



Let Hope Fly

A Family's Special Message

<Addressee>

<Address1>

<Address2>

<City> <Province> <PostalCode>

DATE

Dear <salutation>,

Two days before Christmas, we received a precious gift in the midst of Erik's battle with cancer: Our second daughter, Emilie, was born.

It was our first Christmas as a family of four, with 2-year-old Sophie and 2-day-old Emilie. And I wanted it to be special.

I couldn't have known it at the time, but in my heart, I think I suspected Erik wouldn't be with us much longer. In the months leading up to Emilie's birth, Erik lost nearly 40 pounds. New tumours emerged, and made it hard for him to walk.

*Six months later, Erik would be gone. I would place my hand on his heart, feeling the pace going slower and slower, trying to enjoy as much of his soul as I could before he left. **As he took his final breaths, I was amazed to see ... even in death, he was still smiling – that same smile I first fell in love with.***

Erik passed away on June 29, 2017. He was only 32. That was our very first Christmas as a family of four – and our last.

When I remember the joy of that Christmas morning – how Sophie's eyes lit up when she rode her new toy car, the pride and love on Erik's face as he held 2-day-old Emilie – ***I am so grateful ...***

Because I know we wouldn't have had that Christmas together if not for people like you – if not for the amazing care Erik received at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre.

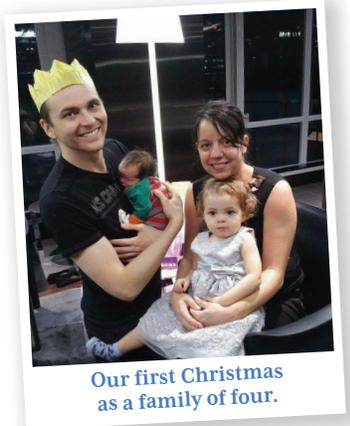
I'm writing you this letter because despite all his courage and dedication to life, despite how hard he fought for 14 long and painful months, Erik lost his battle. He won't see his girls grow up and get married or even hug them again.

I was looking forward to old age, because I was going to get to grow old and grumpy with him. So many plans and dreams changed when Erik died. Our lives have been shattered forever.

But those last months were such a gift. And today, I know that when you return your dove, along with your holiday gift, you can make a difference for another family like ours ... another family who needs hope, and the very best care in the face of cancer.

You can dedicate your dove to anyone you want – someone you've lost, a friend or family member who's been diagnosed with cancer, or even a doctor, nurse, or hospital staff member.

<Perhaps you'll choose to honour <past dedication> again this year.> Whomever you choose, I hope you know your tribute is meaningful, and your gift will make a real difference in conquering cancer.



Last year, nearly 12,000 doves soared in the cancer centre. While Erik was having his treatment, I would go around and read the messages. Those doves were a source of comfort and support for patients and families like mine, and a powerful sign of our collective hope and determination to Conquer Cancer In Our Lifetime.

The dove you return, along with your gift, will be a sign of your hope for all those facing cancer this holiday season.

This year, the dove on our tree will be for Erik. Below it will be the tree skirt we made as a family with our hand prints. When I see it, it will remind me of all the precious moments we spent together as a couple for over 10 years – and as a family for only 2 years – all the memories of Erik I'll cherish forever...

There are so many memories – the little moments and the big – that we simply would not have if it weren't for donors like you. Your support of The Princess Margaret gives families the gift of time.

Erik fought so hard to be there for his girls. He would have endured any treatment if it meant he could have had one more moment with them. He loved them more than anything, and though his time as a father was cut so very short, I can't imagine a better dad.

I'm so grateful for every moment you helped give him, and us, by supporting breakthrough research and world-class care at The Princess Margaret.

From day one, that support meant the world. Erik's cancer journey began in May 2016, when he was diagnosed with stage 3 alveolar rhabdomyosarcoma, an aggressive cancer of the soft tissue.

The very next day, he started an intensive 42-week chemotherapy regimen. We were so impressed by the care he received at The Princess Margaret, including the speed of his diagnosis and treatment. It gave us confidence that Erik was getting the very best care right from the start.

But even more than that, his team at The Princess Margaret gave us hope. Hope for recovery. Hope for life.

And hope is something we badly needed. It was just one week before Erik was diagnosed with cancer that I learned I was pregnant again. I'm sure you can imagine the strange sadness that hung over our announcement of the joyful news: "Hi! We're pregnant, and by the way Erik has cancer."

With one-year-old Sophie and another baby on the way, we needed the positivity of Erik's oncologist, Dr. Gupta. It kept us going during the toughest times ... kept us fighting until the very end.

You see, the blows came hard and fast. After the first treatment, Erik's tumour started to shrink, his pain eased. We thought, this is good news! Now we just have to get through the next 42 weeks!



Erik's favourite photo of us on our wedding day.



The Christmas tree skirt we made as a family.



Erik and Sophie in the park.



Our very first photo together!

But soon we received the life-shattering news ... despite his tumour shrinking, the new scan showed a spot on his bone, meaning his cancer was upgraded to Stage 4.

He was given less than 4% odds he'd survive the next 5 years.

It was the first appointment I had missed since his diagnosis. The worst part for me was that I wasn't there when Erik got this news. But without me, he was able to ask his oncologist the hard questions, like, "How will I die?"

Erik could have been angry at the hand he'd been dealt, but that wasn't him. The man I fell in love with was always smiling, always happy. It's what attracted me to him, and what kept me going during our tough times.

As he fought for time, Erik always told people, "I can't control that I have cancer, I can't control that I'm going to die — but I can control my attitude. **I choose to be happy.**"

He chose his girls. He chose to enjoy every last minute with them, and me. Today, despite our heartbreak, we still choose to be happy because that's what he would want for us.

And I want you to know that when you send your dove back, along with your gift this holiday season, you are giving other families this precious gift ... the gift of hope, and time.

You are part of the drive to Conquer Cancer In Our Lifetime. *For the ones we love ... for all of us...*

Erik's greatest fear about dying was that his girls wouldn't know how much he loved them. But, thanks to people like you, and the advances you help make possible, he had time to let them know ...

He carefully picked out songs and little white dresses for little Sophie and baby Emilie. He danced with them — a moment preserved in a video they'll see on their wedding days. We did the same for graduation and for birthdays.

Together, we made so many memories and recorded countless treasures ... special messages and ordinary moments together so that his girls will always know who their daddy was and how much he loved them.

Once the chemo stopped working, things went quickly as tumours overwhelmed Erik's body.

I can't say enough about Erik's palliative care team, led by Dr. Breffni Hannon. Truly, he had the best quality of life any sick person could have. In fact, things were so good, it was easy to forget sometimes that Erik had cancer, that he was dying. Because Erik was so well taken care of, he rarely felt extremely sick. It meant we got to enjoy so much good quality time together during his last year. *What a gift that was.*

Near the end, it felt like Erik was holding on, like there was something preventing him from letting go. That's when I had the idea that Erik should get to ring the bravery bell, which usually signifies the end of a person's treatment. He was always scared to jinx himself by doing so ... but I thought, he came so far already, he earned it.



Sophie and baby sister Emilie all dressed up.

Erik never gave up. He never stopped fighting.

But when he and our smiling toddler Sophie rang the bravery bell, something shifted. I think it gave him a sense of closure, made him feel like he finally had permission to go.

Erik's final moments came a week later. And he passed with a smile. I thought, if Erik could smile, even at the very end, then surely, I can remain hopeful ... I can encourage others by sharing his hope, his story.

Erik wanted so badly for his cancer journey to be useful.

And today, through his story, I believe he can do so much – by inspiring the support that will help countless people see another Christmas, another birthday ... even survive to see weddings and grandkids. Because it is your support, and the support of friends like you, that will help us Conquer Cancer In Our Lifetime. For everyone.

When we were planning his funeral together, I asked Erik what kind of candies he wanted me to give away to our guests. He said, “Give the feet – the jujube feet – they’re a reminder to ‘keep the journey going.’” So I did. And that’s also why I’m writing to you.

Your gift today is the gift of hope – it was for us, and now, it will be for others. So, please. Return your dove. Keep the journey going for others facing cancer – and those who love them – with your gift today. On Erik’s behalf ...

Thank you from the bottom of my heart!



Marie-Eve Mongrain

Erik's wife, Sophie and Emilie's mom

P.S. Each night, Sophie and Emilie tell me that their daddy is always in their hearts and that he loves them so very much. Thank you, from my heart, for the time and memories you gave us – and for the time, and the hope, you’ll give others with your Doves of Hope gift this holiday season.

P.P.S. You’re invited to attend this year’s Doves of Hope ceremony on December 12, 2018 at 11:30 am at The Princess Margaret. Please return your dove by November 16, 2018 so it can be displayed in time for the ceremony.



Make your dove donation instantly!

www.ThePMCF.ca/dove

Dedicate and share your dove with friends and family!

