karuna

When treatment options were exhausted, Krissy returned home to be with her family in her final days.

Her end-of-life care was made possible thanks to generous donations from people just like you.

Dear Supporter,

From the moment I met my wife, Krissy, I could tell she was a very caring person. She loved the simple things in life. Cooking and gardening. Camping, especially at the beach. A cup of coffee, or a glass of wine.

Over the years we spent together, she shared a lot of these loves with me. But most of all, we shared a love for our growing family. Our two children, Madeline and Lachlan. Krissy loved them more than anything else in the world.

When she was diagnosed with terminal bowel cancer, what hurt her most was the high probability that she would not be around to see them grow up.

Our second child, Lachlan, was born via routine caesarean. Our obstetrician noticed a small legion on one of Krissy's ovaries during the procedure. He sent it for biopsy.

A few weeks later, we learned that the results indicated early ovarian cancer. And then further testing showed the possibility of a different type of cancer.

Krissy was quickly booked in for a colonoscopy. We were devastated when the results revealed a very advanced stage of bowel cancer.

There is no 'good' time to receive a cancer diagnosis. But the timing of Krissy's diagnosis felt particularly unfair. She was only 33 years old. We were caring for a newborn. Helping Maddy adjust to becoming an older sister. And at the same time, we were exploring treatment options for a life-limiting illness.

We could never have predicted that those life experiences would go together. But Krissy was incredibly strong. She was adamant even at the very end that cancer wouldn't defeat her.

Shortly after her diagnosis, Krissy started treatment. This included multiple surgeries. Followed by two rounds of chemotherapy. The second course gave us hope for a period. But the cancer soon returned.

This time, Krissy wanted to explore alternative therapies. She focused on creating healthy habits with food and exercise. One thing she loved was practicing yoga. I think that helped with mindfulness as well. Some other therapies included UV treatment and working with a biochemist.

She was even able to adapt things she already loved, such as cooking. She made a hobby out of healthy eating. She discovered so many new recipes she loved to prepare for everyone. Sometimes, she would ask me to cook them for her instead. That way, she could simply enjoy eating them.

The alternative treatments helped initially. Until they didn't anymore. All too soon we were back in the oncologist's office. A third round of chemotherapy did not help. It was at this point that we were referred to Karuna.


Krissy with Madeline and Lachlan

At first, Krissy wouldn't even consider the idea of palliative care. From the day of her first diagnosis, she had been determined to get better. Through treatments and trials, she turned difficult emotions into her source of strength. Grief and fear became determination.

I understood why Krissy wanted to get better so badly. She had children to care for. We had dreams to achieve. A future to live, together. She didn't want to face the possibility of a different outcome. But sometimes, I worried that she thought palliative care meant giving up.

I had a different understanding of palliative care. I lost my dad to pancreatic cancer in 2013, only a few years before Krissy received her own diagnosis. It was a very difficult period for my family. But his loss helped me understand the importance of being prepared for death.

Preparing for death can be emotional and difficult. But that doesn't mean conversations shouldn't happen. I wanted everyone to be ready for life without Krissy. Especially our kids.

I also wanted Krissy herself to be ready. To know at the end of her life, that we loved her and would miss her greatly. But our lives would continue in the way she wanted. I believed that this could help her reach the end of her life with greater peace and comfort.

Eventually, I took the initiative to contact Karuna myself. Krissy had been spending a lot of time in hospital. But we were still hearing that treatment options had been exhausted. And I believed that staying in hospital had never been the right option for us.

Neither of us had heard of Karuna before. I just wanted Krissy to be in a place where she could be comfortable in her final weeks. We decided she would be happier at home. And so would the rest of our family.

Karuna's nursing and spiritual care teams made this possible. The nurses helped us manage Krissy's pain at home. But even with their care, Krissy struggled to refer to their support as "palliative care."

She saw the service as another treatment option. She continued to believe that recovery was possible. It wasn't until she spoke with one of Karuna's spiritual care practitioners, that she realised this was not the likely outcome. It was heartbreaking to see her process that information.

Only a few weeks after she was admitted to Karuna care, Krissy died at home. Although it was very difficult to witness, I'm grateful for the time it gave us as a family.

Madeline and Lachlan were able to say goodbye to Krissy one last time before she went to the funeral home. It was a beautiful and peaceful moment for them. I never would have expected that from palliative care. I'm very grateful they were able to have that moment with her.

Our family on holiday in Fiji

After Krissy's death, we had to adjust to our new normal. It felt quite isolating at times. Our extended families had helped with Krissy's care while she was in treatment. But I knew that they couldn't stay forever. Even if they wanted to. They had their own lives to return to.

We also had to navigate the changes within our own family unit. I had been fortunate to take extended leave from work while Krissy was ill. Now, it was time for me to return. Maddy and Lachy had to adjust to not only losing their mum, but also to not having dad around as often as they were used to.

It was a difficult transition whilst trying to navigate grief. Not just my own, but also for both kids. I found it very frustrating that people didn't seem to understand I had to manage both sides.

Due to their age at the time of Krissy's diagnosis, our kids processed her illness in different ways. Lachy was too young to really understand what was happening. Other than knowing that mum felt sick sometimes.

Maddy was a little older. I was able to sit down with her and talk about what was happening. To try and prepare her for not having her mum around anymore. It was never an easy conversation. And naturally, she still grieved after Krissy's death.

We all had to learn together how our grief would shift and change. Especially as they grew older and their understanding of her illness grew too.

Time has helped immensely in our grieving process. Six years after Krissy's passing, our kids are very well-adjusted. They miss her every day, but they understand that death is a part of life. They know that the most important thing is that they live their lives and don't let the loss of their mum define their future.

We often talk about Krissy. We've created new traditions for special days. It's very important to me that she is part of both the big and little moments. So I leave space in our everyday lives for Krissy. A moment where we can wonder what she would have thought about school. Or work. Or dinner. Especially dinner. She always had a lot to say on that subject.

I want Maddy and Lachy to remember that all the love she shared with us when she was alive, did not disappear when she died. It helps that we have so many wonderful memories to look back on.

Every day Karuna patients and their families face the profound realities of death, grief, and loss. Our team are here to help them navigate this period and the complex emotions that may arise.

Donations made to Karuna help to cover the cost of our services, including grief and beareavement counselling, spiritual care, and 24-hour nursing support. This keeps them accessible and free-of-charge to Karuna patients and their families, now and in the future.

Please consider making a donation to Karuna today. Your gift will help transform lives with love, dignity, and compassion.

We were able to spend a lot of time together as a family. Krissy achieved a lifelong dream of owning a caravan just two years before her death. We were only able to take short trips due to her illness, but we enjoyed the time together immensely.

The children have favourite memories as well. Madeline loves to talk about our family holiday to Fiji. Especially when she had her hair braided. And it always makes us laugh to remember how Krissy and Maddy loved to play dress-up with Lachy. They used to put him in dresses and call him Lucy.

It means a lot to me that in addition to these memories, they also remember the way Krissy cared for them. The day-to-day moments that may seem easy to forget. Like when she would rub their backs or sing to them.

I often remember a time from when we were first living together. Krissy loved quiet mornings. She would get up early, and make herself coffee. I would find her when I woke up, closer to midday. Sitting in the sunshine with her coffee, a book, and her beloved cat.

As our children continue to grow, our conversations about Krissy grow and change as well. Something I have always wanted Madeline and Lachlan to know, is how Karuna helped their mum in her final weeks.

I want them to know how important services like Karuna are. Why they need to continue. For other families who want to bring their loved ones home. For other families who are having difficult conversations about death. For other families, just like ours, who need support too.

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> The energy of love is enduring. It is not something that is restricted by time, or form or circumstance. And that love, when freely offered or graciously received, can bring nourishment and sustenance even when things seem to be crashing down.
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> Love and connection are interdependent and they support us through life and hold us in death. They can offer us strength and courage, and show us patience and spaciousness in heart and mind when we need it the most. They are always available even though sometimes they feel so far away.
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> But we just need to breathe, focus, create space and open heartedness and that energy of love and connection will be there to nourish us, once again.
>
> – Venerable Tsultrim
> Karuna Community Connections Advisor

And I also want them to know that it’s families like ours who can help Karuna. On the anniversary of Krissy’s passing, I always host a fundraiser for Karuna on my Facebook. I know that many of our friends and family like to donate and remember Krissy this way.

We also have a ‘Charity Club’ at my workplace. The winners can choose a few charities to receive the winnings from the Club pool. I’ve won it a few times, and I always choose Karuna as one of the recipients.

Krissy shared so much love when she was alive, that we can still feel it today. I think it is important to share some of that love with those who need it. So I continue to support Karuna. For all of the warmth and kindness they showed our family when we needed it.

And that love continues to grow. Maddy and Lachy have noticed my support for Karuna. It’s inspired them to give back in their own ways. I think it is so special that now all of us can share Krissy’s love with Karuna, and the other families they care for.

Warm regards,
Craig