

Lisa Kern Hannon - January 11, 1970 - May 3, 1994



Lisa Hannon was born into a family where international service and adventure were the norm. She grew up in Virginia, Montana, Belgium, England, Russia, Tanzania and Kenya. She interned for the State Department, taught school for a year in a desert region in northwest Kenya, picked peaches in France, worked as a photographer in Belgium, winterized a log cabin in Montana, worked with the handicapped in Virginia and established Peregrine falcon wilderness release sites in Oregon and Idaho.

Lisa attended the University of Virginia where she majored in international relations and English literature. While in college, she joined the Blue Ridge Mountain Rescue Group, a member group of the Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference (ASRC), where she served as the equipment officer, incident staff training officer, ASRC Board of Directors representative and preventative search officer, which included her active involvement in coordinating the Hug-A-Tree program that teaches children how to survive and be found if lost in the woods. Operationally, Lisa rose through the field and management ranks to become an ASRC and VA state incident commander, the highest certification possible in the ASRC and VA state search and rescue program. She was one of two female ICs in the ASRC at the time. She was a certified VA emergency medical technician and member of

the Scottsville, Virginia, Rescue Squad, serving on a regular weekday night crew. Lisa graduated UVA in December 1993 and began working part-time while looking for a job in the area of international aid and development. During the Spring of 1994, she trained and was certified in April as an Outward Bound instructor in order to fine tune her group leadership and mentoring skills and help others through outdoor experiential education.

On Monday May 2, 1994, the West Virginia State Police called the Virginia Department of Emergency Services to request assistance with a 3-day old massive search for a five-year-old boy Victor Shoemaker lost in the mountains of Hampshire County near the town of Kirby. Lisa responded as the initial IC for Virginia and the state liaison for all VA SAR resources. She was to be the highest SAR trained and most experienced SAR person on-site. However, she would have to figure out the political and command structure of the mission and determine in what role she or others from VA could help. That night, Lisa together with the other search managers successfully established an incident command system organization under a single IC, Lisa, for mission coordination. As someone later recalled, when she arrived on scene and began to organize the effort, a calm began to settle on the search base. When her relieving ICs arrived, John Panches-ASRC-SWVMRG, and Dave Carter ASRC-TSAR, they found a well-organized search operation.

Lisa left the mission base on a bright clear morning about 8am to make it back to the DC area in time for her afternoon job, since a fellow co-worker had taken her original morning shift. While driving along US Route 50 about 20 minutes after leaving base, she is believed to have fallen asleep, her truck striking a tree at full speed, killing her instantly. Lisa was 24 years old. She died in the line of duty, the first such death in the Virginia search and rescue program.

Unfortunately, the search for the little boy was ultimately suspended May 5th, with limited continuing search operations the weekends of May 7-8, and May 14-15. Police continued the investigation into the possibility of foul play. The search incident involved over 1,000 people in 29 SAR, police, fire, and rescue organizations, expending at least 40,000 man hours. As of May 2005, he is still listed as missing. He is listed with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, http://www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/PubCaseSearchServlet?act=viewPoster&caseNum=790164&orgPrefix=NCCMC&searchLang=en_US

Lisa's keen intellect, her exuberant personality and her boundless energy were an inspiration to all of us. We are left with an emptiness and an inspiration. Her spirit remains with us as we continue the tradition of service and dedication so "that others might live."

A 501(c)3 tax exempt fund, The Lisa Hannon Fund, was established in Lisa's memory and continues to operate. An independent committee oversees this fund and gives a Lisa Hannon Fund Memorial Award using a portion of the interest to members of BRMRG, ASRC or others in the SAR community. On years when an interest award is available, a solicitation for applicants is made and the award given by the committee. The fund is administered by the BRMRG Finance Officer (contact at <http://www.brmsg.net>).

She was also awarded the NASAR service award posthumously at the 1995 NASAR convention in Nashville TN. At the 1995 National EMS Memorial Service she was added to the Tree of Life in the "To The Rescue" national EMS museum in Roanoke VA, see <http://www.nemsms.org/honorees/hannlk95.htm>.

The Virginia Search and Rescue Council also established the Lisa Hannon Service Award to recognize members of the SAR community who have made outstanding contributions (<http://vasarco.fovfr.org>).

Several efforts by the ASRC and VA SAR community were organized as a result of her death to help avoid future accidents and address the risks faced by SAR volunteers:

1.) Robert Koester, also an ASRC IC, developed and conducted a fatigue survey for ASRC members and others in the SAR community. This survey was given to hundreds of SAR incident participants to measure their sleep history prior to the incident, duties on-scene, perceived fatigue at the time they left the incident, and then the reality of that fatigue after they arrived home. After a year of data collection and analysis, he presented the results to the ASRC, to the VA SAR Council, and to the national SAR community at the 1997 Richmond NASAR conference. These results showed the prevalence of fatigue in SAR personnel which led to new training and changes in operations and administrative procedures in ASRC. Mr. Koester developed a fatigue awareness training module that was integrated into state training standards. He has incorporated this and further research as a training program to help all emergency services providers, an instructor book "Fatigue: Sleep Management During Disasters and Sustained Operations" available here (<http://www.dbs-sar.com>).

2.) To reduce fatigue-related risks, the ASRC adopted sections 5.12 through 5.15 of the ASRC Operations manual to specifically identify responsibility for on-scene personnel rest and sleep plans to help mission participants be aware and monitor their fatigue. It also requires ASRC member participants to take a sleep latency test upon request and sign a written refusal of recommendations to sleep if they insist on leaving the incident. See http://www.asrc.net/asrc/uploads/operations/ASRC_opsman.pdf

3.) The Virginia Department of Emergency Services (now Dept of Emergency Management) took necessary steps to recognize SAR volunteers who respond at the request of the state to be eligible for VA state workman's compensation, medical insurance, and disability insurance coverage. This has helped many SAR volunteers recoup losses due to injury while participating in SAR incidents.

4.) It was clarified that Federal Public Worker death benefits can be paid if the SAR group is recognized as a public safety organization by a local political jurisdiction, such as the ASRC-BRMARG group being recognized by Albemarle County.

[© ASRC 2005, written by William Dixon, who would like to acknowledge portions of this text appeared in the NASAR Response magazine article "A Tribute to Lisa Kern

Hannon", Summer 1994, believed to be written by Mark Pennington, VA-DES Search and Rescue Duty Officer at the time.]