

## ***Compassion Story of the Month***

### **Compassion Begets Compassion**

by Gary Rosen's Circle of Care

Talk about a compassionate human being – Gary Rosen was a gold standard.

Who could forget his devotion to children? Who could forget those Teddy bears -- some wearing sunglasses – who were there with the kids at his concerts, and who paraded with the kids through the auditorium as Gary sang "Teddy Bear's Picnic?" Who could forget his lifetime commitment to music as therapy for persons in need?

A beloved children's entertainer since the mid-1970s, Gary was diagnosed in 2004 with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), often referred to as "Lou Gehrig's disease." He fought a courageous battle with the disease for the next three years.

It's now the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gary's death – a good time to remember not only his devotion to others, but also the remarkable compassion offered to him and his family, compassion which continues to this day.

A group of particularly caring individuals formed a "Care Circle" for the Rosens and went to great lengths to provide them with help and comfort. "Gary offered us the opportunity to create a compassionate community. He provided a need around which we could rally," remembers a member of the Circle.

These folks did so much: they shoveled snow; they brought food, they helped Gary get to the performances of his children Lela, Penn and Eliza, in his 1988 Ford Econoline wheelchair van dubbed "the Fun Bus" (Gary *never* missed a performance); musicians and music groups surrounded him with music (kudos to the Hallowell Singers); they maintained his backyard garden; they read to him; they sat and laughed with him; professionals came for medical care, comfort and spiritual guidance.

And the "returns" on this compassion were clearly beyond calculation. Gary's wife Mary notes that even now, 10 years later, people keep telling her how much *they* received in the course of helping her family. A constant refrain: "We got more than we gave." And they continue reminiscing with Mary about their most memorable moments with Gary and the family.

Mary is filled with gratitude for every small act of kindness and especially for the friends Circle of Care that became her rudder as Gary approached the end of his life journey. "I couldn't possibly extend enough thanks to all the compassionate individuals in our community who kept us going. Filled as I am with gratitude, I try to pass forward such acts of loving kindness on a daily basis," she said.

Gary responded in kind, finding joy in each day. Friends continue speaking about “that twinkle in his eye and the smile on his face.” These friends well remember that Gary continued living life to the fullest, refusing to allow the disease to overcome his spirit. And it didn’t. He simply refused to succumb to the fear of ills the day might bring.” A Hallowell singer remembers: “I often wondered how Mary and Gary could remain so centered and focused. You could see the love and gratitude in his eyes, and he saw it in her eyes”.

And his daughter Eliza in her memorable “Amazing Grace” eulogy for Gary, remembered, “Even as he was losing his ability to walk, play guitar, sing and talk, he continued to wake up each day smiling, soaking in the laughter and music which surrounded him.”

Bonnie Stearns, the driving force behind “the Circle,” remembers the first Sunday in April 2005 when friends came together to inaugurate this community of caring for Gary and the family. “We began creating what I think of as the Gary Quilt. Gary was the thread sewing all of the unique quilt pieces together. Mary helped us figure out the design and the size of the quilt. We were the unique quilt pieces--no two of us matched. We were like different fabrics with different textures, thicknesses, and colors. We wanted our quilt to be comforting, warm, cozy, secure, snuggly and stuffed with love—for Gary and his family.

And, another Circle member, recalls that they spoke continually about Gary’s unending compassion toward others, and the remarkable things he did: more than 3,000 concerts in 45 states, including Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the White House, New York’s Town Hall, the Smithsonian. “And he sang the National Anthem at Fenway Park twice!”

And finally...Who that was present could ever forget Gary singing “The Best That I Can” with his kids at Boston’s First Night celebration on Dec. 31, 2004. For that performance his kids added an additional verse:

We’ve got a dad who’s special to know,  
Although he’s been sick, he’s still doing his show.  
We say, ‘Don’t you feel sad that you’ve got to slow down?’

Then Mr. Rosen chimed in:

Oh no, not when I’ve got love all around,  
Don’t go feeling sorry for me.  
I may be sick, but I can see  
I’m gonna be the best that I can.  
Yes I am, yes I am.

*With Brattleboro voting overwhelmingly to become part of the international Charter for Compassion, the Reformer and The Commons have agreed to publish a “Compassion Story of the Month.” This is the sixth.*

*Submissions, from Brattleboro area residents, for future publication, not to exceed 650 words, should be emailed to: [compassionstory@gmail.com](mailto:compassionstory@gmail.com) or mailed to: Compassion Story of the Month, c/o Robert Oeser, PO Box 6001, Brattleboro, VT 05302. Please include your name, address, phone number and email address. Earlier submitted stories will automatically be considered in subsequent months.*