

Former Dorchester resident advocated for bowel cancer awareness

by Wendy Spence
THE SIGNPOST

Amy Mattingly is being described by those who knew her and those who followed her on social media in many ways, including: inspiring, sarcastic, colourful, positive, kind, funny, a super hero and a beautiful soul. "There's not a shy or retiring bone in Amy. She was always out front, outspoken and never afraid," said her father, Brian Mahon. "You'd meet her and a day later you'd count her as a friend. She had that ability."

Amy, a former Dorchester resident, passed away earlier this month of bowel cancer at the age of 32. She touched many lives, supported many others with cancer and was very candid about her experience on social media outlets and her blog. Amy's legacy lives on in the impression she made upon others to live their lives fully and the impact she made to increase bowel cancer awareness, especially among younger people. She also promoted the importance of organ and blood donation. Amy will be honoured at the Canadian Blood Services clinic in Dorchester next month.

"My daughter was gracious to the very end," said Mahon. She reached out to someone who was dealing with cancer just a couple of weeks before she died. "I don't know how she did it when she was so sick."

"It's rattling to the core to see someone you love go through all of the things that she

went through and the only way to describe it is sad," said one of Amy's friends since childhood, Meagan Paterson. "I'm inspired by her but I'm sad. She is already missed by all her friends and family."

Paterson was able to travel to the U.K. along with a friend, Leah Boulet, who lives in Thamesford, to see Amy in November.

"This visit was incredible because we were able to accompany Amy on one of her walks from Bath to Bradford-on-Avon where Amy lived. Knowing how sick she was and yet was making this weekly (nine mile) walk to raise awareness for bowel cancer was beyond inspirational," said Paterson, who still lives in Dorchester. "That's a memory that I will always cherish; her walking with her cape on and head held high."

Another one of Paterson's favourite memories from the trip was going out to a nice restaurant in Bath one evening. "We shared an incredible meal and laughed just like old times, as if nothing were wrong. Seeing Amy laugh like that, enjoying herself, was such a gift."

Paterson said it was very difficult to leave and she wishes she could have stayed longer, but she was thankful for the time she had with Amy.

"Beyond all of the awareness that she has created and the need for people to donate blood and be organ donors, I've learned to live life in the moment and with thanksgiving," said Paterson. "She didn't have a bucket list,

she went about her life enjoying the view and I appreciate the peace that brought her. In a life where so many people compare experiences, and have the need to 'one-up' one another, she was content... even amongst the chaos of chemo treatments and procedures."

Mahon said that his daughter always had a smile on her face. Paterson recalled the sweet laugh that came easily to her. "She loved being around people, socializing and chatting about life. She was one of the easiest people to talk about anything with and got through life by smiling and just carrying on when life threw the most wicked of wrenches her way. Obviously she had her moments when things were too overwhelming for her to handle, but one of the things I am most proud of her for and inspired by, is her perseverance. She always got back up when others would have given up."

According to her longtime friend, Amy was persistent and always gave it her all. "She could have given up and wallowed in her situation. Most would and no one would have thought her weak for it, but she chose to be fabulous! She would get all dressed up in the most sparkly and loud outfits with funky wigs and incredible makeup and walk in to get her chemo and procedures done with such pride." Amy became friends with many of the patients and staff and she brightened the day of many others when she showed up on Halloween for a procedure dressed as Beetlejuice, recalled Paterson.

Amy moved to Dorchester with her family when she was in Grade 1, which is when Paterson met her. They worked at the Dorchester grocery store for a few years as teens and got to know each other better. "We became good friends shortly after and the following year she switched back to LDSS for her Grade 11 year (after attending Beal for one year). Amy, myself, and our

other friends Amy Hollywood (Unruh) and Amanda Wallace (Harris) were inseparable!"

Amy lived in London, Ontario for a few of her adult years before meeting her future husband, Chris Mattingly, and moving to Bath, U.K. at 22. "Although she has lived in the U.K. for 10 years, she always came home to visit friends and family and to frequent her favourite Dorchester spots," Paterson recalled. "Having grown up in Tiner, the Mill Pond was one of her favourite places to hang out." Amy, who worked as a web designer in the U.K., at blubolt, an eCommerce platform provider that she and Chris started from the ground up, also loved her friends and family, karaoke, sparkly makeup and cats. She had a passion for major home renovations and design. Paterson and another friend from Dorchester, Ally Bryant (Mustos), were in Amy's wedding in the U.K. in February 2008.

Amy was first diagnosed with familial adenomatous polyposis, a type of bowel cancer, in April 2017 after the stillbirth of her son Leo in January 2017. "If you asked Amy, cancer's one thing," said Mahon, "but losing a baby was the biggest heartache for her."

Looking back, Amy realized she probably had symptoms 10 years before that, when her bowel habits changed. She endured numerous procedures, underwent surgery and chemotherapy treatments and passed away on April 5. She didn't want anyone to say that she "lost her battle" with cancer but said she'd rather be remembered as someone who never lost hope. Amy requested that people donate blood and/or to contribute to bowel cancer research. The Canadian Blood Services clinic to be held in her honour, is Monday, May 28 from 4 to 8 p.m. at the Optimist Hall on Richmond Street. There was a memorial celebration in the U.K. on April 14 and there will

be another memorial service in Canada in the future. Get details on the Team Amy Facebook page. A team is taking part in Colorectal Cancer Canada's annual 5K walk and 10K run, Push For Your Tush fundraiser, on June 3 at Wonderland Gardens in London in honour of Amy.

Bowel cancer, known more commonly as colorectal cancer in Canada, can be treated most successfully when diagnosed early, which was not the case with Amy. "It's now become a disease of the young," said Mahon.

Colorectal cancer, the second biggest cancer killer in Canada, is a malignant tumour that starts in cells of the colon or rectum. It can spread to other parts of the body.

See your doctor if you have these symptoms: a change in your bowel movements; bright red or very dark blood in your stool (poop); new and persistent diarrhea; constipation or feeling that your bowel does not empty completely; stools that are narrower than usual; new and persistent stomach discomfort and/or unexplained weight loss.

"Amy did a great job of raising awareness and I would say others can benefit from her experience by being aware of their bodies," said Paterson. "Be aware of signs and symptoms. Don't think because you are young you are invincible; Amy was only 32. And this is not something to be embarrassed of. Amy was so open about her experience and it has helped to remove any stigma associated with bowel cancer... she loved everything poop emoji." Follow Amy's journey at: catslovepeanutbutter.com.

Paterson said there's definitely a hole now because so many things have happened that she has wanted to let her friend Amy know. "It's hard knowing that we won't reminisce over all the memories we shared, we won't laugh at our old pictures and won't have a chance to make new memories."



Amy Mattingly showed off her flashy attire, fun makeup and gold cape while in hospital for a chemo treatment.

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