

Lana Rush's daughter Lily unexpectedly stopped speaking when she was about 18 months old



"Ryan finally looked me in the eye and asked me if I thought Lily was regressing. Clearly, we had both noticed it, and it was time to face it."

-Lana Rush

A Mother's Connection

Photo by Heidi Doe

Lana Rush learns the language of love isn't always spoken when her youngest daughter Lily inexplicably loses the ability to speak

Written by Kelly Boldt

Lana Rush and her husband, Ryan, are the proud parents of three daughters: Ryley, 21, Reagan, 18, and Lily, 8. When Lily was born, the Rush family took her home and expected to start the familiar task of caring for an infant. But at 5 days old, Lily stopped breathing.

Clinging to Life

They rushed her to the hospital where it was discovered that Lily had a Ventricular Septal Defect (VSD), more commonly known as a hole in the heart. The family lived in Austin at the time, but came to Houston's Texas Children's Hospital to have the necessary surgery.

Ryan recalls, "I remember walking into the intensive care unit after Lily's open-heart surgery for the first time and viewing our little girl clinging to life. She was surrounded by monitors and tubes and breathing machines."

Lily was unconscious and unaware of her father's presence. "But then Lana walked in the room, she leaned down, kissed Lily gently, and whispered that she loved her," shares Ryan. "The monitors began to report that Lily's heart rate elevated with no explanation but that the presence of her mom had made a tangible impact. That moment really encapsulates what Lana has meant to Lily, and Lily to Lana, on this journey."

Heartbreaking Silence

Soon, other physical issues were uncovered, but the hope was that fixing her heart would take care of those as well. "We spent so much time in the hospital during her first few months, it was like we lived there," Lana recalls. "Lily rolled over for the first time in a hospital bed."

After surgery, Lily immediately started showing improvement. She started walking, talking, and responding when they read her books. "She used to walk into the church nursery and greet everyone with a bubbly, 'Hey there!'"

Things were definitely looking up. "At 18 months, I noticed that she seemed a little less engaged," Lana recalls. "I am definitely not a person who lives in denial, but I tried not to acknowledge

what I thought might be happening. One night in the kitchen, Ryan finally looked me in the eye and asked me if I thought Lily was regressing. Clearly, we had both noticed it, and it was time to face it." Not long after that, Lily unexpectedly stopped speaking and hasn't spoken since.

Becoming Lily's Advocate

Lana not only continued to nurture her daughter's special needs, but she became more determined than ever to find out what was wrong. "I am a researcher," explains Lana, "I jumped on the internet. I was going to find out what was wrong and find the best doctors to help us."

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- Lana Rush

The next several years became a roller coaster as they met with doctors around the country in search of answers. Although there is some definitive information now, learning is still a very important part of their lives. "We love her exactly the way she is, but I need to feel like we've done everything we possibly can to help her," Lana says. "It's hard finding that balance. I don't want to miss breaking news because I've stopped looking."

Our Miracle

Today, Lily attends Arbor School in Houston. "They love Lily, and that is what a mother needs when trusting the care of her special child to someone else."

Photo by Layla Zakaria



Lana Rush says her daughter Lily is the family's miracle

"Being Lily's mom has taught me not to major on the minors," Lana describes. "She has taught me what things aren't important. We have learned to celebrate the smallest victories. Some days I have to choose to keep going even though I'm not getting anything in return. I don't get to hear 'Thanks, mom,' 'Can we go outside?' or 'I love you.' There's no doubt that she loves us, but she hasn't said it to me in almost eight years." Lana and her husband Ryan, who is the senior pastor at Kingsland Baptist Church in Katy, compare it to God's love for us. "God loves us despite the fact that we don't always tell him we love Him back," explains Lana. "We know that Lily is not our 'sick' child; she is our miracle."

Since moving to Katy last June, Lana has found many things she enjoys about the area. "I have found that there are so many resources in the Katy area for our family. You can be looking for a specific club, therapy, or medical service and chances are good you'll find something to meet your needs. The people here have been very warm and welcoming to our family - all of us." **KM**

KELLY BOLDT is a Katy mom and freelance writer who loves to share stories of people doing amazing things.



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Ryan and Lana with their three daughters, Reagan, Lily, and Ryley



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