

CULTURE

Leslie Odom, Jr. Helps Fundraise \$700,000 for Alzheimer's Los Angeles

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Susan Disney Lord thanked everyone for choosing the Alzheimer's Los Angeles fundraiser on Sunday night over 'Game of Thrones' before sharing her mom's battle with dementia.

Susan Disney Lord's mom, Patricia Disney, died from Alzheimer's in 2012, and Lord has chosen to speak now about the disease's impact on their relationship at the Alzheimer's Los Angeles annual fundraiser An Unforgettable Evening on Sunday night, which featured a performance by *Hamilton* star Leslie Odom, Jr.

"When my mother was diagnosed, there was shame about this diagnosis ... and then parent and child relationships come into play," Lord said. "When it was time to take her car away, she was furious with me because she didn't think there was anything wrong with her."

Lord explained that taking care of her mom was one of the hardest things she had to do. Not only did she have to wrangle with her mom's strong will, but she had to "figure out the logistics of her care" all the while dealing with her own grief, being a mom and being the owner of The Bel-Air Restaurant.

"Most families who come to Alzheimer's Los Angeles are looking for help and most could never afford professional caregivers," Lord said. "We never turn anyone away, and we never charge a family for services."

Today, there are “250,000 families living with the disease” in the Los Angeles and Inland Empire areas, said Kara Bonela, vp marketing for Alzheimer’s Los Angeles. The organization is a resource for those families, providing care counseling, art therapy, workshops and advocacy support.

“My grandmother Vivian Michaelson had Alzheimer's,” Fox 11 news anchor Elex Michaelson told *The Hollywood Reporter*. He brought his father, David, as his plus-one to the garden party, which took place on a private estate in Santa Monica. “We know what it’s like to watch a love one forget who you are.” The experience was painful for both him and his father. That’s why Michaelson was honored to be the evening’s master of ceremonies, so that it could be “a tribute to her.”

As soon as Michaelson took the stage, he asked those impacted by Alzheimer’s to raise their hands, and nearly the entire audience did. Michaelson took note of all the attendees that were impacted before transitioning into the live auction. Gifts such as an Ermenegildo Zegna experience in Milan, a photography session with the celebrity photographer Donald Graham and a private in-home tasting of Macallan whiskey were offered. Lord announced to the audience that the live auction, combined with the evening’s donations, pushed the total funds raised that evening to over \$700,000.

Alzheimer’s Los Angeles held the first An Unforgettable Evening event seven years ago, Scott Lord told *THR*. Soon after “Patty Disney” died of Alzheimer's, Susan Lord started working to raise money for caregivers, which led to the annual benefit.

In the spirit of Nat King Cole, Odom, calmed the audience down from the excitement of the live auction with jazz medleys before thanking the Disney family with his rendition of *Pinocchio*'s "When You Wish Upon a Star." He finished his performance with the *Hamilton* tune "The Room Where It Happens."