



Left: Warren and Gretchan Pyne with their three children at the beach in Wareham in 2000. Right: At the same beach four years later, the death of their daughter, Lulu (below), has left a void.

Losing Lulu

In an instant, a family is shattered.

First of two parts

Saturday, July 14, 2001, was one of those perfect beach days in Truro. The waves glittered against the bluest of skies. As usual, Gretchan and Warren Pyne and their three children were the first to arrive and the last to leave. They built "sand bathtubs," digging trenches and letting the ocean fill them with water. They played paddle ball and frisbee, made sand castles and boogie-boarded. Lulu noticed a little girl on a nearby blanket and asked her to play. Lulu taught her how to chew gum.

What Warren remembers of that outing was the rock. The Pynes had a tradition: Once the cooler was emptied of food and drink, it would be refilled with interesting shells and rocks. As they were leaving the beach, 4-year-old Lulu tagged behind as usual, stopping here and there to get one last treasure. Her father held the overflowing cooler in one hand, his daughter's hand in his other.

"She picked up one about the size of a cantaloupe, and it was brown and in the shape of a heart," says Warren, 40. "I



PYNE FAMILY PHOTO

had to keep the cooler lid open to carry the one." Today it sits on the Pynes' deck.

Here's what Gretchan remembers: Lulu climbing into her lap on the beach, then crawling onto her shoulders. "It was almost like she was trying to get into my skin," says Gretchan. It was sandy and uncomfortable, but her mother didn't mind. "It was so funny and so cute. It felt like she couldn't get enough of me."

At the end of the day, the sea still in their hair, the sand in their swimsuits, the Pynes stopped to get ice cream at Bob's Sub & Cone in Wellfleet. It started to mist, creating a double rainbow. In the parking lot, Lulu licked her ice cream cone and danced around while her father videotaped her. "I remember standing in line and looking at her and thinking, 'I'm never going to forget this moment,'" says Gretchan, 41. "She just looked so beautiful."

Gretchan went into the shop to fetch Lulu's 9-year-old brothers, Drew and Dylan. As they emerged, they saw Lulu step onto the ledge of a metal bicycle rack in the parking lot. They saw her strike what they call her "Vanna White pose,"

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'We all adored her'

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one arm extended upward as if showcasing the rainbows. They saw the unanchored rack flip over onto her body. They saw their father drop his camera and race over to her. As he got to her, she reached up and opened her mouth as if to say something, but no words came out. "It looked as if she was reaching past me to the rainbow," her father says.

The boys and Gretchan ran, too. Gretchan screamed for someone to call 911. Warren tried to resuscitate his motionless daughter. The twins were kneeling beside their mother. In shock, Gretchan grabbed their hands and began to pray.

When the ambulance came, she rode with Lulu. Warren and the boys followed. "Come on, Lulu," her mother begged. "We really need you here." She sang all of her daughter's favorite songs, but in her heart, she knew Lulu could not hear her.



PYNE FAMILY PHOTO

Grief experts will tell you that there is no more searing loss than that of a young child.

"It's the death of your future, the loss of innocence," says Earl Grollman, a rabbi and grief counselor who has written numerous books on the topic. "The death of a child is the wrong chronology; it's not the way it should be. Without any question, for most people there is never closure."

A family is an organic unit; when one part of it dies, the entire infrastructure teeters and can collapse. As little as she was, Lulu filled a large space at the family table. Her death was also the death of the Pyne family as they had known it.

What happens when such a tragedy strikes a family? How do the surviving members go on? What helps and what hurts in their journey back from the brink? The news is filled with stories of children who die, but what happens to the loved ones left behind?

Every day, families all over the world head off for day trips. This is the story of one family of five that set off for a blissful day at the beach and returned a family of four.

The making of the Pyne family began in Davenport, Iowa, in 1985. Every three weeks Warren Pyne would come in to get his hair cut at the Phase III beauty salon. It was just a few blocks from the Palmer College of Chiropractic, where he was studying. The \$8 cut suited his student budget, and the hairstylist suited his fancy.

"I thought she was gorgeous," says Warren, who was 22 at the time.

Gretchan Russell cut his hair every three weeks for the next two years. You can get to know a person pretty well, shampooing and rinsing, snipping and shaping. They'd talk about everything: her boyfriend, his school work, their goals, the Iowa weather.

Warren's fraternity had a 48-room mansion whose parties were legendary at Palmer. He'd never directly ask Gretchan for a date; she had a beau. But he'd say: "Why don't you stop over?" She'd promise to do that, but she never did. She swore she'd never date a Palmer man. She was a townie; those boys were nothing but trouble. "They had a bad reputation of dating Iowa girls and then leaving them behind when they graduated," Gretchan says.

Then she and her boyfriend broke up. Around that time, Warren had to find patients to examine for class. Would Gretchan be willing? She was. He did the basic student exam: palpated her spine and checked to see if her feet and legs were even. Afterward, he invited her back to see the fraternity house. This time she

said yes.

They dated for a year, and when it came time for Warren to graduate, they decided to come back east together. He had grown up in Brockton, graduating in 1981 from Brockton High. The ocean had always been his passion. He spent summers at his parents' cottage in Wareham on Buzzards Bay. He and his friends all had dinghies with engines. They'd harvest and sell quahogs to the neighbors for gas money.

Gretchan and Warren moved into that cottage while each established a practice: She opened her own beauty salon in Matapoisett, he a chiropractic office in Easton. On Sept. 9, 1989, they were married on the grounds of the Kittansett Club in Marion. They were 25 years old.

The next year, they bought a raised ranch in Wareham that came with a beach lot. They could look out the bay windows and see the water. For Gretchan, who never laid eyes on the ocean until she was 21, it was a piece of heaven. For Warren, it was a necessity.

Just three years ago, Gretchan and Warren Pyne felt blessed. They had created their dream family: healthy twin boys and, five years later, a daughter. It hadn't been easy having any of them.

Gretchan was suffering from toxemia during her 16-hour labor with the twins in 1992. They were delivered in an emergency C-section. Afterward, she caught a glimpse of a blueish-gray baby before the nurse exclaimed, "He's not breathing!" and took off with him. Meanwhile, her own blood pressure was crashing.

"I was a wreck for two hours until I got word that she and Dylan were doing OK," says Warren.

After the twins, the couple were not going to have any more children. They had two healthy boys and two businesses to take care of. "Our plate was full," says Gretchan. Warren smiles. "I always wanted to have six kids," he says, "but the twins cured me of that delusion."

Gretchan did not realize she was pregnant again until the end of her first trimester. On July 5, 1997, after 30 hours of labor, Olivia Lynn Pyne was born. "Olivia" means "bringer of peace," but the family nicknamed her Lulu, after Cindy Lou Who, the blond, pigtailed girl in "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." Until the day she died, she firmly believed that the Fourth of July fireworks were meant for her birthday.

Her delivery was even more frightening than that of her brothers. Lulu was born at Jordan Hospital in Plymouth but was rushed to Children's Hospital in Boston after inhaling meconium, a mixture of an infant's first feces and amniotic fluid, causing severe respiratory distress. In the neonatal intensive-care unit, wires and tubes crisscrossed her body. The Pynes were asked what faith they observed and were told their baby probably would not make it. But the hospital had one of the few high-frequency respirators at the time, and after 10 days of treatment she made a complete recovery.

During that pregnancy, Gretchan had sold her beauty salon to stay home. "Warren and I thought someone should be with the kids. It was a financial sacrifice, but how much stuff do you need?" The boys were in school, so she and Lulu had lots of time together. "I am so glad I did that," she says. "I am so grateful I had that time with her."

The Pyne family was in perpetual motion, hiking, camping, boating, and skiing. Every nice weekend, they would drag coolers down to the beach where their boat was moored. They'd motor over to Cuttyhunk or Martha's Vineyard and spend the weekend crabbing, shelling, and kneeboarding. A favorite family vacation was to be dropped off by pontoon boat on a remote island 7 miles off the shores of Lake Umbagog in New Hampshire with their camping gear and food for a week. In winter they'd bareboat charter in the Caribbean. Weekends, it was skiing in Maine. When she was 3, Lulu broke her leg on the slopes. She wore her hot-pink cast like a badge of honor, making everyone sign it.

"She did it all," says her mother. Lulu also had a girly side: She loved to dress up, smear on makeup, paint her fingernails — and, in the process, much of her fingers — and go to the grocery store, clomping down the aisles in her plastic high heels. One of the family's favorite photos shows both Lulus: She's dressed in a purple tutu, firing away at her brothers



PYNE FAMILY PHOTO



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/SUZANNE KREITER

with their plastic semiautomatic. They dubbed her "The Warrior Princess."

When they weren't on the boat, they'd drive down to the Cape. "When we go to the beach, we go to the beach," says Gretchan. "We bring three or four duffels full of all kinds of stuff, and a cooler."

They'd build sand mermaids and fish, bury the boys up to their chests in sand, surf the waves, bring body paints. "We spent all of our time with our kids," says Warren. "And we still do. We don't have that regret."

There was something about Lulu Pyne that drew people to her. She was a beautiful child, with white-blond hair and ocean-blue eyes and unusually long, curly lashes — a miniature of her mother. But it was more than that. Lulu took instantly to people, and they to her. "The harbor master at Menemsha wouldn't let us through unless we had her with us," says her mother. "He'd always say, 'Is Lulu on board?'"

She loved to pick up starfish and crabs. She kissed frogs and chased dragonflies. "She had a flamboyant temperament," says Gretchan. "It was inconceivable to her that someone could be in a bad

mood. She was happy, and rightly so. We all adored her."

In bed at night, her brothers would hear her small voice calling for milk while banging her sippy cup on the wall, and one of them would throw off his covers and fetch it for her. Dylan liked to play rough and tumble with her. Drew would sit and talk sweetly to her. Dylan liked to dress her up. Drew would play Beanie Babies with her; the pink flamingo was her favorite.

"The Beanie Babies would fight over the kingdom," says Drew. "We'd always let her win."

"We spoiled her," adds Dylan.

Good brothers, they never revealed the identities of Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, or the tooth fairy. That last Christmas, they aided and abetted their father in his annual ritual: While Lulu was being tucked in, they took his boots, dipped the bottoms in cornstarch, and made "snow-covered" footprints down the hallway, from the fireplace to the Christmas tree.

Then they went outside, under her window, shaking reindeer bells and throwing pieces of wood against the house to make it sound as though Santa had landed on the roof. "Mama, Santa's

Above: A rainbow emerged moments before Lulu Pyne was crushed by a bike rack at an ice cream shop in Wellfleet. Gretchan Pyne (below and left, with Lulu) says, "I am so grateful I had that time with her."

here!" she exclaimed.

"I'm very glad we let the boys do it," their father says. "Because it was their last chance."

The 35-mile ambulance trip from Bob's Sub & Cone in Wellfleet to Cape Cod Hospital in Hyannis was the longest ride of Gretchan Pyne's life; she prayed, sang, and talked to her daughter the entire time. When they got to the hospital, Dr. Craig Cornwall took over from the paramedics.

Lulu had no pulse when she arrived. Still, Cornwall labored over her as Gretchan sat holding her limp hand. It was, he would later recall, the most devastating night of his career; he had three young girls of his own at home. As he worked, he talked Gretchan through it all, telling her every step he was taking.

"You know when you're not going to have a good outcome," says the emergency-room doctor. "But when they're young, you try harder. It helps the family to know that you are working, so they don't think you've given up."

But by the time Warren arrived with Drew and Dylan, Cornwall had given up. Lulu's chest and trachea had been crushed by the bike rack; she had died almost instantly. An autopsy would later show that her heart had been severed. In a terrible irony, the happy-go-lucky girl, the darling of the family, had literally died of a broken heart, mint chocolate chip ice cream still on her mouth.

Cornwall turned his attention to her parents.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "She's gone."

Tomorrow: Life after Lulu