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# SPOTLIGHT Carol Lynn Gibson

## Foundation built on family, friends

**BY MICHELLE PARKS ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE**

FAYETTEVILLE — The tranquil image shows a boat atop intense blue water, beyond a white beach, palm trees, wave-battered rocks and rugged huts. Four divers are silhouetted under the water's surface.

This oil painting, called One Particular Harbor, hangs on Don and Carol Lynn Gibson's living room wall. The four divers are the couple and their sons, Ryan and Derek.

It celebrates the family's love of the water, and reminds them of the one who's gone. Ryan died in January 2001 from pneumonia, says his mother. He'd had a weakened immune system after fighting leukemia and undergoing a bone marrow transplant in 1996.

That's why the painting, created by the local artist Jane Garrison, is so special.

"It's no place in particular. It's just all the things we like to do," Carol Lynn says of the painting. "It's your one little place that you can go when things are tough. You can find peace and solitude."

In the summer of 1995, Ryan was finishing his scuba certification when he was diagnosed with leukemia. He took time off from Southern Methodist University in Dallas to get the transplant, before returning to graduate in 1998. After his transplant, the family also traveled to the Bahamas, where they all went diving.

Carol Lynn describes her firstborn as the "kindest, most tenderhearted person ever. ... He just brought out the good in everyone."

Ryan always wanted to work in the medical field, she says. Before he died, he was working in Dallas with Baylor Health System in a joint cancer research project with the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. He'd planned to enter medical school in fall 2001.

Ryan "never considered his illness a detriment," his mother says. Rather, he felt God was directing him to work in that area of medicine for a cure.

"He never thought for a minute that wasn't possible," she says.

Ryan loved the singer-songwriter Jimmy Buffett and the ocean, thus the name of the Ryan Gibson Foundation's forthcoming fundraiser, One Particular Harbor. The foundation was started in Dallas by Ryan's best friend, Scott "Hook" Harmeling, and other fraternity brothers at Pi Kappa Alpha. They wanted to do something to honor Ryan and to "keep Ryan's dreams alive" for finding a leukemia cure, Carol Lynn says.

"He had a passion for medicine and for helping people," she says.

From the foundation's start, the mother says, she had no idea there would be such enthusiasm, longevity and continued growth. Besides the Arkansas chapter, the foundation has chapters in Florida, Tulsa, Houston, Dallas and South Padre, Texas.

"I think now it's touching more people than just friends of Ryan Gibson," she says.

The foundation has given research grants of \$45,000 to Dr. Robert Collins at University of Texas Medical Center; \$3,500 to the Arkansas Cancer Research Center at UAMS; and \$50,000 to Dr. Patricia Yotnda at Baylor College of Medicine.

Yotnda will be the guest speaker at the fourth annual fundraiser, planned for Saturday at the Fayetteville Town Center. The event will feature a Caribbean dinner and dancing to the music of Oreo Blue. Live and silent auction items will include a guitar autographed by the Eagles and a Jimmy Buffett concert package in Chicago. Tickets are \$75 each, and tropical attire is encouraged.

"It's a fun party, but, also, it has a purpose and a meaning," she says.

She says she's grateful for the volunteers and contributors who've supported the foundation, who've given their time, energy and money.

"We couldn't do it without help," she says. "It's gotten too big."

Her younger son, Derek, is special events director for the Ryan Gibson Foundation. He is also vice president of commercial and private banking, at Springdale-based Legacy National Bank, where his dad is president and chief executive officer.

"We miss [Ryan] every day of our lives," Carol Lynn says.

But, the foundation helps the family "gain some peace of mind," she says.

More information about the Ryan Gibson Foundation is available by calling (479) 571-1313 or (479) 756-9604.



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/BETH HALL Carol Lynn Gibson says a foundation named for her late son, Ryan, is touching more than just his friends. A fundraiser set for Saturday will enable the Ryan Gibson Foundation to continue to give research grants to fight leukemia.