

## St. Jude's Benefit ~ Back in the Early Days

Written by Mark Edward Wilows  
Monday, 18 October 2004 16:00

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Oh my how you have grown!

[Photo Gallery ~  
Wilows and the Stars in 1993](#)

***At Right: Martha Byrne (Lily, ATWT) with Soapdom's Mark Edward Wilows in 1993 at an early St. Jude's Benefit.***

*Soapdom's Mark Edward Wilows has been a fan of soaps for many moons. In fact, he was one of the very first fans to ever attend the St. Jude's Benefit. It was back in 1993. Martha Byrne (Lily, ATWT) and a few other actors from ATWT, along with a couple from GL, and about 200 fans, gathered in a small room at a small hotel in NYC to rekindle awareness about childhood cancers and the amazing work of St. Jude's hospital in caring for those children.*

*How did one of the first events differ from the 10th Anniversary event held in 2004? Who attended? What star went out of her way to make Wilows dad feel welcome? Read on to learn about the beginnings of what was destined to be an annual event for years to come.*

I like to refer to it as "the event of the year," or the "biggest night for soap opera fans." It's Martha Byrne's (Lily, ATWT) spectacular annual event for St. Jude Children's Hospital held in New York.

St. Jude Children's Hospital is the center for research and treatment of catastrophic diseases in children, primarily pediatric cancers.

Every time the benefit comes up, I'm amazed at how far it has grown and come along with the hottest daytime stars coming in even from the West Coast. In 2004 over 110 stars attended, along with 1000 fans. The celebrities represented all nine soap operas. [2004 Celebrity Attendees.](#)

Back in 1993, however, the only stars in attendance were from As the World Turns and Guiding

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Light. The room had a lot of fans -- around 200-- which was a lot at the time. Most fans were from New York and the Eastern part of the country, but nowhere to the capacity that it fills today with fans coming far and wide.

I can still remember when I attended in 1993. It was the first or second benefit that Martha organized (she is host/organizer) and I saw the hard work and dedication that went into the event. It was like preparing for a Broadway show.

I left my Midwestern roots upon hearing of the event. My family for years had always made a small donation to the St. Jude Children's hospital and I knew the importance behind it. And where else can I see my favorite Oakdale residents assembled in one room.

In the beginning the benefit was held at the Hotel Macklow. (Now it's at the Marriott Marquis.) I stayed at the Hotel Macklow and can remember going down to the so-called "little theater" early that afternoon, and there was Byrne with her staff rehearsing and trying to make everything go off without a hitch.

The evening was magical. The room was filled with great entertainment and the most down to earth stars in attendance. Bryne was brilliant!

She answered fans questions, sang songs, and introduced different stars that performed on stage giving them a chance to break from their character. I can still hear Lisa Brown (ex-Iva) doing a rendition of Give My Regards to Broadway. She brought the house down. There were also some raffle prizes given away. One such raffle was a tour of the ATWT set.

Stars in attendance from As The World Turns were Jon Hensley (Holden), Kelley Menighan Hensley (Emily), Don Hastings (Bob), Greg Watkins (ex-Evan), Paolo Seganti (ex-Damien), Susan Marie Snyder (Julie), Marie Masters (Susan), Ed Fry (ex-Larry) and of course Elizabeth Hubbard (Lucinda). From Guiding Light, Rick Hearst (ex-Alan Michael) and Maureen Garrett (Holly) attended.

One of the most memorable moments involved Elizabeth Hubbard (Lucinda, ATWT). She can

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make quite an entrance. She was running a tad bit late. The show had already begun. When all of a sudden, I heard a gasp from the fans and there was Elizabeth entering in her beautiful red suit, just like she would wear at World Wide (her fictional company). She looked at the fans and motioned for them to "hush" by placing a finger over her lips.

Now, I have an Elizabeth Hubbard memory of my own. She's quite a gal. I engaged in conversation with her and casually mentioned that my dad was upstairs in the room. Dad traveled with me, but didn't want to intrude, or maybe he had gotten cold feet meeting some of his favorite stars. (Dad was 75 years-old at the time). When Hubbard found out he was upstairs, she immediately said "Go get him, or I'm going to go get him down here."

And when Elizabeth Hubbard speaks, you listen! I went and got dad who was in awe on meeting Hubbard. Dad admired her work, but is too shy to say he is a fan. Next thing you know dad and Elizabeth Hubbard were engrossed in conversation, and I see Elizabeth making dad a sandwich! I think dad had died for a moment and gone to heaven. Every year dad (who is now 86) talks about this benefit, and still is one of Oakdale's biggest fans.

Overall, the stars were so cordial. They mixed with the crowd, taking pictures, signing autographs, and just being plain folks for the evening and talking about life in general. Like Susan Masters talking about her daughter attending college in Illinois. Many stars brought their family and introduced them to the fans. Greg Watkins brought his new bride, Paolo Seganti brought his dad, who was a joy to talk to with and listen to his Italian accent. (Seganti is from Milan.)

The event was held in a little room with a few tables, drinks, and sandwiches, but there was this feeling in the air that this benefit is destined to become a big event. And boy has it ever. I wouldn't doubt if in the near future Martha Byrne's St. Jude benefit will turn into a National Telethon. And if anyone can put on a show, it's Martha Byrne! And to think...for such a wonderful cause.

The most recent St. Jude's Benefit in 2004 raised over \$250,000 for the Children's Hospital. [More on this year's event.](#)