

## **Jason and The Kids: Crystal is still watching over us.**

Update: November 17, 2011

It's hard to believe that it has been 3 years to the day since Crystal was first diagnosed with ovarian cancer. That very difficult day and the courage Crystal displayed during her 5-month battle have forever changed my life in ways I could have never imagined. People often ask how I am doing and how I'm able to cope with such a loss. Now that I have had a chance to look back the 6-months following her passing and the long nights sitting in total silence were by far the most difficult for me, but the real battle was fought by Crystal. Since that day three years ago I have always and continue to find peace knowing that we lived a great life together with no regrets.

I did not have the luxury of just falling down and lying there until I felt better. I had our young family to raise - with the two youngest - Aiden, aged 3 and Rylee, aged 1 - far too young to grasp what had even happened. My son, Gaven, was 14 at the time and much better able to understand - and - therefore, feel it all. Even in his own grief, he was a big help to me then. But they all three had a right to laughter, fun and the many other rights of childhood. Crystal would have wanted us all to go on and we have found a way to do that. Falling apart would not have been any way to honor her life.

The two most important things in Crystal's life were being a nurse and having a family. We are so grateful that she got to see both dreams fulfilled. Her legacy lives on in these beautiful children and through all the lives she touched so deeply while being an Oncology Nurse for Kaiser Permanente in Denver, CO.

As you can imagine, the people Crystal worked with at the Oncology Unit for Kaiser Permanente in Denver, CO had to face a unique adjustment all their own. Many of them have stayed in touch with me and remind me about what a difference Crystal made in their lives and the lives of her patients. Many of them are just now getting more acquainted with The Hope Tree sculpture, its meaning, the new documentary and the important messages found in the web site [www.thehopetree.com](http://www.thehopetree.com). Who knows, maybe Kaiser will have a Hope Tree of its own one day to inspire and encourage patients, families and staff during their cancer journey. Regardless, I know that their nurses and doctors remain committed to the finest care possible in oncology - just like they gave to Crystal.

Crystal was a loving force in her own family and the loss of her presence has been hard for them as well. Her whole family made a pilgrimage this year to see The Hope Tree at the Martin O'Neil Cancer Center in St. Helena, CA. You met some of them in the documentary about The Hope Tree. You can view it now by going to this link: <http://www.thehopetree.com/documentary/> They loved seeing the sculpture completed and at home in such a beautiful setting. They got the grand tour from the center's Director, Shari Bluband, and were very impressed with warmth and comfort - all patient focused - at this state of the art facility.

To know that Crystal's "dream charm" is nestled high in the sculptures platinum branches - watching over patients, families and staff as they go about the business of fighting cancer - is a comfort somehow. And right behind the open knot hole - where thousands of people have put their sacred, secret messages of hope - her crucifix rests snug and secure to the very structure buried within the sculpture. The family put notes of their own in the tree that day. The children and I are going to make the same pilgrimage once they are old enough to understand it.

So many of you have been kind enough to ask how we are all doing since her passing. The truth is, we are all doing well. Of course we miss Crystal, but we are fine and trying to live and enjoy all that life has to offer. Like all mothers, Crystal had high hopes that her children would grow up to be fine, loving people - educated, disciplined, respectful and kind. They are all well on their way to reaching that goal. There are many new people in their lives since that time and are simply surrounded by love and respect all the time.

Gaven will graduate from high school next year and is your typical teenager. Through all the challenges we are lucky that he remains committed to school and has been a careful and responsible driver. Though he is still not quite sure what direction he wants to head in after graduation, we will support his decision.

Rylee is in preschool and loving it. Smart as a whip. She is the same "firecracker" she was right from day one. Remember her whapping me in the face on the documentary? Well, not much has changed there. She does whatever she does with ENTHUSIASM! She looks so much like Crystal at that age. She is all about energy, passion and fierceness in her play and learning. She and Aiden have a very special bond even after jousting with the rough and tumble play of that age group.

Aiden is in first grade and really starting to shine. Being a bit older when he lost his mother, he struggled more than Rylee did at the time. But he has turned a corner and is really coming into his own - loving school and doing well with his work and interactions with classmates. He has always been such a gentle, sweet soul - and remains so very sensitive and dear.

Professionally, I have continued my work at Cart Works Company. A little more challenging than I first thought we continue to see growth and I'm excited to start each day. Personally, I am able to laugh more easily now and enjoy life again. I try to spend most of my time being grateful for our life together and not focusing on what we did not get to experience. She was a gift in my life and I was a gift in hers. How lucky was that? Some people go their whole lives and never have that. Was it unfair that she died so young? Yes, it was. Would I have traded those eight years with her to escape the pain of losing her? No way.

Well, that's the update from the LaGrange gang. Thanks so much for your interest and good thoughts on our behalf. You'll be hearing from us again as the kids grow and thrive. How lucky are we? Not only is Crystal watching out for us, but all of you are too!

My best wishes to you all,  
Jason, Gaven, Aiden, and Rylee