Margaret Bahen Hospice for York Region | Better Together | Doane House Hospice

*We had **one final promise** to make.*

We belonged together like peas and carrots.

Ian John Mason was my best friend and life partner. His infectious smile lit up the room. He was a proud son, brother, father and friend to many, especially his work mates at York Regional Police Services.

Ian was strong and healthy. He played golf, hockey and baseball – sometimes all three in one day. He played in a band, loved trips on his Harley and loved his work. He was in his 30th year on the force, having followed his dream and joined when he was 22 years old.

We were strong, we were happy. We enjoyed everything together and travelled often, frequently visiting Ian's brother and family in Florida.

Then everything changed.

I'm sharing my story with you because it's important to me that our community understands that Margaret Bahen Hospice and Doane House Hospice provide critical support that will help you through one of the most difficult times in your life. Knowing what I now know, I refer to Margaret Bahen Hospice as the best place in the world you never want to go.

With support from people like you in this community, these two outstanding organizations are able to provide programs and services that would not otherwise be available to families like mine. I hope you will consider sending a special gift today to help them continue their important work.

Ian and I met through friends in 2003 and our friendship gradually grew into our wonderful partnership. In February 2019, upon our return from a trip to Florida, we both decided to lose some weight. Ian reached his goal weight before me – but then he just kept losing more. By September (two days before his eldest son's wedding), with his family doctor having recently retired, and his weight loss continuing, he went to a walk-in clinic. From there, he was referred first to Southlake Hospital, then to Sunnybrook Hospital, then to St. Michael's Hospital. The diagnosis was pancreatitis. We were told it would go away on its own. It didn't.

The day after celebrating an early Christmas on December 7th with our extended family, Ian couldn't stop vomiting. Ian was admitted to St. Michael's Hospital where he spent the next 65 days undergoing tests and treatments. On January 14th, we received the devastating news that he had stage 4 pancreatic cancer which had metastasized to his liver. Ian decided it was time to go home to be with his friends and family.

Ian was strong – and a fighter.

Ian knew there was nothing further that could be done to treat his cancer and only continued with chemotherapy to manage his pain. At home, over the next ten days, Ian enjoyed a constant stream of visitors. Then, on Monday, March 2nd, after a scheduled tour at Margaret Bahen Hospice, Ian knew that hospice was the best place for both of us.

Ian was accepting and gracious. He had always been realistic about the possibility of dying on the job, without a chance to tie up loose ends. He was thankful he had been spared that and had time to do whatever remained to be done. We had so much to be grateful for and had loved our life together.

But Ian had one regret. We had never married.

Two days later, with the help of family, his YRP colleagues, Pastor Taylor and the hospice team, Ian and I were married at Margaret Bahen Hospice, with Ian's brothers and their wives in attendance. Our wedding rings were aptly inscribed – "Peas and Carrots."

Margaret Bahen Hospice made Ian's wish come true, providing a peaceful environment, managing his pain and ensuring we both had everything we needed. Being at the hospice with all of our needs being cared for allowed us to <u>just enjoy spending quality time together</u>. The hospice team treated Ian like a king, bathing him, shaving him, making sure he had everything he wanted, and they looked after me, making me feel comfortable and supported. I'm convinced that each and every member of the team was heaven-sent.

Ian died peacefully on March 20th, eighteen days after being admitted to Margaret Bahen Hospice and sixteen days after we married.

Now as I face life without Ian, Doane House Hospice is there for me.

Taking a step forward after losing Ian felt impossible. I needed to talk to someone in order to deal with my overwhelming grief. Doane House Hospice's community programs are helping me take tiny steps forward.

Their programs and services support individuals facing life-threatening illness and their families by meeting their emotional, spiritual and physical needs. The programs provide access to the right care at the right time and give opportunities to remember your loved ones in special ways. I participated in the Memory Bears program that turned various pieces of Ian's clothing into one-of-a-kind keepsakes for myself and thirty of his closest friends and family.

Since Ian died, my "coffee chats" with Hollie, a Supportive Care Coordinator at Doane House Hospice, have been a highlight, providing me with a sounding board, encouraging me to share everything I'm thinking and feeling. Hollie is a constant in my life during a time when everything feels like it has fallen apart.

Thanks to the compassionate care provided by Margaret Bahen Hospice and Doane House Hospice, Ian and I were able to <u>just be together</u> without the distraction of responsibilities. Being surrounded by the beauty, love and respect that embraced us during those days allowed us to focus on each other. I will never be able to adequately express my gratitude for all they did – and continue to do – for us.

Please consider making a gift to these life-changing hospices to ensure other families receive this outstanding care during one of the most challenging times of their lives.

Sincerely,

Michelle Mason (nee Vilkas)

P.S. There will always be families like mine that need to turn to Margaret Bahen Hospice and Doane House Hospice for care and support. Please consider sending a gift today. **It will be matched dollar for dollar by an anonymous donor, doubling the impact of your generosity.**