



Everything New Orleans

Weathered, Chee-Weez headline Mallorymania benefit

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By **Sheila Stroup, The Times-Picayune**

When Jim Hanley met Mallory Simmons in 2009, he had no idea she had cystic fibrosis. He just knew she had a beautiful outlook on life and she could sing.



Jim Hanley

Mallory Simmons with Jim Hanley of Weathered, after he invited her up on stage to sing with the band

So he pulled her up on the stage to sing with his band Weathered at Pelicanpalooza, the annual concert to benefit Camp Pelican, a free camp for Louisiana kids with chronic lung diseases.

"We all had a blast," he said.

Actually, Simmons was too scared to have a blast that day.

"I looked out at the hundreds of people there, and I was ready to freak out," she said.

And she has already told Hanley she doesn't want to sing at Mallorymania

Sunday afternoon.

"I told him, 'This is my thing, so I should get to make the rules,'" Simmons, 22, said. "But, who knows? I'm sure he's going to try to get me up there."

I'm sure he will, too. After all, this will be Simmons' first time in public without a mask since she had a double lung transplant at Ochsner Medical Center six months ago. And it is her "thing." She might as well get up and celebrate.

Mallorymania is a concert for Simmons and her family, who have been through tough times in the past couple of years. It will feature Weathered and the Chee-Weez, another popular cover band. They're working with the nonprofit Friends in Need Foundation to put on the benefit.

"It's exciting for us to be able to do this for Mallory," Hanley said. "She's such an inspiring person."

Simmons, a college student from Lafayette, was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis at 21 months old. CF is a chronic debilitating lung disease that literally takes your breath away. As a child, she faced daily poundings to get the mucus out of her lungs. Later, she would put on a special vest that shook the the mucus out of her.

Still, she called CF "an inconvenience."

By the time Hanley met Simmons, the disease had progressed. In September 2008, she'd had a collapsed lung. In May 2010, her lung collapsed again, and she was airlifted to Tulane Medical Center. By then, her lungs were deteriorating so quickly she was put on the transplant list.

When Hanley learned she was in the hospital in New Orleans, he and his wife, Destiny, started visiting her and cooking for her.

"As sick as she was, she still had this amazing attitude," Hanley said.

At that time, Simmons' mom and her younger sister, Hannah, were at St. Jude's Children's Hospital in Memphis, where Hannah was receiving chemotherapy for leukemia.

"We have kids of our own, so we realized how helpless Mallory's parents had to feel, knowing there was nothing they could do to help their daughters get well," Hanley said.

Mallorymania will give the Simmons family a lift and help with their ongoing medical expenses. Thankfully, both Simmons and her sister Hannah, 14, are doing better now.

"After she got her new lungs, the difference in Mallory was immediate," Hanley said. "The day after her transplant, she was like a brand new person, so full of life."

She had to live within 15 minutes of Ochsner Hospital for three months after the transplant in case she had any problems. But now she's happy to be back in Lafayette with her family. When I talked to her on Friday, she sounded wonderful.

"I am good. I am very good, compared to last year, especially," she said. "I didn't know how much I was missing until my transplant."

For a while, when she was getting weaker and weaker, she tried to hide it, because she didn't want to worry her parents any more than they were worried over Hannah, and she didn't like thinking about getting new lungs.

"But it's amazing how fast you feel so much better," she said. "Within a few weeks, I was walking all over, and I could climb stairs. You don't realize how important it is to be able to climb stairs until you can't do it."

She is in the process of writing a letter to her donor family, but she's having trouble doing it.

"I wish I could just talk to them," she said. "It's so hard to write down the words that say what these lungs mean to me."

Simmons, a psychology major, won't be able to go back to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette until spring semester 2012 because she has to be very careful about being with a lot of people and getting sick. When she does go back to college, she will pursue her dream of being a family life specialist, working in hospitals with sick children.

She has already talked to a 14-year-old girl who was in need of a lung transplant, but was scared like she was.

"It's good to be able to show other people how much better I'm doing," she said. "Now, she's had a transplant, too, and she's talking to other people."

Simmons' sister Hannah is in remission from the leukemia now, and her hair is growing back thick and curly.

"She's starting high school, so she wants long hair," Simmons said.

If all goes well, Hannah and their other sister Sarah, 16, will be at Mallorymania on Sunday.

"I hope Jim pulls them up on stage and makes them sing," Simmons said.

Whatever happens as far as the singing is concerned, she won't be mad at Hanley.

"I love Jim," she said. "He's such a good person, and he's helped me so much. I'm going to be friends with him for the rest of my life."

Mallorymania will be Sunday from 12 to 4 p.m. at Southport Hall, 200 Monticello Ave, in Jefferson. Tickets are \$25 for those 18 and older and \$10 for teenagers 13 to 17. Children 12 and under get in free. The event includes music, free food, the Boogie Booth, face-painting and other

activities for kids, a silent and live auction, a raffle and a cash bar. To make a donation, visit Friends in Need and choose Mallorymania.

Sheila Stroup's column appears Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday in Living. Contact her at sstroup@timespicayune.com or 985.898.4831.

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