

## **Melissa's Eulogy**

On behalf of Paula, Kelly, Tommy and especially Melissa we would we would like to thank everyone for their support and prayers not only during these past few days but for the last 10 years. As a family, we could not have provided Melissa with the support she needed without your help.

When looking at Melissa's life, even as short as it was, we are comforted by what she has allowed us to experience through her. I believe we may not have been a party to these experiences if it were not for her path in life. These include:

### **Never Giving Up**

Melissa taught us not to give up no matter how bad a situation may be. Through the years, my family has been faced with many challenges from illness, occupational, and other situations. When confronting these difficulties, we looked at how Melissa was fighting back the effects of her disease. Her strength and altitude inspired my family to accept that unpleasant situations occur in life and needed to be dealt with as best we are able too.

Melissa never gave up in her fight even in her last days. Prior to the onset of her medical problems, Melissa could have been described as strong willed or stubborn. A good example of this trait is how Melissa would always get even after losing a tussle with Kelly. Melissa would accomplish this by hitting Kelly with a toy or biting her. You see, Melissa would lose the battle but needed to get the last shot in. This tenacity served her well throughout the last 10 years. She never gave up fighting the good fight and in the end, this disease just simply over took her.

## **Bringing People Together**

During this last 10 years, Melissa has been the catalyst of bringing people you may never have met otherwise. One example, in 2002 St. John of God took several families including ours to Toronto for “World Youth Day”. As a group we could only participate in a few events and were lucky enough to be placed very close to Pope John Paul II during his opening Mass. But the best part of this trip was the lasting friendship we made with the other families with special needs children and all of the volunteers who accompany us on this trip.

Through Melissa, we have met many families who have or had children with Batten Disease. These families are able to support each other by being able to share similar experiences. This support was especially helpful at the beginning of our journey with Melissa.

On reflection, we realize Melissa has some sort of presence about her that affected people. We do not understand the dynamics of this attribute but have witnessed it many times. Whenever we were in public with her, young children would approach her wheel chair or buggy just to touch or talk to her. Sometimes these inquisitive kids would ask us pointed questions. There seemed to be some sort of connection happening. This same connection also affected adults. It seemed like Melissa inspired them in way that could not be explained.

One last example I will share with you occurred the day after Melissa passed. On Thursday, Melissa was able to allow two of our friends to meet for the first time to talk about their experiences in dealing with breast cancer. One friend who just finished her treatments was able to offer her perspectives to the second friend who is just starting on her journey. Paula and I are convinced this

experienced helped both of our friends and we only have Melissa to thank.

### **Brings out the Best In People**

Melissa brought out the best in people. As her family, we are grateful to have experience these acts of kindness. These included; the hundreds of prayers, blessings, gifts, treatments, and support by hundreds of people. As parents, you never want your child to suffer or be burden with the destiny of Melissa. But in reflection, you realize how Melissa was able to help others as they helped her with these acts of kindness. This selflessness brings some measure of comfort to us.

We feel Melissa made Paula and I better parents not only to her but to Kelly and Tommy as well. Once we understood the impacts of Melissa's diagnosis, Paula and I decided we were going to deal with this situation on a day by day basis. We did not dwell on the end result because we knew there was nothing we could prevent. So we decided to move forward as normally as possible. This meant Melissa would go with us everywhere we went such as vacations, dinner, church, and ball games. We made exceptions only when it was risky to Melissa's well being and recently as her condition worsen.

As I just mentioned, there are hundreds of people to thank from family members, friends, "wye oak" neighbors, Kelly and Tommy's friends, Melissa's teachers, nurses, and school aids. Anytime Melissa suffered a setback, these people rallied to help Melissa's by providing prayers, taking care of Kelly and Tommy, providing meals to my family, and many other acts of kindness. This support allowed us to do what was necessary to help Melissa bounce back from these setbacks.

But one person in particular we need to thank and that is Brother Tom. Brother Tom fell in love with Melissa early on during her stay at St. John of God and has constantly been at her side. Paula and I have been able to see the special bond Melissa and Brother Tom formed with each other over the years. Brother Tom dedication to Melissa shows his ability to put others before himself. As a family, we may have not been able to get through this without him. Brother Tom, we may not be able to fully repay you for your generously and support you gave Melissa. But please know Melissa loved you and will be your strength as you continue your service to others.

These are just a few examples of how Melissa helped others even though she was suffering herself. This just proves that she was indeed a special child and we all were blessed in knowing her.

We believe Melissa was at peace when she passed, somehow knowing she was going to heaven. As a family we believe she is in a better place being united with her grandparents Frank and Kay, her Godmother Mary, and her Uncle John. We also believe she is no longer suffering and cured of all her ailments.

We are going to miss our daughter but we realize she will always be with us in spirit. We know she will help us through the difficult times ahead, especially as we get used to her not being here. However, we also know she always be in our memory and will be there for all of the good times as well.

As we leave the today, please listen carefully to the recessional song which is not typically heard in church. The song is "Let it Be" by the Beatles. These three simple words have provided comfort for us as we watched Melissa all of these years and will help us going forward without her.

Melissa, we love you and wish you were still here. While we will miss your physical presence, we know you are at peace with God and will never forget what you meant to us and how you shaped our lives.

Melissa, again we love and will miss you forever.