

## *I Fought to Survive*

I fought to survive.  
It is a miracle I'm alive.  
Seizures and kidney failure nearly claimed my life.  
I wrote this poem to give advice.  
No matter how rough it gets,  
Keep fighting for your life!  
The best reward of it all is how I get to enjoy my life.  
I take every day one step at a time.  
I get to enjoy activities in my own life.  
I'd never have fun if it weren't for the gift of life.  
I am grateful for this gift, the kidney from my dad, day and night.  
The gift of life is able to keep me alive because of technology.

Vanessa Zytaruk

Vanessa was born August 1, 1978. She began fighting for her life with renal failure. She wrote this poem in hope to educate and make more people aware to donate for research on renal failure and organ donation.

### *Funeral Service*

St. David's United Church  
Friday, October 19, 2018 at 1:00 pm

### *Presider*

Rev. Mike Jones

### *Candle Lighting*

Josie Novak

### *Hymn*

Amazing Grace (#266)

### *Tributes*

Brian and Myrna Zytaruk  
Bill Benson  
Lil Muir  
Annabelle Novak and Maryann Kahn

### *Photo Memories*

Prepared by  
Evan J. Strong Funeral Services

### *Duet*

Shari and Amy Klassen  
*It is Well with My Soul*

### *Reception*

Immediately following the Funeral Service, relatives and friends are invited to meet with the family in the St. David's Church Hall. There will be an open mike portion for anyone wishing to share a memory.

*In Memory of Vanessa, please  
sign your Organ Donor Card.*

# *Your Smile is Forever in Our Hearts*



# *Vanessa Zytaruk*


## *1978 - 2018*

# Vanessa Eliza Zytaruk

August 1, 1978 - October 9, 2018

Vanessa Zytaruk passed away on Tuesday, October 9, 2018, following a two-month battle with cancer at Foothills Medical Centre in Calgary, at the age of 40 years. When first admitted to FMC her room had a white board for medical information, appointments and patient comments with the heading Patient Goals. Vanessa was quick to write: To Survive Cancer and make suggestions on how we can be creative killing my cancer! Unfortunately, there were no treatment options for Vanessa and our focus became pain management. Vanessa always had challenges to overcome throughout her life. She was born in Fredericton, NB after putting her mom Patricia through 32 hours of labor. She was a good baby sleeping through the night almost from the beginning. Before the age of one she moved to Saskatoon, SK. At the age of 2 she contracted hemolytic uremic syndrome and was in a coma for several months. This caused damage to her kidneys and brain but she persevered. After that she and her mom Patricia managed the resulting kidney damage with a careful diet. At age 6 she moved to White City, SK. In White City she thrived attending the local school until Grade 8, after which she and her mother home-schooled. She learned to ride her bike to school, which was a tremendous feat as she was directionally challenged. She never knew it but her mother followed her to school every day she rode her bike. At the age of 10, in 1988, her kidneys could no longer provide adequate function to keep her healthy and it was determined she would need a transplant. In September of that year, on the day Ben Johnson won & lost the gold medal for the 100 M dash (this was how Vanessa remembered the date), she received her transplant. It was a rough go at first as she had a severe rejection and it took everything the doctor's could muster to get it settled. But she did have Dr. Best and Dr. Good managing the transition. After that there were seizure management issues and occasional illnesses. But she persevered year after year. Vanessa and her mom worked hard to manage her medications and diet. Vanessa had to take an array of meds, she was amazingly good at taking them punctually and recognizing when the pharmacy made errors. Patricia and Vanessa would take the bus between Regina and Saskatoon each month to attend University Hospital to continue management of her transplant and medications. Vanessa continued to get stronger and was able to take on more adventures. She was always doing research, first with many books and then with the internet. She was an avid reader and read books which were special to her many times. She loved to write stories and we have many scribbles with many chapters depicting life on the prairies. A few years ago she undertook research on the Canadian Hong Kong Veterans as her grandfather had been a prisoner of the Japanese for 44 months. She produced a book with illustrations and a fiber art cover that she presented to dad at Christmas. She always had pets, dogs included Rum, Wizard, Goldie, KD, Belle and now Ruby. She also had a mouse, turtles, a salamander, a frog and many tropical fish. The mouse once had an extra ride in the central vacuum system when Patricia and Vanessa were cleaning the cage. We recovered him a little worse for wear by propping open the vacuum port. We then started a terrarium with a salamander and frog we captured in the back yard. During short holiday times we wrapped them in wet paper towel and stored them in the fridge crisper. In 1987, Patricia started a long battle with brain cancer and Vanessa helped out supporting her mom through three surgeries, radiation, and chemotherapy. During all this Patricia worked to prepare Vanessa and Brian for the inevitable, which came in November of 1995. Vanessa and Brian became a team that managed to travel to Barbados, Disney World, Vegas, a Caribbean Cruise and Hawaii, where Vanessa learned to snorkel. It took a few days but once she figured it out we could not keep her out of the ocean. We traveled to Washington, DC often. She loved the Smithsonian and the Washington Zoo. She would often engage the staff in discussions about some of the programs they ran to restore populations of primates in South America. They were always surprised by the knowledge she exhibited. We always stayed in an apartment hotel, on Pennsylvania Avenue. I never worried as the staff always understood how special Vanessa was and watched over her during my work day. In 1997, Vanessa and I left Saskatchewan for new adventures in Calgary, AB. We found great opportunities for both of us, in particular we found the Calgary Special Olympics, Gymnastics Club, Columbia College and Indefinite Arts. Vanessa was a member of the Gymnastics Club for 20 years. She thrived in the club with great coaches and friends. She was always selling the virtues of the club to new friends who were coaxed into joining in on the regular practice sessions. Vanessa also participated in

cross country skiing, snow shoeing, and figure skating. She was successful going to provincials regularly and to the National Games twice. Her greatest successes came from the long-term friendships she developed through Special Olympics, Columbia College, and Indefinite Arts. In 2001, life changed again when Brian and Vanessa met Myrna. After a whirlwind courtship that surprised everyone but Vanessa, she stood up as a witness at Myrna and Brian's marriage. Life was even better as Vanessa and Myrna adopted each other and became fast, trusted friends. The three of us made a life together as Vanessa developed her independence. Vanessa then set off on her own with the help of a series of supportive roommates until we found Josie and Bruce in October, 2008. It was an interesting first few days as Josie and Bruce wondered about this new person who sat quietly in the family room writing in her book. But eventually the dialogue started Bruce telling tales and Vanessa checking with Josie to determine if they were true. After a few days, they had figured each other out and Vanessa had not only acquired supportive roommates but an additional set of parents. For the next 10 years Vanessa had two homes and two sets of parents to rely on when she needed support. Vanessa increasingly became more independent, mastering ACCESS Calgary and was able to travel on her own and continually expand her circle of friends. She maintained her long-term friendships, the two Heathers, Laura, Megan, Chantel, Anisa, and of course Andrew, just to mention a few. A favourite place for them all to meet was Chinook Mall, which offered entertainment, food and a place to walk and talk in safety. She was quickly adopted into the neighbourhood, participating in block parties, hosting birthday parties and adopting the neighbours pets, particularly Blackie, Hershey and Reese. Vanessa always managed her kidney transplant carefully through watching her diet, taking her many medications on time, and exercising daily. But after 28 years the kidney was no longer able to filter the toxins and 2016 Vanessa started dialysis at FMC. At first it was a bit daunting but she very quickly got with the routine. Three times a week she and her roller bag headed to the hospital for treatment. She soon had many more friends including the dialysis staff and other patients. She continued her activities at Indefinite Arts, Columbia College, and Calgary Special Olympics. She focused her training on snowshoeing and gymnastics. When she travelled to the lake she would set a winter course for herself and she and Ruby would go round and round for hours. Vanessa would practice her gymnastic routines on our lawn and play her flutes for Belle and Ruby on the beach. Ruby, like Belle and Simon before, quickly became best buddies with Vanessa and never left her side when they wandered about the property. We were able to work an agreement between FMC and Creston hospital to continue dialysis so that Vanessa could maintain her summer and Christmas visits to Kootenay Lake. It was shortly after the June-July 2018 visit to Kootenay Lake that Vanessa started to experience pain on the right side of her head. It was initially diagnosed as an ear infection and treated with antibiotics. Vanessa's pain became more severe over the following weeks and in August it was finally diagnosed as a tumor on the right side of her tongue. Unfortunately, it had been missed by Vanessa's dentist in a July visit and two subsequent MRI's & CT Scans. Vanessa was admitted to FMC on August 16. Our mission became management of Vanessa's pain as the tumor developed rapidly. Through it all Vanessa was positive, joking and laughing when the pain was controlled. It became obvious the evening of October 8 that Vanessa would not make it through the night. Vanessa died the next morning at 3:30 AM in the arms of her parents, Brian, Myrna, Josie and Bruce. Throughout Vanessa's stay in hospital she had hundreds of visits from friends, hospital staff (dialysis), and family. Vanessa marveled at all the support she had and told us how much she loved us all every day. She would say to the nursing staff who came to poke her, 'it was alright, don't worry, I have been used to being poked all of my life'. Vanessa loved music, art, books, and puzzles- particularly Sudoku and challenges. During the past few years she began teaching herself algebra which was an interesting challenge for her as there were few gray areas in her mind, everything was black and white or right and wrong. Vanessa will be loved and remembered by her father Brian; step-mom Myrna Wiebe; adopted parents Josie Novak and Bruce Lowe; the Benson Family including Aunt Norma, Uncle Bill, Aunt Linda, cousins Jenna, Mike, Scott, Chris, Danielle, Kevin, Neva, Tessa and Lily; Grandma Wiebe, Uncles Milt, Al, Bud, and Richard; aunts Judy, Lil, Martha and Carol; cousins Shari, Amy, Phil, Carla, Brad, Danielle, Wayne, Colin, Indri, Bryan, James, Miriam, Jordan, Megan, Natalie Max, Clairra, Nate, Harper, Crosby, Nikki and Jonathan; and the Novak and Lowe families including Maryann, Avi, Ethan, Adam, Richard, Cathy, Annabelle, Nathan, Justin, Wade, Wendy, Tiana, Tyler, Rochelle, Jamie, Izzy and Emmy.

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