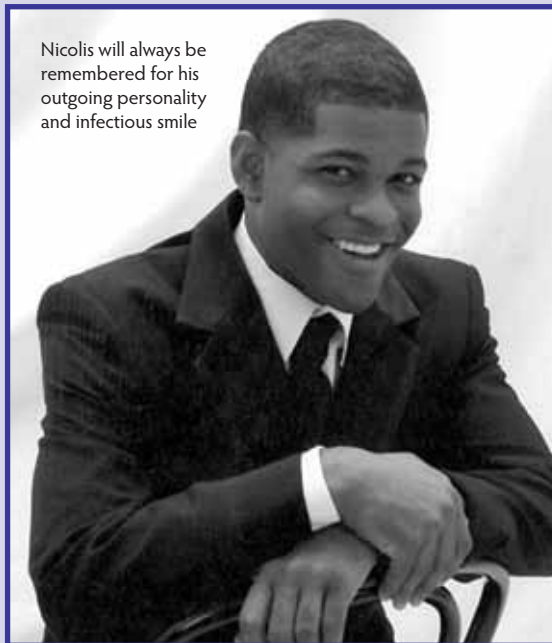
When Nicolis awoke with a high fever and headache he went to the on-campus clinic and was told he had the flu. Nicolis then went home and went to sleep. Three hours later, he woke up but was incoherent, combative, and unlike himself. His roommate called 911.

"They got to the hospital, and after eight minutes there, he went unconscious," Greg recalls. "The doctors were

trying to determine what the problem was. They did a spinal tap and confirmed he had bacterial meningitis."

Arlene received a call from Nicolis' roommate telling her to get to the hospital. Arlene and Greg quickly met to carpool the two hours to College Station. "We were told he had

Nicolis will always be remembered for his outgoing personality and infectious smile



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meningitis and Nick's dad and I had to educate ourselves very quickly," Arlene says. "We figured he had the kind where he'd have to be in the hospital for one week, and then he'd be fine."

Then, Arlene received a call from the hospital doctor. "He told me how bad his condition was and told us that if we're a praying family, now's the time to start praying," she says. "I thought my baby was gone. My eyes got blurry. I couldn't see anything. I turned into a parking lot and cried and cried."

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- Greg Williams

Letting Go

For three days, the Williams family sat vigil at their son's bed. A sea of friends visited Nicolis, all praying and keeping hope that the once outgoing college student would be able to bounce back. "We all took turns talking to him," shares Arlene. "We spent the night talking to him. Whole waiting rooms filled up with college students coming out to see him and pray for him."

The university president visited Nicolis and his family. Nicolis' older sister Tiffany arrived. Everyone began texting friends and family asking for prayer requests. All were hopeful.

Then the doctors showed Greg and Arlene photos of Nicolis. His brain had swollen up so much that it was pushed down to his brain stem. "We realized that we'd been asking for God to bring him back, but what we needed to do was ask God what his intentions were for Nick and whether it was to bring him back healthy and as vibrant a person as he was," Arlene

says. "If not, I asked for God to give me a sign that this was the end for my baby."

The next morning, the family made the decision to terminate the life support. "We sent out another text to family and friends saying please pray for Nick's safe arrival to God," Arlene says. "That was it."

Helping Others

At the time, state law required students living in college dorms to receive the meningitis vaccine. No on-campus housing was available when Nicolis first applied to Texas A&M, so he had lived off-campus and had never had the vaccine.

"The first thing I wanted to do after Nicolis' death was to get the law changed," Greg says. "The law didn't make any sense to me. The logic I used was what if we had a law where only the driver had to wear a seat belt. Well, what about the passenger? Or the riders? Shouldn't we protect everyone in the car?"

The Williams family began contacting their government officials asking what could be done. They worked with Rep. Charlie Howard of Sugar Land and Sen. Wendy Davis of Fort Worth to craft legislation. After facing tough opposition, the bill finally passed. On May 13, 2011 Gov. Rick Perry signed the act.

As of January 2012, any new student under the age of 30 taking on-campus classes must receive the meningitis vaccine. "We feel extremely proud that my son's death wasn't in vain," Greg says. "You never know who it will save or what impact they will have on society. Hopefully, we can save so many lives in the future." SLM

JENNIFER HEATH works from home, in addition to playing full-time with her sons Landry and Ryan.

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