



News

**'Always have a bottle of Champagne in the fridge and always order pavlova': How cancer blogger, 22, who was given just three months to live after finding a mole on her back kept a bucket list of simple things she loved before her tragic death**

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1,362 words

17 April 2018

02:10

Mail Online

DAMONL

English

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\* Emma Betts died earlier this month as she lost her battle to melanoma aged 25

\* At 22, she was given three months to live - but survived the illness for three years

\* ABC show Australian Story has recapped her life in an emotional documentary

\* Ms Betts wrote a list of things she loved to help her keep positive before she died

A woman who was diagnosed with skin cancer and given three months to live aged 22 wrote a list of little things she loved to keep her positive before she died.

Emma Betts, from Brisbane, was diagnosed with Stage 4 Metastatic Melanoma after her scuba diving instructor spotted a mole on her back.

Knowing she was going to die as treatment failed, she married her boyfriend Serge Simic, started a sun safety blog called Dear Melanoma and began raising money to save others' lives because she couldn't save her own.

The aid worker felt writing a bucket list would bring too much pressure to complete it so instead kept a list of simple things she enjoyed in life.

It read: 'Always have a bottle of champagne in the fridge. Always order pavlova if it's on the menu.'

With her customary sense of humour, Ms Betts added on the pavlova: 'Thank goodness it isn't often on the menu or I would be living at the gym!'

The list also included: 'Enjoy Sushi Train often, enjoy regular massages and eat Caramello Koalas when the urge strikes.'

On April 8 this year, after surviving three years since her diagnosis, Ms Betts died peacefully at home with her parents Leon and Tamra and husband by her side.

'Enjoy regular massages': Emma Betts' list of the little things she enjoyed in her 25-year life

To always have beautiful flowers in our home

To always order pavlova if it is on the menu at a restaurant

To have a fold-down (all cushions removed from my bed and the blankets turned down) by Serge every night (Serge is keeping up about 90 per cent of the time)

Enjoy Sushi Train often

Always have a bottle of champagne in the fridge and drink from nice champagne flutes. This should not be limited to special occasions.

Eat Caramello Koalas when the urge strikes

Enjoy regular massages

Make my English Breakfast Tea obsession extra special by drinking out of my favourite fine china teacup and saucer

Buy cherries and eat them like they are going out of fashion

Make having my hair dyed a six-weekly occurrence and always follow it with a blow dry, even when I am going straight to the gym after (yay for Hollywood hair!)

Always have beautiful nails (manicures and pedicures are never to be considered wasted money!)

Always have my favourite white wine on stock at home

Remember that there is always time for weekends away

Enjoy our new puppy, Mr Ralph

ABC show Australian Story recapped her life in an emotional documentary which aired Monday night.

Her boyfriend Mr Simic revealed why he decided to stay with her and get married despite her telling him to leave.

'It wasn't out of pity,' he said. 'I thought "I genuinely want to be with this person," I was in it for the long run.'

Mr Simic, who met Ms Betts after working for her brother-in-law, proposed after just five months of dating because he felt that was 'the road we would go down' if she didn't have cancer.

He said through tears that even though he wanted to spend the rest of his life with his wife, he was pleased that her suffering had ended.

Also in the show, Ms Betts' parents paid tribute to their third daughter and said the week after her death was very 'tough time'.

Ms Betts was volunteering in East Timor three years ago when a scuba diving instructor pointed out an unusual mole on her shoulder.

She went for a skin check and was diagnosed with cancer. After her diagnosis, Emma decided to start her blog to document her daily struggles and start 'a conversation about cancer'.

Covering everything from the plans she had for her death, her support for the 'dignity to die' cause and her fear of leaving her husband behind, her blog offered a raw and honest account of living with the disease.

'While it's tough writing the posts and I get quite upset, seeing the comments and reading how it has impacted people makes me feel like I'm actually doing something for myself, as well as other people,' Ms Betts said at the time.

During her three-year battle, Ms Betts achieved more than she ever thought possible - from marrying her husband Serge and buying a house to starting her own business and raising over \$100,000 for the Melanoma Institute.

In a heartbreaking post after her death, Emma's father broke the tragic news to her 20,850 followers.

'All good things must come to an end,' he wrote.

'At around 11:40 last night Emma peacefully passed away with Serge, Tamra and I at her side.

'I think my Mum summed things up rather succinctly... Emma achieved so much in 25 years, just imagine what she would have achieved if she lived to a ripe old age!'

The family has vowed to continue her work by running her social media accounts and blog for her devoted followers.

'Now I want to make one point very clear...this is not the end of Dear Melanoma, nor Love, Emma,' he continued.

'Over the last couple of months Tamra and I have been in intensive training under Emma's stewardship.

'And we are ready to assume the reins to continue Emma's efforts to raise awareness of the risks of Melanoma and to raise funds for Melanoma research.

'Maybe too late for Emma, but there are a lot of people that Emma still wants to save...this is her legacy and we will honour it.

'I have no doubt that with the support our family, friends and 20,000 plus Dear Melanoma followers we can make a difference...a big difference.'

#### WHAT IS MELANOMA AND HOW CAN YOU PREVENT IT?

Melanoma is the most dangerous form of skin cancer. It happens after the DNA in skin cells is damaged (typically due to harmful UV rays) and then not repaired so it triggers mutations that can form malignant tumors.

##### Causes

- \* Sun exposure: UV and UVB rays from the sun and tanning beds are harmful to the skin.
- \* Moles: The more moles you have, the greater the risk for getting melanoma.
- \* Skin type: Fairer skin has a higher risk for getting melanoma.
- \* Hair color: Red heads are more at risk than others.
- \* Personal history: If you've had melanoma once then you are more likely to get it again.
- \* Family history: If previous relatives have had it then that increases your risk.

##### Treatment

###### Removal of the melanoma:

This can be done by removing the entire section of the tumor or by the surgeon removing the skin layer by layer. When a surgeon removes it layer by layer, this helps them figure out exactly where the cancer stops so they don't have to remove more than is necessary.

###### Skin grafting:

The patient can decide to use a skin graft if the surgery has left behind discoloration or an indent.

###### Immunotherapy, radiation treatment or chemotherapy:

This is needed if the cancer reaches stage III or IV. That means that the cancerous cells have spread to the lymph nodes or other organs in the body.

##### Prevention

- \* Use sunscreen and do not burn
- \* Avoid tanning outside and in beds
- \* Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going outside
- \* Keep newborns out of the sun
- \* Examine your skin every month
- \* See your physician every year for a skin exam

Source: Skin Cancer Foundation

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