



# JUDGE RULES

BY CLAIRE HARPER // PHOTOGRAPHED PATRICK HEAGNEY

If you ask anyone to describe 4-year-old Judge Colvin, they'll immediately talk about his infectious personality and "old soul." "Sweet," "fun-loving," "kind," "happy" and "witty," they'll all say. You'd never know that just one year ago, a freak accident left Judge's mom, Shelly, unsure if her son would ever walk, talk or breathe on his own again.

It was May 3, 2020. Judge and his father, Jeff, headed to meet Jeff's brother, Andrew, for an afternoon hike and swim. By 4:30PM, Shelly noticed the sky had turned black in their East Nashville neighborhood. In a matter of minutes, the same storm—a derecho, a line of intense, fast-moving windstorms known for having tornado-strength winds—was also upon the boys. Judge, Jeff and Andrew raced down the trail, with only a few yards between them and shelter, but Judge and his dad never made it. A massive 75-foot oak tree struck both boys, leaving a series of destruction in its path. The impact left Jeff with a total of 29 broken limbs. But he remained conscious, screaming for his young son who had been catapulted from his arms. Three-year-old Judge lay just 6 feet from his father, unconscious and seemingly not breathing. "It was the most horrifying call to receive," recalls Shelly. "It was only eight minutes between my call warning them of the storm and me receiving Andrew's call."

A frantic mess, Shelly headed for the hospital, arriving just in time to meet Andrew, who had driven to the nearest hospital after he was unable to reach first responders. "Seeing his sweet, little, unconscious body was the

most pain I've ever felt," says Shelly. Judge was intubated and immediately transferred to Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt, where a CT scan revealed a right parietal fracture, subdural hematoma, left frontal subarachnoid hemorrhage and hemorrhage in the corpus callosum—classified as a traumatic brain injury—and he was placed into a medically induced coma. A few weeks later, Judge had been extubated and was no longer in immediate danger, but he would need intense physical therapy. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (choa.org) was the most recommended, as well as Shepherd Center for Jeff's rehab, so the Colvin family packed up their life and headed for their new home.

Ten long months of intense inpatient and outpatient physical, occupational and speech therapies later, and Judge is back to his witty, silly and energetic self. "Children's brought the Judge we knew back to us," says Shelly, who remained a rock for her family through it all. "He's relearned how to do everything—how to walk, talk, eat, use his hands... everything. I'll never be able to describe the exhilaration of watching my son find himself again, to relearn all the 'firsts' for a second time."

As the Colvins' time in Atlanta nears its end, Shelly reflects on the whirlwind year. "It has felt like the most gut-wrenching heartbreak, yet a beautiful gift at the same time," she says. "We will forever have a deep appreciation for our time spent in Atlanta, under the highest-level medical care you could ever enlist—it truly saved all three of us."