

Olivia Chambers

By Jeannette Doud

"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. Ev'ry where I go, I'm gonna let it shine." Olivia Ann Chambers' light touched the hearts of everyone she met in her short life of 11 years. She was born January 3, 1997, one of six children of Jody and Mark Chambers. Early in her childhood, she suffered from an undiagnosed rare neuromuscular disease, which never hindered her radiant smile, precious personality, and courageous will to live. She was truly an inspiration. On Thursday, January 10, she died at her home on Mackinac Island, surrounded by her loving family. The care and devotion that Olivia received from her parents, brothers, sisters, and two faithful friends, Annabelle and Charlie, was exceptional. The entire community gave wonderful support to this very special little girl.

She attended the Mackinac Island Public School, where she arrived each day in her special wheelchair and was greeted

warmly by her friend, Mike Bradley, head custodian. She loved school and being with all of her friends.

Father Rey Garcia, pastor at Ste. Anne's, was a shining star in Olivia's life. He would often visit her beside, playing his guitar and singing to her. Olivia could not speak, but she was able to call him "Pa."

One year at Christmas Eve Mass, Fr. Jim Williams invited Olivia to carry the Christ Child to the manager. She was escorted by her brother, Robert, in her wheelchair. Rest assured there was not a dry eye in the church on that holy night.

Let us not forget Olivia's constant companion, her 11-year-old tiger cat named "Tigger" that seldom left her side. Her little hand would always pat his head and he gave her much comfort.

On Monday, January 14, family and friends gathered at the Chambers home at Stonecliffe, where a wake service was held for Olivia, who was sur-

rounded by beautiful flowers. At 7 p.m., Fr. Jim Williams offered prayers. Outside the home, in remembrance of Olivia, the family built a beautiful snow angel, which sparkled in the sunlight.

Fr. Williams, assisted by Deacon Don Olmstead of St. Ignace, was celebrant of the Mass offered for Olivia Tuesday, January 15. The church was overflowing with family and friends who came from far and near to pay their last respects. Pianist John Kissane and choir members provided beautiful music. Olivia was eulogized by her sister, Emma, her aunt, Linda McKee, and Fr. Williams as a teacher who loved the simple things in life and taught everyone patience, love, and courage. In the spring, she was thrilled to hold a dandelion, to go for a bicycle ride with her parents, and to watch a movie with her little sister, Clara. As the family left the church, the choir concluded the service by singing "On Eagle's Wings."

Mackinac was never so mag-

nificent with the first big snowfall of the season. Riding through the wooded area, we saw the tree branches hung low under the weight of the fresh snow and the sky was a brilliant blue as Olivia was taken to her final resting place by a Mackinac horse and sled, escorted by her pallbearers, her brothers, Richard and Robert, her cousin, David Johnson, and a special friend, Mike Bradley. She was placed in Ste. Anne's cemetery next to her beloved grandfather, Patrick W. Chambers, as more than 75 people attended Fr. Jim's final blessing. May she rest in peace.

Olivia is survived by her parents, Mark and Jody, two broth-

ers, Richard and Robert, three sisters, Emma, Maggie, and Clara, a grandmother, Joyce Chambers, a grandfather, Richard Johnson, other members of the Johnson and Chambers families, and Aunt Jeannette and Margaret Doud.

A luncheon followed in the Community Hall.

Memorials may be made to the Olivia Chambers Fund at the Mackinac Island Community Foundation.

To Olivia,

There are those whose lives remind us

Of the sunset's warming glow.

*They leave a touch of glory
Lingering after they go.*

"Angels on Earth"

By Aunt Linda McKee

An ice-storm, a noreaster
To Cheboygan is no stranger,
For on January 3, 1997
There was no sense of real danger.

At 3:30 p.m. sharp
As the north winds whipped and unfurled,
A 7 lb. 7 oz. sweet little baby
Gently drifted into this world.

Olivia Ann Chambers
Was just starting to open her eyes,
A beautiful name, a beautiful baby
To the Chambers family...the 5th surprise?

As Jody brought Olivia to her new home
Slipping and sliding across the ice,
Safe into the arms of 2 brothers, 2 sisters
2 dogs, 2 cats, 1 bird, and probably
some mice.

Olivia had no idea what a loving home
Was going to be her 10 year nest,
For life was about to change this day
And all would be put to the test.

Oh, we all know the story of Olivia
For some reason she failed to thrive,
But for a more important reason
For 11 years she touched our lives.

I am confident everybody in this room
Has a favorite Olivia story to tell,
And as I know from living her once
You all weave a tale quite well.

But as I reflect back since I met this gal
I have a true confession to make,
For the longer she lived and the more
she fought
I had to admit my own mistake.

You see, I thought that true Angels
Were confined to Heaven above,
But the more I got to know Olivia
I realized she was an Earth Angel of love.

An Angel on Earth, how could that be?
No halo or white feathery wings,
But for all who spent time with Olivia
Her angelic powers pulled on your heart-
strings.

Amazing for a child without a voice
She could get a point across with her eyes,
And for a child who could not walk
She traveled a great deal to my surprise.

Olivia had this soft aura about her
A calming child to be around,
Like an Angel, she innocently wiggled into
your heart
Without even making a sound.

This tiny Earth Angel of Mackinac Island
So beautiful for all to see,

Always clean and impeccably dressed
Just another member of her proud family.

Her golden hair is a trademark
Always styled for the upcoming day,
Pigtails, headbands, perhaps a French twist
A ponytail or a smart checkered beret.

She sat so erect and peaceful
And her smile could light up a room,
What was it about little Olivia
That could erase any feelings of gloom?

You see, I believe we have all been blessed
By just knowing this one little girl,
And I also believe that she taught me
That Angels do exist in our world.

But right now, for an answer please
Of her death I must make sense,
How can we let her just slip away?
How can we go on without her presence?

I think, perhaps, the only way I can cope
As my heart breaks for I'm so sad,
Is to remember where Olivia is right now
In a world that she never had.

For now she runs, she skips
She laughs, she leaps across a stream,
For all those years she watched other
children play
Trapped in a body that could only dream.

Dream of a life that she has now
She's talking, she's shouting, she's singing,
Eating sugary cotton candy, sipping cold
lemonade
Perhaps splashing in a cool water spring.

Yes, that is what an Angel does
They first touch our souls and hearts,
Then one day God says, "You've done
your job."
And sadly they must quietly depart.

So thank you God for giving us
An Angel on Earth for 11 years,
I will finish this poem with blurry eyes
As I fight back a flood of tears.

And I thank all of you for taking part
For all you did in this brief time,
I know how much the Chambers appreciate
all of you
A more loving community Olivia never
could find.

So this is how I'll end my poem
For what this short ballad is worth,
Olivia Ann Chambers has earned her wings
Since she first was an Angel on Earth.

**Dedicated to Olivia Ann Chambers
In Honor of her family
By Aunt Linda**

My Sister, My Angel

By Emma Chambers

The first thing I did when I chose to write this talk was I made a list of all the words that reminded me of Olivia. Honestly, this list went on and on. I actually had to cut myself off because I could have gone on forever. After I finished, I looked at my long list and laughed to myself. How can someone so simple like my sister, Olivia, have so many words to describe her?

We all know Olivia never said too much. Actually the only words I have heard her say in the past two years was "pa" when referring to Father Rey, and "momma" is what she would scream out at night when she needed to be readjusted while lying in her bed. So I looked at my list and I went through each word and thought about why I saw this trait in her. I picked out three words that I felt represented my sister the best - happy, inspiring, and strong.

So I first chose happy, and that word can mean so many different things. Someone could be happy they bought a new car, or happy they did well on a test, but when I think of Olivia and happy, it means so much more. She wasn't just happy about a material thing, she was happy to be in this world. Not one of us in this entire church has experienced what Olivia has. Honestly, if I had to go through some of the things she did, I don't think I could have been as happy as she always was. No matter how many trips to the doctors or how many times she was poked with needles, this child was never unhappy. And who couldn't tell, because her amazing smile never went away.

I was remembering all the times that Livvy had to go to the doctors, and there was one specific time that really stood out in my memory. I was a senior in high school, and it was about 7:00 in the evening, when my mom decided that the flu Olivia had at the time was serious enough to take her to the hospital. So we packed all of our things and called up pilot Paul Fullerton, who was always willing to do anything for Olivia and my family, and we flew over right away. Then Olivia, my mom, and I drove to Traverse City. I sat in the back seat with her as she went in and out of sleep, and when we finally arrived, the doctors ushered her in. They did what they had to do, and right when Olivia started to regain consciousness, I walked into the hospital room and you know the first thing I saw was? Olivia's huge smile. Even at near death experiences, and up until the day she went to the Lord, this child was never unhappy. She was just so grateful to be part of this world. She loved her life, and anyone who looked at her could tell.

The second word I saw in Olivia was inspiring. Olivia makes an impact on everyone she meets. She inspires people and changes lives. People will look at this beautiful girl, hear her story, and they will never forget her. She inspired this community in ways I am just now realizing. Like when Jim Pettit screams "Olivia" from his big dray as she passes him on her carriage to school everyday, or when she pointed to her forehead, Mike Bradley would give her a kiss in that exact spot. For my sister, who never says a word or asks for anything, she inspires people to show their love and kindness. As I reflected last night, I was overjoyed with the love that filled our home all day yesterday. With all of our differences, we became one family. Olivia did that. A girl with no words. Even now that she is gone, she will still inspire our community every day.

The last word is strong. I have learned so much in the 11 years Olivia was alive, and this is something I think about all the time. How could someone who couldn't speak, couldn't walk, or who couldn't even eat, teach me so much? I realized I learned it all from watching her be strong, since she was first diagnosed until the day she passed.

Livvy loved to scare us. When she had the flu, she had it the worst, or when she broke her leg, of course, she was put in a full-leg cast, but no matter how sick she was, or how close she came to dying, she always pulled through. As soon as she felt better, she acted as if nothing happened. She went back to school; she played on her computer, and just continued on with her very simple life. Nothing affected her. For someone so small and fragile, she is the strongest individual I have ever seen, or ever will see.

I am so blessed to be one of many who have experienced life with Olivia in it. My life would not be the same; I would not be the same person. For 11 amazing years, she has taught me things I could never have learned at school. She showed me how wonderful life is. She made me see that there are many worse problems one could have than the small petty ones that I sometimes dwell on. Olivia was put on this earth to teach me, all of you, and anyone who she encountered, that life is way too important and meaningful to ever take it for granted. And she never once did. She was just happy to be alive. I couldn't really understand why God would choose this beautiful young girl to go through all the things she had to, and I see now exactly why. She was born to teach all of us, and she did an amazing job at it. I am so thankful to be touched by this angel, and that is exactly what she is. If anyone deserves that position in heaven, it is my happy, inspiring, strong sister, Olivia.

