

Room in her heart

by Susan Anderson

Lisa Eades never imagined that, at 40, she'd be sitting with her new baby in the auditorium at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., watching older daughter Brooke sing on stage. They made the trip last month with the Casper Children's Chorale.

Imagine the double joy of holding your "late-in life" gift, while seeing the blossoming of your 10-year-old.

But Lisa, who has experienced an extra dose of the wonder of motherhood, has also been to a place no parent ever wants to go.

Five and one-half years ago, she had just learned that her 9-year-old son, Jason, had a brain stem tumor, that he probably wouldn't survive the year.

And he didn't.

So, as she celebrates Mother's Day with her husband Rocky, Brooke and 3-month-old daughter Skylar, she will also mark another day without Jason.

Who is she thinking of on this holiday for moms?

Brooke and Skylar — and Jason, of course.

"When you lose a child, you think about that every day," she says.

She also thinks about "the other mothers and their families who have lost children to brain tumors and other kinds of cancer."

She and Rocky saw what it cost their family to fight to save Jason, then watch him die.

"When a child dies, part of our heart dies," says Lisa. "The emptiness you feel sucks out your strength and consumes every emotion. There is an inability to make even the simplest decisions.

"Tears fall constantly and unexpectedly. Sleep is impossible. The body is weak."

Statistics fill out the picture of how tough it is.

Lisa says that within two years of losing a child, three out of four married couples divorce. Half of the parents have a serious illness.

See **LISA EADES** on A2



Lisa Eades with daughters Brooke (right) and Skylar (in her arms).

LISA EADES continued from A1



Jason Eades

Room in her heart
How could someone who survived this experience have the courage to have another child, to love like that again?

"When you lose a child, you are pretty sure you'll never be able to do anything again," says Lisa.

"Part of it is fear..." Rocky says. "...Opening yourself up for more heartache," adds Lisa.

But the pain that never goes away dulls over the years.

"Finally Rocky and I were at a place in our lives where we felt we

had love to give another child," she says.

And Brooke "has all kinds of room in her heart," says her mom.

Doctors assured them the cancer that killed Jason was not hereditary, so neither Brooke nor the baby was at greater risk than other children.

Lisa's pregnancy thrilled many in Casper. "People in the community were excited with us and for us," says Lisa. "So many watched what we went through with Jason. 'This is not just your child, she is the community's child,'" said their friends.

Both adamantly point out that Skylar is in no way a "replacement" for Jason.

But she is a very powerful

tiny person.

"This little baby girl is helping us heal and move on. We never figured we'd be in this place right now, after Jason left us," says Rocky.

And on a beautiful May evening at their home at the foot of Casper Mountain, the air was full of joy and satisfaction. Skylar doesn't want to go to sleep when people are up having fun. Rocky carries her around on her tummy. Brooke also wants a turn holding the baby.

Lisa is tired, very tired, and content, very content.

"You need to cherish every minute with your children and be aware of the gift that they are," she says to us on Mother's Day.

Reaching out

Knowing what they know of losing a child, Lisa and Rocky are reaching out.

And they have plenty of help.

They and friends Tisa Bilek and Jerri Durdahl founded Jason's Friends Foundation in 1996. The foundation helps families of children with cancer.

If a family needs help with a house or utility payment, Jason's Friends is there. A primary family advocate is assigned to each family. That person becomes a lifelong partner in the experience of dealing with childhood cancer.

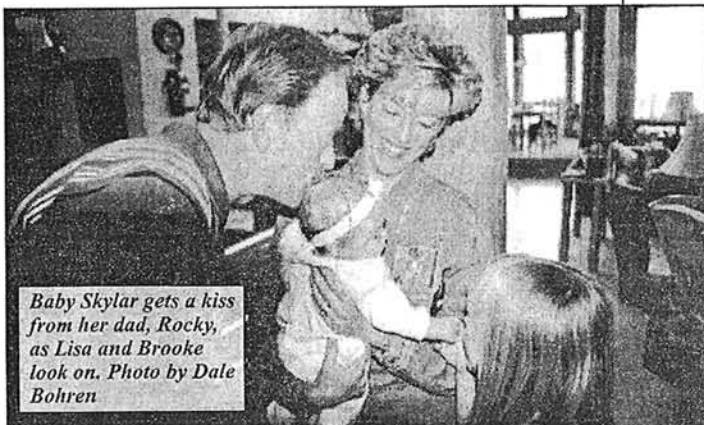
Every person involved in Jason's Friends is a volunteer.

There is tremendous community support, says Lisa. At the second annual bowling fundraiser last weekend, they raised \$65,000 after expenses from the efforts of 550 bowlers.

The foundation is helping 20 families now. Lisa points out that not all the outcomes are tragic. There are stories of survival and remission.

But on Mother's Day, Lisa wants to remember these children who "have crossed paths" with Jason's Friends, who have died: Stephanie Jackson, Sierra Gomes, Rosie Thomas, Melissa Martzell, Donna Cameron, and Wayne Cheney.

To reach Jason's Friends, call 235-3421.



Baby Skylar gets a kiss from her dad, Rocky, as Lisa and Brooke look on. Photo by Dale Bohren

Tribute to a mother

Rocky Eades said this about Lisa Eades at the memorial for their son, Jason.

"I have never seen so much love between two people as I have witnessed between Lisa and Jason. This love developed over the years of Jason's childhood. It is something that truly cannot be put into words. Jason and his mom shared everything together. Their hikes through the woods, their deepest thoughts, their dreams, their sorrows. Lisa has devoted her life to her children. She endured three long months in New York City, often alone, away from her precious little daughter, to save her son.

She gave him strength from her strength.

She gave him love from her heart.

We saw miracles in Jason's first recovery in May, much of it due to Lisa's love and devotion to our son. She stuck with him through surgery, chemo, radiation and physical therapy.

She was always there to cheer him on. With very little sleep and nutrition she has never weakened and has gone way beyond her physical limitations.

Toward the end, Jason would rarely let her out of his sight. In his last fight for life, he squeezed her hand with his paralyzed hand as she told him over and over how much she loved him and how proud she was of him. It touched everyone that was present that night. I now know the true meaning of the word "Mom."

It is a privilege for me to be raising children with and sharing my life with this incredible woman."