

Brande's Story

I miss my husband. Brande and I were a couple for 25 years. He was my lover, best friend, and mentor. Just like perfectly matched salt and pepper shakers, we were always together. We were two individuals, complete on our own, yet so much more together. He died of liver cancer in October 2014.

Brande was diabetic and suffered from exhaustion and nausea. When blood test results showed his liver enzymes were high, his doctor accused him of being an alcoholic despite the fact that he rarely drank. Unfortunately his doctor did not test any further.



Years later, when pinkish brown spots began spreading across his chest and neck, Brande insisted on seeing a dermatologist who told him he needed his liver checked. It was his endocrinologist who booked him for the ultrasound that led to the diagnosis of liver cancer – a consequence of previously undiagnosed non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD). He was then immediately referred to a transplant surgeon.

The diagnosis of liver cancer and fatty liver disease came as a shock to both husband and wife.

Fatty liver disease is caused by the accumulation of fat in liver cells. The greater the percentage of fat in the liver, the greater the risk of developing liver inflammation, fibrosis or cirrhosis (moderate or severe scarring of the liver) which can, as in Brande's case, develop into liver cancer. In addition to obesity, fatty liver disease has also been linked to other risk factors, including insulin resistance, hyperlipidaemia, high blood pressure and Type II diabetes. One of the scary things about fatty liver disease is that there are often no symptoms until it is well advanced. The Canadian Liver Foundation estimates that as many as 7 million Canadians may have fatty liver disease making it the number one liver disease in the country.

Research shows that when diagnosed early, the damage caused by fatty liver disease is reversible. However, continued research and education is vital because the incidence of liver cancer is growing at an alarming rate. Ruth and Brande were angry that his fatty liver disease wasn't diagnosed earlier. If it had, he might not have developed liver cancer or needed a transplant. Ruth feels she now owes it to her husband to share information about fatty liver disease and help raise awareness of the importance of organ donation.

Brande lived with liver cancer for four years. His only hope was a liver transplant and finding a liver donor was a long, slow process. In April 2013, Brande got the call that a donor liver was available, but a last minute CT scan of his lungs showed that the cancer had spread meaning he was no longer eligible for a transplant. He died just a few weeks after his 64th birthday.



Canadian Liver Foundation
Fondation canadienne du foie

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After Brande's death, Ruth turned her attention to doing what she loved and was motivated to help raise awareness about liver health by sharing her story.

"After Brande died, I knew that turning my love of floral photography into a business would help me to heal, and thrive...and bring joy to many!" says Ruth. "As for my husband, I like to think he's found a heavenly fishing spot."

Ruth is keeping a Facebook page that she started when they were actively searching for a living liver donor and raising awareness about organ donation. Check out her blogsite: widowsendorphins.blogspot.com.

Photo: Ruth Adams and Brande Gentry - taken a few days before he got the call for a liver transplant (Douglas Ryan)