

Where Are They Now ...

KEITH THIBODEAUX

Billy Jeansonne

Keith Thibodeaux, *I Love Lucy's* "Little Ricky", has to be an inspiration to so many people, drummers and non-drummers alike. There is a charisma about this person. Something about him I can't put my finger on it. Or maybe I can. This boy, or now a man, was blessed. I believe he was put here for a special purpose.

Keith was born in Lafayette, La. on December 1, 1950 to the parents of Lionel Joseph Thibodeaux and Mary Ann Chitty, both originally from Louisiana. The family moved to Bunkie, La. when Keith was only a couple of years old where his dad worked for United Gas Company.

With the sound of Benny Goodman, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington being played in the Thibodeaux home, Keith quickly developed a sense of rhythm. He began playing rhythms on garbage cans pretending they were drums. For so many years my aunt has told me stories about Keith coming over to her house to play the drums on garbage cans that I have developed a mental picture of what he looked like back then in that place and time. It will be etched in my mind forever. My family is also from Bunkie.

Keith soon began playing drums for the Lions Club, radio programs, amateur shows, promotional events, and talent shows.

Keith's first big break came in the form of The Horace Heidt Show at three years old. He joined up with the traveling show. His dad was his manager and traveled with the show also. The Horace Heidt Show traveled to major cities across the country displaying

featured talents. Keith had instantly gone from a little kid playing cowboys and Indians to a professional drummer traveling across the country. He was billed as "The World's Tiniest Drummer". Pretty drastic change for a young boy from a small town.

The family then made the move to Sherman Oaks, California where Horace Heidt had a ranch and the Thibodeaux family took up residence.

Mr. Thibodeaux soon heard that Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball were conducting a search for their TV son to play Little Ricky. The rest is history. Keith seemed to be a natural for Lucy and Desi's TV son.

So natural that myself and so many other people thought that he was their real life son.

Keith had won the audition over 200 other young boys on the spot. He was a drummer and that fit into what Desi was doing and he just plain looked like Little Ricky should look. He was perfect for the part. He became Little Ricky in 1956. He starred in between 40-50 episodes. Keith's part as Little Ricky ended in 1960. From there he guest starred on several other TV shows including *The Andy Griffith Show*. He played the part of Johnny Paul Jason, Opie's best friend.

Keith has been a professional drummer since the age of three years old. As a young boy, Keith had a style of holding his drumsticks in an unorthodox way. He held his stick in his right hand with a traditional grip and used the matched grip with his left hand (he is right handed). It obviously worked for him. Buddy Rich

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saw him playing with his style of grip. Keith's dad asked Buddy if he thought Keith should change the way he held the drumsticks. Buddy replied, "His cymbal work is very fast. If he's that good just leave him alone".



He is still an active drummer who now lives in Jackson, Mississippi. He has played for many years with the Christian band *David and the Giants*. He has recorded many albums with the band and still actively performs.

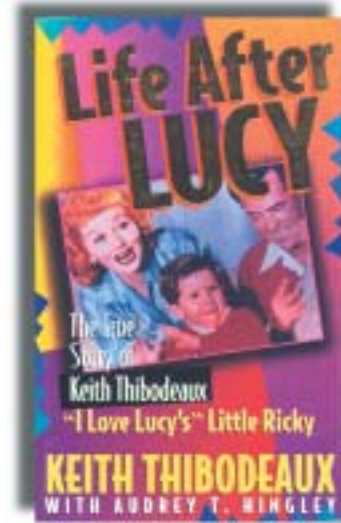
Keith still owns a 1957 Gretsch kit that was bought for him by Lucy. He has had endorsements with Slingerland and Gretsch. He now plays a set of Ludwig Classics. He has never taken formal drum lessons.

Keith's life has had a dark period to it. Thank God he has come out of that period. He became a Christian in 1974, married Kathy Denton, an award winning ballet dancer from Jackson, Miss. and has one daughter, Tara. Keith and Kathy Thibodeaux own and operate a Christian ballet dance company called *Ballet Magnificat* that travels the world over.

Keith's book, *Life After Lucy, The True Story of Keith Thibodeaux*, fills in the many blanks about his life.

This book will fill your heart and soul with inspiration. The book chronicles his privileged early years as a child star, the devastating divorce of his parents, and the

downward spiral his life took until he found the faith that saved his life. We can learn from his testimony. We now know his special purpose.



To order Keith's book, visit

www.amazon.com on the internet. A video collection has just been released of the *I Love Lucy* episodes. Check out the episodes from between 1956-1960 in which Keith starred.

If you have any questions for Keith or would like more information about him, we will forward all correspondence. Please send me an email or call me a 770-438-0844.

Billy Jeansonne

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