

Lyric of Life
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LOL

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 Terry Benson / LOL Director / Father



WHO IS LYRIC MARIE BENSON?

She is the most wonderful experience in my life. That's how I might sum up my beautiful daughter and how she continues to impact my life.

Deborah and I enjoyed the beautiful happening shortly after midnight on September 20, 1980, at Suburban Hospital, Overland Park, KS. As reluctant as I might have been to have a child of my own, nothing could have erased that fear more quickly than being there to see Lyric come into the world. From the beginning, she was a Lyrical Miracle. It was a huge change in my life and I was very thankful for that.

Deborah's son, Ethan, was nine when Lyric was born. From a previous marriage, Ethan doted on Lyric like everyone else. They were very much the loving brother and sister. The only one who didn't feel that the new situation was joyous was the cat. There was too much jealousy and therefore, catty behavior. A better situation was found for the cat.

Lyric learned to read at an early age and almost always had several books with her. It wasn't within her norm to whine or complain about being bored or having nothing to do. Her interim endeavor was reading. That led to many of her talents and special traits, which included an increased vocabulary, memorization skills, creativity through book characters, cleverness, wittiness, acting out fantasy roles, and an alluring charm that was simply endearing. Yes, theater was a part of her.

Through the normal process of growing up, Lyric tried some typical activities. There was basketball, soccer, softball, track, volleyball, gymnastics, and dance. It was such a thrill to see her balancing her life with other such efforts. She learned well in terms of techniques and was a joy to watch. But everyone, including Lyric, knew that these participations were simply a part of evolving through childhood.

At age six, before ever embarking upon these, she was at the first of many lip sync deck parties that I had for friends and neighbors. Up to that time, she was relatively shy in front of groups of people. That night she performed three lip sync songs that she had been practicing. She wowed the crowd and, quite frankly, surprised me. There were many more deck parties to come and each year she was a star. I always thought of those parties as sort of a preview of things to come.

Though it was difficult for me, Lyric and her mother moved far from the Kansas City area when Lyric was twelve. She was about to embark on an amazing cosmopolitan journey that led to wonderful successes and an unimaginable end. To complete her journey, please check the following web sites: www.lyricoflife.org and www.donatelifeny.org (A tribute to Lyric is included on this website.)



WHAT IS LOL?

LOL has developed into a very recognizable acronym for online chat room users (meaning 'laughing out loud'). The new and more important LOL is 'Lyric of Life'. It's OK that both exist, as the potential for the transfer of meaning online is possible. The internet is a powerful medium and the idea that one day LOL espouses a more powerful message is an encouraging thought.

Soon after the tragic event, a fund was set up in Lyric's name (Lyric's Gift) through the New York Organ Donor Network. The outpouring of financial gifts was amazing and showed the love for Lyric from people all over the world. It only made sense that a similar effort be made for her where she grew up. Born in Overland Park, KS on September 20, 1980, Lyric lived on both sides of the state line (KS / MO) in the Kansas City metro area until she was almost thirteen.

LOL is officially recognized by the IRS (EIN: 88-0517536) as a nonprofit association. A local committee helped put together the first LOL Benefit Night on April 24, 2004. Local committee members included Sara and Emily Perlestein, Wendy Christ, Pam Lander, Jerry Cundiff, Paul Osgood, and Lisa Trainer. An off-site member, Rita Haggard, worked via computer from Lexington, KY and was instrumental in all graphic collations for invitations, T-shirt design, logo, this newsletter, etc.

Because of Lyric's life-saving organ donations and her theater degree from Yale, the funds from LOL go toward the following: 1) organ donation education, 2) financial assistance to donor and recipient families, and 3) theater scholarships for high school seniors. Though LOL is just a few months old, it has already helped a senior with her first year of college and an organ donor mom be able to attend the 2004 Transplant Games in Minnesota. More about those two feel-good stories are found in the remaining articles.

LOL 2004 ~ A Benefit for All

April 24, 2004 was one year to the day since the nightmare of my life. Yet, it turned out to be the most tranquil I had felt since that initial phone call. The word 'benefit' seemed to extend far beyond raising money. The Valentine Room in the Uptown Theater in Kansas City, MO, was filled with promise.

It was empowering to have so many wonderful people---family, friends, acquaintances, and new guests---all coming together to remember Lyric. Some were 'meeting' her for the first time through pictures, videos, an audio, articles, her creations, and the stories and recollections of those who did know her. The approximately 200 attendees were festive with hope for the future of LOL.

Several made trips from the east coast. Lyric's best friend, Chelsea Lagos, traveled from New York City. (continued on back page)



LOL Assists Attendees to 2004 U.S. Transplant Games

What could be more wondrous than getting the proverbial new lease on life? Ask the many who have received life-sustaining transplants. Many show their thankfulness through exuberant competition in the Transplant Games. All athletes are transplant recipients participating in events similar to the Olympics. Getting to experience the games was both wonderful and emotional.

I left for Minneapolis on July 31st knowing that I was drawn to this destination by Lyric's tragic death. The atmosphere here was a blend of melancholy and rejuvenation. Combined were families who had given and those who had received. Either way, mixed feelings were the mood of the day throughout the events. What I was most excited about was the opportunity to meet Tammy Pezl and Brandi Billings.

In 1996, Tammy had to accept the worst possible news. She lost her precious daughter, Tyanna, and her mother, Carolyn, in a house fire. Tyanna was ten and became an organ donor. Tammy's sister, Brandi, provided major support as she took Tammy into her home to begin a difficult healing process. Through connections with the National Kidney Foundation, LOL discovered that Tammy had wanted to attend the 2004 Transplant Games, but at the time could not due to expenses.

LOL was able to fund the trip for both Tammy and Brandi and bring a small amount of relief in terms of facing the day to day grief. Both sisters were delightfully engaging as they helped rejoice new life for others at the games. At the same time, they shared in grief classes to help cope with the sad memories and recall good ones. The sisters are from the Kansas City area and it is hoped they will be able to attend the April benefit for Lyric.



Tammy and Brandi

LOL 2004 ~ A Benefit for All (continued from front page)



Susan and Ray

Chelsea took part there in a Public Service Announcement about organ donation that contained video of Lyric and included appearance/narration from Chelsea, herself. It was shown during the evening. Lyric's grandmother, Jean Davis, and her aunt, Amanda Davis, came in from Beaufort, NC, and Washington, D.C. respectively. Amanda was instrumental in getting the PSA produced. It has been showing on the east coast and hopefully will be doing the same in the Kansas City area soon.

Three heart-tugging video tributes held the audience captivated. One was put together by associates of Chelsea in NYC and another was done in Kansas City by Matthew Stevens. The third showed Lyric from ages six through seventeen during lip sync deck parties. It was edited by Gordon Brown of Avalon Studios in Lawrence, KS.

One of the evening's highlights was the appearance of Katie Berry and her mother, Sandra. Katie was the first recipient of an LOL theater scholarship for high school seniors.

She earned the \$500 grant at Turner High School in Kansas City, KS, based on her high standards in academic achievement, community service, and commitment to theater. She is now attending Stephens College in Columbia, MO.

The essence of what the benefit represented could be felt when Ray Gabel took a few minutes to address the audience. While Lyric provided five miracles with her organ donation, Ray explained how those types of miracles are experienced from a recipient's viewpoint. Ray is the Community Education Coordinator at the Midwest Transplant Network in Westwood, KS. He is also a heart recipient from a transplant which actually took place on Valentine's Day, 1991. His wife, Susan, was also in attendance. She became a liver recipient in 1995. Their lives are now shared one day at a time, in appreciation for what organ donation is all about. They are advocates and supporters of LOL. Because they are supporters of Lyric's causes, Ray and Susan's firsthand knowledge of organ donation will create an invaluable link for the future of LOL.



Sandra (mom) and Katie

Although LOL is working in small ways compared to other established fundraising groups, the consensus of those involved was that the first try was a success. People who shared that special evening last April were as important as the money they provided to help LOL help others. While every contribution is very much appreciated, there were some who opened their hearts in financial ways that exceeded the norm. Steve and Debbie Ledman's \$500 contribution stood atop many generous supporters. One business contribution benefited LOL in a wonderful way, a \$1000 donation from Compass Financial Resources, a group managed by Russ Lane. In all, just over \$16,000 in donations came to LOL, an optimistic start to a fund in honor of a beautiful angel, Lyric Marie Benson.

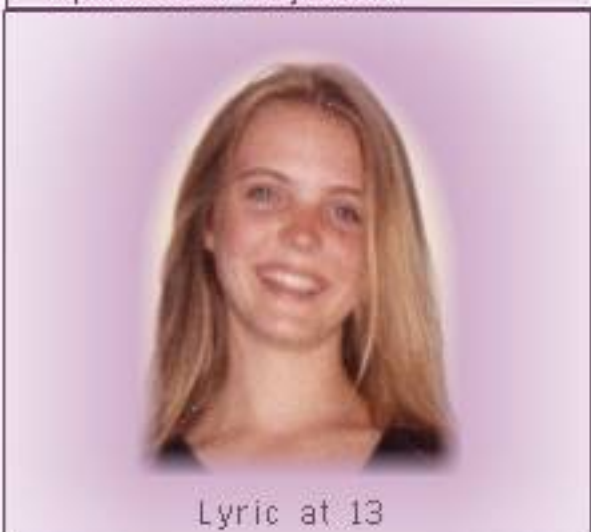
Lyric's spirit of fun and laughter translated into a light atmosphere for much of the benefit. Donated items were raffled to the party goers, mostly show tickets granted from local theaters throughout the metro area. A fabulous house band donated its valuable time to keep enthusiasm at a high. Tony Rustici's band, Motion, played popular tunes and dance music throughout the night. By the end of the festivities, many were still calling for more music from the talented foursome. Motion will again be on hand for the April 23, 2005 event.

CALENDAR REMINDER!

Don't forget to mark your calendar well in advance for Lyric of Life. The 2005 benefit night for LOL will take place on April 23rd in the Valentine Room at the Uptown Theater in Kansas City, MO. A \$30 donation is requested in advance or at the door.

The money that is generated is important and targets organ donation and theater scholarships, but the people who show up make the event. Those who will be planning to attend the LOL event for the first time should expect to be among wonderful people, meet Lyric through touching memorabilia and media, learn more about organ donation, enjoy a beverage and snacks, and dance to lively rock music.

So, mark it now! See you then.



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