

JENNIFER HOWELL

Born in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Jennifer landed in Los Angeles shortly after graduating from Emerson College with a B.A. in Mass Communications and Film. She has since become an inspiration to tens of thousands of children and their families, and set a new precedent for social responsibility within the entertainment community.

An accidental philanthropist, Jennifer had a movie career in mind before fate dealt her a different hand. "There really is no rhyme or reason to it," she explained. "I wasn't looking for a change in my life. I was super excited about being in LA and starting a career in the film industry." But only after a close friend was diagnosed with Leukemia, and experienced first-hand the loneliness of children forced to suffer in a hospital bed alone, did a simple conversation turn into a totally different perspective. "For some reason, that story just redirected my life," she said.

Soon after, Jennifer began volunteering at the Children's Hospital in Los Angeles. But after several weeks of regular visits, she found herself in another unexpected position. "They took me in this big board room with a whole bunch of people," she explained. "They said, 'We never in a million years thought you would follow through. We love the artists you bring in and so do the children, but if you want to keep doing it, you have to start a non-profit.'" Reflecting on what became a major career change, she joked "I was 22 at the time. I didn't even know what a 'non-profit' was."

Nevertheless, she was determined to continue what she had started. And in the fall of 1997, the Art of Elysium was born. What began as a group of friends with a mission to make sure no child goes through treatment alone, became a new way of looking at art and its capacity for social change. "I believe in the power of creativity," said Howell. "If you can teach a child to see a hospital room as a totally different world, and allow them to create their own reality through the means of creative expression, then you have given them the gift of imagination and the true healing power of art."

ART OF ELYSIUM

The Art of Elysium is a "Full-Circle" model for non-profit fundraising. By enlisting the unique talents of actors, directors, musicians, writers, fine artists, and fashion designers, the foundation brings the healing power of art into the lives of children suffering from critical illness. With the help of volunteer support, and the strategic investment of time and energy into profitable artistic endeavors, it does so in a way that is cost-efficient, sustainable and

artistically compelling.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS & FUNDRAISING

The four, year-round programs that constitute the Full-Circle model are: Elysium Collections (fashion design), Elysium Project (fine arts), Elysium Sessions (music), and Elysium Industry (film and theatre). Each provides free programming for hospitalized children by working artists, and offers platforms for those artists to showcase their talent and support the organization financially.

“The entire idea of the charity from the beginning has been that our artists would support us,” explained Howell. Their latest endeavor, Elysium Industry, will be the most ambitious addition to their repertoire, as they transition into film production. “We do art exhibits and music showcases, produce plays and fashion shows,” she continued, “but I think we always knew that creating the model for philanthropic filmmaking would be what would make us self-sustaining.”

In addition to the four full-time disciplines, the foundation also provides special programs with a focus on self-esteem. During Girl Talk (girls) and Yo Lo Tengo (boys), volunteer artists invite children and their families to participate in eight-weeks of discussion and activities, designed to help them handle questions and comments about their disorders, and live confidently in a world outside hospital walls.

HEAVEN

The jewel in the crown of Art of Elysium’s fundraising events, Heaven is a black-tie gala and celebration of artistic expression. Sponsors, donors, and celebrity volunteers gather in honor of an artist whose dedication to the community inspires others to put their own talents to good use. “The Art of Elysium is the art of Heaven,” explained Howell. “Artists are mirrors of what is going on in society. When an artist shows love, compassion, and philanthropy through their work, they are not just building a career, they are reflecting those values onto an entire community.” Honorees are recognized with the Spirit of Elysium Award, and include such artists as Eva Mendes, Kirsten Dunst, James Franco, and Elijah Wood.

Guests are also invited to experience a visionary artist’s conception of Heaven on Earth, with the unveiling of a major art installation. Past visionaries have included Jim Sheridan, Shepard Fairey, Mark Mothersbaugh, and Cameron Silver.

TAHNEE & THE BEGINNING OF ART OF ELYSIUM

The first child to be helped by the program was a seven-year old foster child named Tahnee. Despite suffering from Cystic Fibrosis, “she was literally roller skating around the hospital with an IV pole,” described Howell. “She wheeled right up and asked us to play her a song.”

Due to the severity of her condition, Tahnee rarely left the hospital for the majority of her adolescence. When she turned eighteen, the foundation found her an apartment and gave her a living stipend in exchange for her continued involvement in the charity. Tahnee died in 2011, but left behind a new legacy of artists whose lives and work have been forever changed through the act of sharing their gifts with children who so desperately need them. “She was able to help us find better ways to help other children like her,” said Howell.

FUTURE OF ART OF ELYSIUM

Thanks to the continued support of sponsors and private donors, the Art of Elysium continues to inspire children to see beyond their illnesses and discover their own voice in a world that seems too big to make an impression. “People always think we are bigger than we are,” said Howell. “We have plans for every kind of expansion you can imagine, we just don’t have the financial resources or man power.” Those plans include expanding the Art of Elysium beyond LA and New York, where they are currently operating in several children’s hospitals. “We want to be everywhere there is a child alone in a hospital bed, and an artist in the community willing to share their gifts,” she concluded.

For those interested in sponsorship opportunities or those that would like to make a donation to the organization, please call _____ or visit www.theartofelysium.org