

Joy of Living Well

Jason Wilson

Respiratory therapy manager and BBQ guru



Living well isn't just about what you do for a living. It's also about what you do to bring joy into your life. For Jason Wilson, a Manager of Cardiopulmonary and Respiratory Therapy at Baylor Scott & White Health, joy is found in front of a backyard smoker, where he cooks up fresh, delicious barbecued meats to share with friends and family. As a veteran, Jason experienced a difficult transition into civilian life, and barbecuing was a way for him to re-connect. He created a platform called *Meat Therapy*

to share his passion for barbecuing with the rest of the world. "If you can feed someone a great bite of food, you can connect with them," Jason says.

Before joining the Baylor Scott & White Health team, Jason spent five years in the Army, including a tour in Baghdad, Iraq, where he served as Lead Gunner for a personal security detail. When he got out of the military, he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression. At the time, he remembers just wanting to feel normal – but he

didn't feel comfortable around other people just yet.

Barbecuing was one thing Jason had always felt happy doing, so he returned to this simple hobby as a way to relax, get outdoors, and spend time with his family. He began making his own seasonings, participating in competitions and sharing meals with friends, and he soon found cooking and serving others to be so rewarding, it felt like therapy. His father-in-law encouraged him to start a food blog, and Meat Therapy was born. Now, Jason has a popular Meat Therapy website and an Instagram page with over 44,000 followers, and his story has been featured in the *New York Post*, *Fox News*, and *Texas Standard*.

Jason and his wife Jaclyn, who is a Labor and Delivery Nurse at Baylor Scott & White Health, also host personalized "Meat Therapy" cooking sessions for small groups in their historic home in Waxahachie, Texas. The experience includes hands-on lessons in prepping, grilling and presenting the selected meat, along with a sit-down dinner. Jason is proud of his relationship with Boot Campaign, a 501(c)(3) public nonprofit organization that provides individualized programs with high-touch, customized care to help veterans regain and find their joy. He recently had the opportunity to go on national television in New York to talk about the meaning behind Meat Therapy and the services Boot Campaign provides to veterans.

Beyond giving back to veterans, Jason also shares his joy of barbecuing with co-workers at Baylor Scott & White Health. During the height of the COVID pandemic, hospital workers were extremely busy and under a lot of pressure. To relieve his own stress, Jason managed to find time to barbecue one day a week, which he says helped him feel calm and happy. Soon, he began bringing meat and snacks to work to share with his team and other floors. His smoked party mix, dubbed "Covi-Snacks" by co-workers, was a very popular item.

"We had to keep those warriors eating," Jason says. "On the floor, healthcare workers may not have time to eat a meal, but they have time to grab a handful of a snack. It made me feel good to be able to bring a little extra caring, joy and hope to my team."

Jason and Jaclyn shared a huge helping of joy with their co-workers during Hospital Care Week, when they fed over 600 team members at the hospital, in an epic backyard BBQ. The effort required cooking 32 pork butts, which were smoked over a three-day period.

While barbecue brings Jason a lot of joy, his family has always been his greatest inspiration. He cooked his first overnight brisket with his father at age seven, and he still remembers waking up every 30 minutes to put a log on the fire, by the light of the moon. Many years later, when Jason became a father, he would once

again be kept up late at night – this time waiting anxiously in the neo-natal intensive care unit (NICU). His first son, Bryson, had been born prematurely and spent months in the NICU, where respiratory therapists worked to save his life. Inspired by Bryson’s health journey and the medical team that helped him, Jason decided he wanted to become a respiratory therapist. However, it would take a bit longer for this dream to come to fruition. After the birth of his second son, Payton, Jason joined the military to help support his family. Later, when Jason was released from the army, it was Payton who gave him the push to pursue a career in respiratory therapy.

“I remember I was spending a lot of time at home, barbecuing and trying to figure out what to do next with my life, and my son said, ‘Dad, you didn’t have to go to college, so I don’t have to go to college, either.’ I wanted to set a positive example for him, so two weeks later I enrolled in college.”

As a respiratory therapist, Jason brings the point of view of a parent and a medical professional to his patients and their families, which helps him provide more personal, empathetic care. He is grateful to have a career that allows him to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others, while still making time for a hobby that brings him joy.

“Everyone needs a little therapy in their lives, no matter what it is,” Jason says. “It could be barbecue, gardening, anything.

Find the one thing that makes you feel happy, despite the struggles life brings you. Then, do what you enjoy with a passion and share it with others. It can bring you closer to them, and help them along in their own journeys to find healing.”