



**Lisa Nichols**

## Living Each Day With A Smile

In the midst of our busy lives, we do not appreciate, as often as we should, the many good fortunes, some more visible than others, we receive along the way. For Village

resident, Lisa Nichols, her life has brought much fulfillment with a loving husband and seven beautiful children. Today, Lisa Nichols is fighting a life threatening illness. Not knowing what life will bring from one day to the next, she approaches every day with a smile and grace.

A native of California, Lisa and her husband Dave moved to Colorado, to search for a better place to raise their family, which at the time, consisted of four children. As their family grew with three additional children, they realized their need for a larger home, and moved to Cherry Creek Village North four years ago. Lisa, a homemaker, and Dave, a network manager, were very excited about their new home in Greenwood Village.

"We immediately fell in love with our house and the neighborhood," said Lisa. "Dave really liked the house because it had a workbench downstairs (she laughed), but more important, the neighborhood had a sense of community as we drove through. We knew that this would be a great place for our family."

As the Nichols settled in their new home, the neighborhood was immediately greeted with the Nichols' generosity as they hosted a Halloween Party for all the children of the neighborhood. Lisa opened up a childcare that she operated from her home, which spoke to her motherly ways and her natural instinct to help others. Dave later served as a member and president of the neighborhood homeowners' association, and built the neighborhood Web site.

"Lisa and Dave are such wonderful people who genuinely care about others," said Susie Roy, neighbor and friend. "Lisa is a beautiful person, inside and out. She is a very gracious and humble person," added Katie Murray Kleeman, another friend and neighbor.

With the challenges of managing a household of nine, and operating a business out of her home, Lisa was dealt with the burden of battling an illness that had yet to be medically diagnosed. Dating back to the time that she lived in California, Lisa endured on-going pain and muscle weakness in her arms and legs. Her initial diagnosis was Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

When she moved to Colorado, Lisa's symptoms progressed, and her initial prognosis was proven inaccurate. Her ability to drive a vehicle, take care of children, and perform household

chores became difficult. Every morning, a walk to the bus stop to see her younger children off to school took much longer; the image of her anguish prompted one neighbor to call the school district for help.

"I saw to it that a new bus stop be added near the Nichols' home so that Lisa could still wait with her children for the bus," said Susie. "At first the school district said no; but then I invited them to come out one morning and watch Lisa walk to the bus stop. They did, and Cherry Creek School District put in a new bus stop for Lisa."

Despite her uphill battle with an illness that had begun to take over her body, Lisa continued to amaze her family, friends, and neighbors. Even with her physical abilities beginning to change, her gracious character remained intact.

"Her illness does not affect who she is," said Katie. "Because of her spiritual connection, she continues to share her love and her zest for life with everyone."

Committed to get an official medical diagnosis, Lisa underwent a series of tests before receiving confirmation of a diagnosis that she and her family had been preparing for the past few years. This past January, Lisa was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), commonly referred to as Lou Gehrig's disease.

ALS is a neurodegenerative disease that attacks nerve cells and pathways in the brain and spinal cord, eventually killing the cells and paralyzing the muscles of the limbs and trunk that control speech, swallowing, and breathing. Since ALS attacks only motor neurons, the five senses are generally not affected. With the average life expectancy of two to six years, ALS is a fatal disease for which there is currently no cure. Ironically, Lisa's father-in-law has PLS (a lesser form of ALS that is not fatal) so the Nichols have been aware of the disease for quite some time.



**Lisa and Dave Nichols with their children, front to back, Peter, Joe, Ellie, Katie, Maggie, Molly and Dan.**

"I started preparing emotionally, before I talked with my husband and kids," said Lisa. "You can never prepare for something like this and really come to terms with the outcome of the disease."

Five months later, Lisa's illness has gradually taken over her petite body and taken much of her independence. If you visit her home, you get a glimpse of the Bi-Pap breathing machine in the kitchen that substitutes 50 percent of Lisa's lung capacity, which she lost as a result of ALS. She uses a cane to

walk. She can no longer cook or garden. Her words are softly spoken as her illness has impaired her speech. Withstanding some days that are worse than others, she continues to do her very best to take care of her seven children, encountering each day with a smile and a laugh or two, as characterized by her neighbors.

"At the end of the day, Lisa is worn down," said Susie. "Lisa is a strong person, and an incredible mother. She confronts this horrible illness with dignity, acceptance, and spirituality, some of the gifts that she has given to her family and friends."

Lisa's illness has had an emotional effect on her neighborhood as they have witnessed firsthand the effects this disease has had on Lisa and her family. Three times a week, meals are brought to the Nichols home by neighbors, their house is cleaned every other week by a housecleaning service, and numerous hours of assistance are donated to help with errands, lawn mowing and yard work, and transporting kids. One neighbor, Dr. Jim Good, who is a pulmonary physician, offered to provide treatment of Lisa's pulmonary needs, free of charge.

"It does not take much to look around and see all the good things that have happened as a result of Lisa's illness," said Susie. "We are so fortunate to be living in such a wonderful community."

"Lisa has brought together a lot of people," said Katie. "It has made me appreciate my life and see the many gifts that we can give onto others."

The neighborly spirit does not stop there. Cherry Creek Village North and other neighborhoods have taken their assistance further and are organizing *Band Together*, a family festival and concert at Village Greens Park on August 29 from

1 p.m. to 5 p.m. to benefit the Nichols family, with a portion of the proceeds dedicated to supporting other families affected by ALS (a request of Lisa who was difficult to convince to accept the help).

"The average cost to treat an ALS patient is \$200,000 per year so you can imagine how it could bankrupt a family," said Katie, who is one of the Chairpersons for *Band Together*. "We cannot stand by and watch a neighbor and friend, especially a family with young children, lose everything."

Momentum is building daily as a 40 member committee is hard at work to make *Band Together* a success. Approximately 30-40 hours a week has been dedicated to coordinating food, logistics, sponsors, youth activities, silent auction items, ticket sales, sponsorship donations, and publicity for the event.

"It's a total grassroots fundraiser, said Katie. "It is already a success with the gifts of community, compassion, and caring that have been born from this personal tragedy."

Living with a progressive disease, Lisa never misses an opportunity to spend time with her seven children — Peter, 4; Joe, 6; Ellie, 8; Katie, 16; Maggie, 18; Dan, 21; and Molly, 22; and teach them a lesson or two. Using the life of a butterfly as an analogy with her younger children, she often talks with her children about life and death to prepare them for the day when she will leave, but her legacy — to live each day with a smile — will live on.

"Death is a part of living, that is the way life is," said Lisa. "It's not the end of the world; I am still living."

For more information on *Band Together* or to volunteer, please call Katie Murray Kleeman, at 303-741-2421, Susie Roy, at 303-220-5899, or visit [www.ccvillagenorth.org](http://www.ccvillagenorth.org).

***Band Together***  
**A Family Festival and Concert**  
**August 29 • 1-5 p.m. • Village Greens Park**  
***To benefit the Nichols family***