

RIK LAMKINS



1947 - 2002

Richard Stanley Lamkins was born in Malvern, Arkansas on January 23, 1947. He had to fight for life from the start. A so-called "blue baby"; the cause of his physical problems wasn't discovered until he was three years old. The doctors at Arkansas Children's Hospital determined that he had a congenital heart defect. Specifically, the wall separating the two upper chambers of his heart was inadequately developed - called atrial septum defect. It is a condition usually associated with Down's Syndrome and mental retardation. Rik was the second case known that had the heart defect with none of the other Down Syndrome effects.

All the years of his youth he suffered from heart problems. One Christmas he got gifts early because the folks weren't sure he would make it to the 25th. Another year the kids at school gave him gifts because he wasn't expected to see another Christmas. When the Holidays came round, some of the kids wanted their gifts back because Rik was still alive.

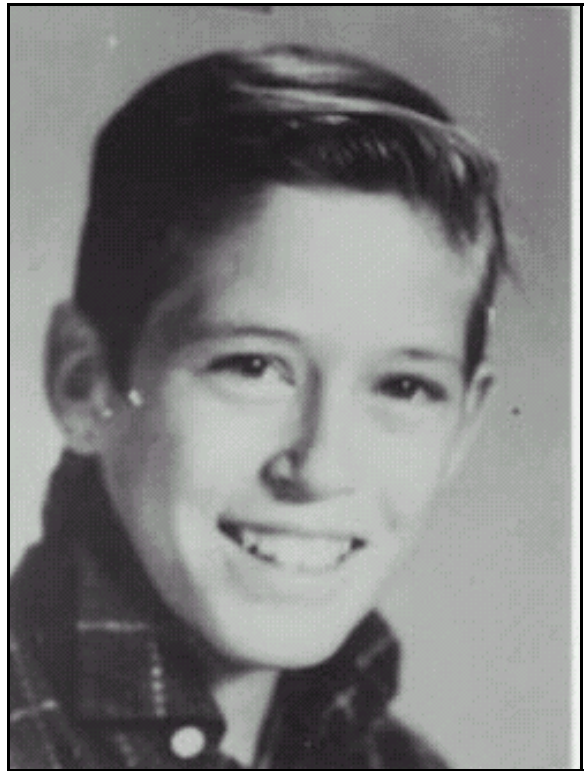
Rik lived in North Malvern on Short Street (later re-named Harris) until 1956. Then for the next five years there was quite a bit of moving around. He lived in Wichita, St. Louis, Memphis, Charleton and El Dorado at various times. By 1961 Rik was 14 years old and was living with his mother in Hot Springs and he stayed in that area for the rest of his life with the exception of short periods in Malvern and Fayetteville.



7 year old Rik (L) in 1954 with brother Link in front of Uncle Elgin's house in North Malvern.



Jewel Lamkins with sons Rik, Link and Jake in 1948



Taken in 1959 when Rik was a "cool" 12 year old in Memphis

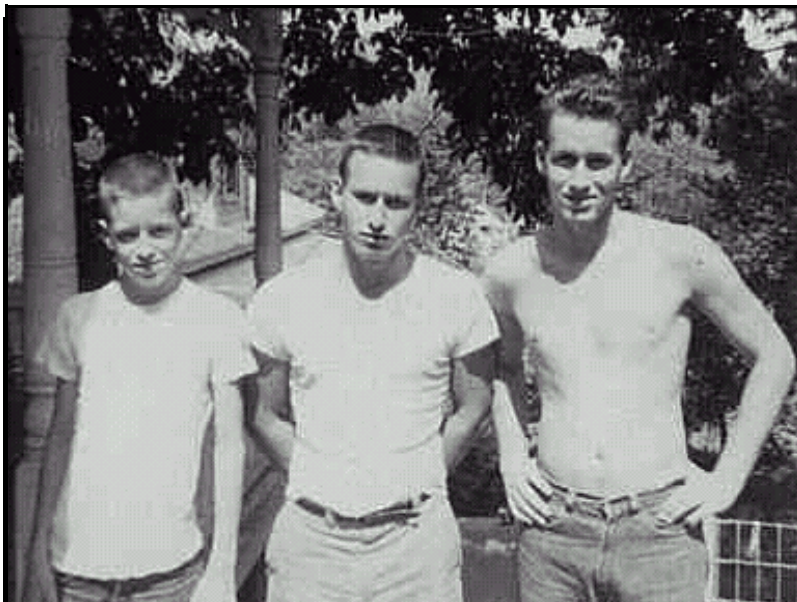
outing. Rik came along. The two couples were out quite a distance from the shore having a water fight.

Rik felt left out so he swam underwater from the shore and came up under one of the girls, getting a handful of her crotch on his way to the surface. The girl gave a scream about "someone's hand", started trying to hit either Link or Jake, when suddenly Rik shot up to the surface with his face all purple (it always got that way when he was in the water) and gasping for air.

It was hard to believe he swam that far underwater.

He always maintained it was an accident he grabbed the girl - he was just trying to surface he said.

Anyway, he was nicknamed "Rik The Hand" after that.



Rik, Link and Jake in Hot Springs July, 1961. He became known amongst us as "Rik The Hand" that Summer

When Rik turned 15 in 1962 he started a major growth spurt and was 6'6" by the time it ended a few years later. He would be the tallest in the family.

His health seemed to stabilize for the next five years and he held a variety of jobs in Hot Springs, Malvern and Fayetteville during those years. He was once stranded in Wichita when he was selling magazines and hitched to Fayetteville. He was 18 then. Later he worked at Campbell Soup.

Another time he worked for a hatchery in Hot Springs but finally

quit because he had to kill his "kids" at the end of the shift. The "kids" were baby chicks that fell on the floor throughout the day and followed the workers around after they imprinted on them.

By 1968 he was working for a roofing contractor. On June 10th his crew was enroute to a job in a pickup truck pulling a hot asphalt tar trailer. Rik was riding in the back of the pickup as the cab was full with the rest of the crew. They were rear-ended by another car which caused the pickup and trailer to flip. The hot asphalt covered part of Rik's body.

Dorothy remembers, "Rik was taken to the ICU at the hospital in Pine Bluff. Chuck drove me over there and I spent the next 3 days and nights all by myself with Rik. The nurses would let me stay in the room all night with him. There I was, 18 years old, no money, green as a gourd....doing the best I could. Heard the doctors talking about maybe having to amputate his left hand.....they had his hands and arms in mineral oil that was in bags that went all the way up to his underarms. His fingers were glued together with the asphalt.

He was sent to the burn unit at University Hospital and stayed there 3 months. My mother would take me over there every Saturday morning and come pick me up every Sunday afternoon.

One time while I was in the room with him - he told me something was wrong - get a doctor...then, he just stopped breathing. I run out in the



On Central Avenue in Hot Springs, 1962

hallway yelling "doctors, nurses, doctors, nurses" and they come running (of course I couldn't go back in) and Rik said he come to with a doc sitting in the middle of his chest. They had "over-loaded" him with fluid because of the burns, but his heart couldn't handle all the fluid.

I remember he wanted to take the shots of Demerol before debriement because, as he said, "he could be out of pain for a little while" because after the debriement, the shots wouldn't touch the pain.

He became addicted to the pain medication. They had to keep him two extra weeks just to get him off the Demerol.

My mother brought him home - he was terrified of being in a vehicle, but he trusted my mom's driving - especially because she drove slow."

Debriement was the procedure to remove the coagulated asphalt from Rik's body. An electric brush was used which took the tar and first layers of skin off. It had to be done to prevent infection. It caused horrible pain and was enough to kill most folks.

Afterwards he was treated for the burns by sitting him on a stool and pouring the medicine over him. The floor was covered with cardboard to absorb the runoff. It turned Rik's skin very black.

The scarring on his back, sides and arm were widespread and he never went swimming again without wearing a shirt to cover them

By 1969 he was recovered and seemingly in the best health of his life. He was full of energy and weighed nearly 220 lbs. It was



Rik and Dorothy were married in Hot Springs on 1/24/69

a miraculous turnabout but the accident would cause more trouble later in an unexpected place.



Rik & MG in 1972



Rik, in front, with Mom, Dave, Link & Steve in 1971



Steve, Link, Rik & their dad in 1971



Rik & Dorothy, 1972

In 1963 he had met Dorothy Clark who was 14 then. They dated off and on for awhile then got serious and were married the day after Rik's 22nd birthday in 1969. They were very happy, had a house in Malvern and Rik got a motorcycle that summer. Later he bought an MG

which he dearly loved - when it would run!

In early 1971 Rik was told he would never see 30 unless he got his heart fixed. Medical technology had progressed to the point that it was probable he would survive the operation. It took place in September at the University Medical Center in Little Rock. A teflon patch was put on the heart wall to close the hole. Everything went well and he made a speedy and full recovery. He enjoyed good health until 1975.

It was when he was having trouble with his MG that Rik had a run-in of sorts with Byron De La Beckwith who was infamous for his involvement in the Medgar Evers murder. Rik was on the side of the road in Malvern working on the cantankerous MG when a car driving by stopped and a man leaned out saying, "You know why you're having trouble?" Rik, somewhat irritated, said, "No! Why?" And the man replied, "Because you're a communist for driving that car, that's why", and then drove off. Rik knew he looked familiar and identified him from a newspaper photo. He never found out why Beckwith was in Malvern that summer day in 1972.



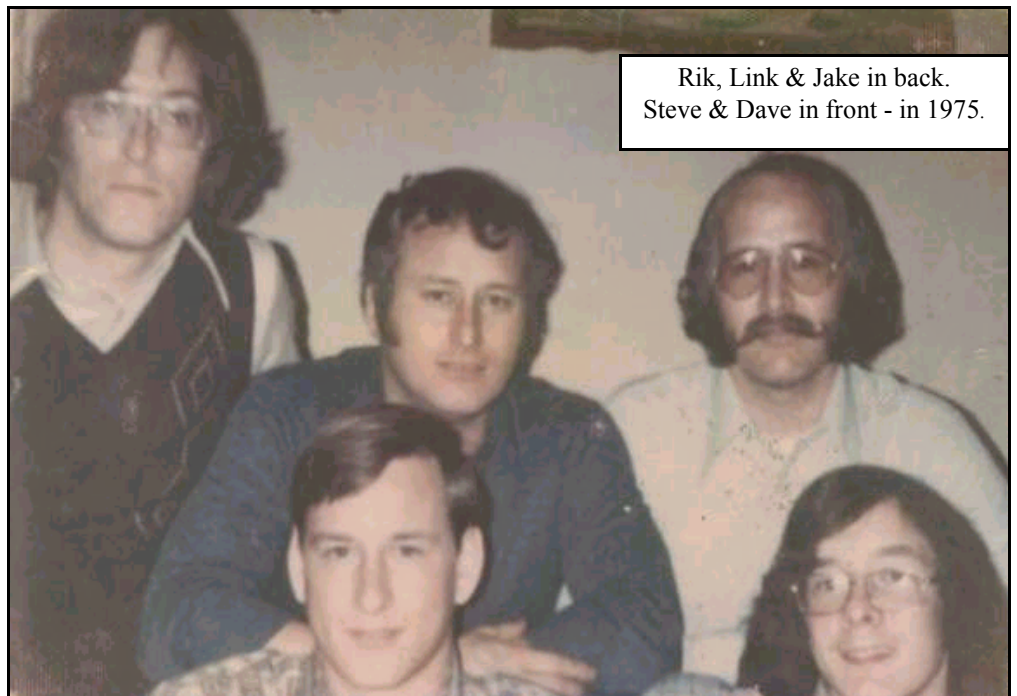
Rik & Dave with Pretzel in 1973

In December, 1972 Rik took off on a backpacking vacation in Europe with his brother Jake. They were gone 5 weeks and rode trains throughout the continent - ranging from Denmark to Spain to Italy. It was a tremendous trip for both of them and was fondly remembered at numerous family gathering for years afterwards. Jake kept a journal of the trip and Rik had a copy of it that he often checked to recall names & incidents.

Rik spoke no foreign language but within a fairly short time he was proficient in sign language. However, he was totally lost the day in Marseilles, France when a little lady in black came up to him jabbering away, grabbed his arm, smacked it and grabbed the other arm, checked his watch for the time and was on her way - still jabbering! The look on Rik's face was hilarious.

He was quite put out with French toilet paper. It was the texture of wax paper and Rik often commented about how "I know now why those Frenchmen walk the way they do!"

Another time, on the train, the two were working on the gin rummy game they played the entire trip. A German businessman



Rik, Link & Jake in back.
Steve & Dave in front - in 1975.



Steve & Rik, 1978

was in the same compartment. Finally he could stand it no longer and asked, "Is it English that you are speaking? It sounds like English, which I speak, but I cannot understand what you are saying." Rik tried to explain what a southern accent was but it only confused the German.

His favorite place was Amsterdam where the walking was great. So much of the city was 100s of years old and everything was remarkably clean. Also, most folks spoke English which was handy. But the elderly gentle-

man who ran the small hotel where they stayed did not speak English. Rik & Jake got by with sign language mostly. One day as they were going out he had the TV on and there was a KLM Airline commercial being aired. It showed a shot of their newest 747 jet which was prominently named Beethoven. The old man pointed at the jet and said Ta Ta Tuh Dum, imitating Beethoven's famous symphony. Music! The international language! They understood him immediately.

Rik & Jake returned to Fayetteville in January. There had been a snow-storm and his MG was buried in a snowdrift. It had to be dug out. What a welcome home!

In 1975 Rik started having pain in his hip and leg. After lengthy medical exams it was determined he had a bad disc in his back. It turned out his back had been broken in the 1968 accident but it was not diagnosed and had healed back on its own. Now the disc had to be repaired.

So, Rik was operated on again. The doctors took part of his hip & fixed the disc. He never had back trouble again so they did a good job.

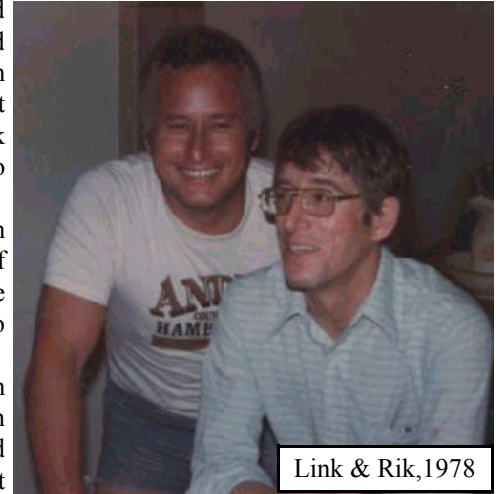
Beginning in 1978 his health began a steady decline and in August, 1980 he had his second open heart surgery. Again, it was at the University Medical Center in Little Rock. This time they implanted a pig valve and replaced the patch in his heart wall which had badly deteriorated. The operation didn't go well at all. There were numerous problems and the doctors had to re-open his chest to stop post-operative bleeding. The metal stitches that closed his sternum weren't snipped short enough and protruded thru his skin causing pain and irritation. That had to be re-done.

There was no remarkable recovery this time. Rik was never 100% again.

Rik needed some minor surgery done in February, 1990. His heart doctor okayed getting off his blood thinner medication for it. On February 22 he had a stroke at home. It partially paralyzed his left side and he never recovered much use of his left arm. But he fought back, did all his therapy and recovered his mobility. He even got re-certified to drive a car.

His heart was still causing problems and he took many medicines to keep going. In the Summer of 1991 he spent several weeks at University Hospital having tests done. The doctors decided another open heart operation was not worth the risk. Most pig valves are worn out in 10 years or so. Rik would use his 21 years.

By 2000 Rik was getting in such bad shape that he knew something had to be done. He had become pretty much housebound by then. The third open heart surgery was scheduled because the pig valve was about to completely stop working. There was no choice now. It was done April 18, 2001 in Hot



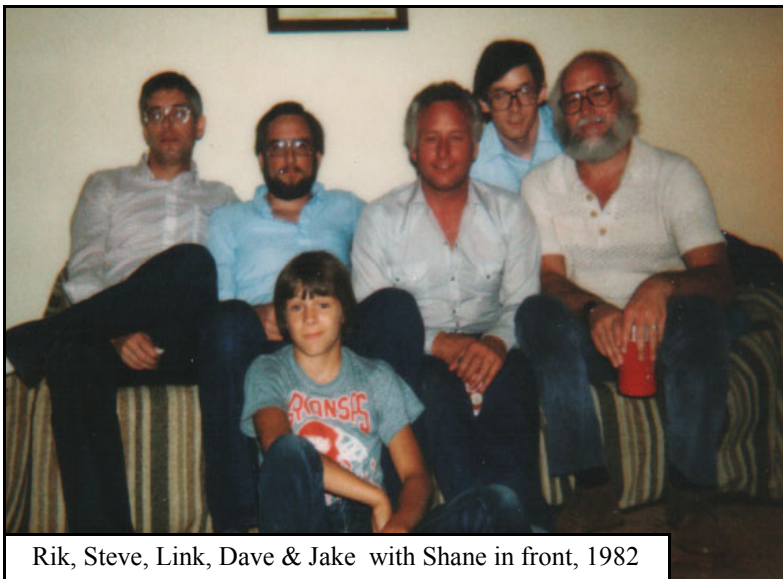
Link & Rik, 1978



Steve, Rik, Dad, Jake & Link - Thanksgiving 1980



Rik & Link, 1980



Rik, Steve, Link, Dave & Jake with Shane in front, 1982

Springs. An artificial valve replaced the old pig valve. The operation took over 12 hours. Half that time was spent just getting thru the chest cavity and old scar tissue. Afterwards the DR was



Rik & Link, 1985

optimistic but did note there was a lot of damage. Rik never really recovered. There were all sorts of problems.



Rik & Mom, 1987

Finally, he was admitted to St. Joseph's Hospital in January, 2002. Rik fought til the end but his body and heart just gave out. He died at 11:45pm on January 12th, 2002.

He didn't want a funeral and asked for his ashes to be scattered on Lake Ouachita at his fa-

vorite fishing hole. On January 13th about a dozen of his immediate family gathered at his favorite restaurant, The Panda, to remember him. Rik's fortune cookie read, "Someone is speaking well of you".

While Rik's health was a dominant factor in his life, it was not something he talked much about. He never felt sorry for himself and found it much more interesting to talk about politics, history, movies, music, his pets and other aspects of life. He was highly intelligent with a keen memory and a wicked sense of humor.

He made a life for himself with Dorothy and his family in spite of all his physical problems. Rik displayed an uncommon courage meeting everyday challenges throughout his life that inspired all who knew him. He is greatly missed.



Rik, Alfie & Dorothy, 1988

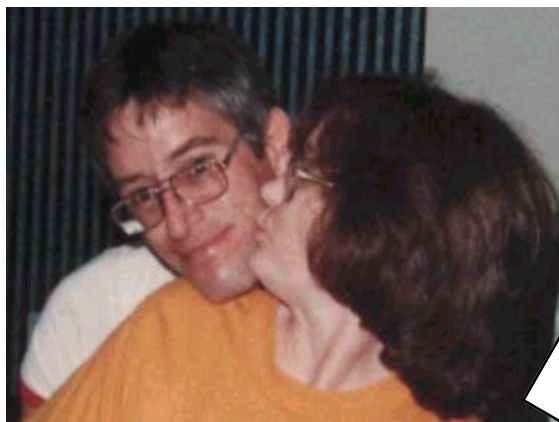


Rik, Alfie & Dorothy, 1988

Sorry about the Sock Daddy



Alfie & Rik, 1988



38 years together!



Rik & Link, 1992



Rik, Dave, Link & Jake, 1995



Fraz the Cat helps Rik get some rest late in 2001



Miss Me – But Let Me Go

When I come to the end of the road
And the sun has set for me
I want no rites in a gloom filled room
Why cry for a soul set free?

Miss Me a Little – But Not Too Long
And not with your head bowed low
Remember the love that we once shared
Miss Me – But Let Me Go.

For this is a journey that we all must take
And each must go alone
It's all part of the Master's plan
A step on the road to home.

When you are lonely and sick of heart
Go to the friends we know
And bury your sorrow in doing good deeds.
Miss Me – But Let Me Go.

RIK LAMKINS



In quiet moments,
there you are.
My heart cries
and tears flow
from my eyes.
Your presence
is haunting -
My loss is great,
no more will I feel
your embrace.
I sit and hold what
little remains of
a body that was so
wracked with pain.
but,
I know in my
heart that while
I sit and cry...that
you are communing
with the "most high!"
Let the heart that weeps
within this flesh,
find peace
in your final rest.
I miss you,
oh - I miss you,
and, as long as
I draw breath,
my heart will sing
just because
I knew you best!

-Dorothy Lamkins

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