

## Emily Vonder Meulen

Emily Ann Vonder Meulen was an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student at St. Dominic School for the 2005/2006 school year. On April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006 Emily died from anaphylaxis after eating a sandwich at a local restaurant. Emily was allergic to peanuts and she was very vigilant about reading labels and quizzing waiters and waitresses about her food. That day, a hidden trace amount of peanut cross contaminated her sandwich. Ten minutes after eating the sandwich she started experiencing asthma like symptoms which rapidly turned for the worse as many body systems became involved in the allergic reaction. Twenty to twenty-five minutes after eating, Emily passed away. The reaction was rapid and overwhelming.

This tragic day occurred a month before 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation and a month before Emily's 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, May 16. Emily had already put together plans for her graduation party. She was planning on going to Mercy High School. She wanted to have a black and blue party. Black represented St. Dominic and Blue represented Mercy. She wanted black and blue streamers, plates, and napkins. She already made her gift list, food list, and invitation list.

Emily is the daughter of Paul and Catrina and the big sister to Evan and Elena. She attended St. Antoninus grade school for kindergarten through third grade. She began at St. Dominic in the fourth grade.

Emily requested the words *Live Love Laugh* be stenciled on the wall of her bedroom. These words sum up Emily. She loved life and she expressed her gratitude and appreciation for many things large and small. She loved dandelions and she would tamp the yellow flower on her nose to color her nose yellow. She loved to laugh and play practical jokes and pranks. She loved to be helpful.

Emily seemed to be wise beyond her years. When she was around five, she wanted to be the mother. She would order everyone around and wanted to do things normally handled by adults, for example cutting birthday cake. She seemed to communicate better with adults than kids her own age.

She was so grateful to people that worked hard to provide something special for her. Below is a letter from her scout master that captures the appreciative nature of Emily:

*To all the leaders,*

*Hello, my name is Linda Gentile, I am a co-leader of Emily's troop. Please excuse the delay, but this was the first time I was able to get on my computer, and it has been a very rough time for myself, Shelly and Troop 137.*

*I would like to tell you about Emily. She was the type of girl scout you truly loved having in your troop. Let me tell you that I have been a leader for 15 years and have had 3 troops. Emily was the first girl that I actually thought "She gets it".*

*Let me explain, when our trip was over for Savannah, Emily came up to me and hugged me, she said "Thank you Mrs. Gentile, this was the best vacation!". Emily knew I had planned the trip and thanked me even though she was not in my troop at the time. Having Emily thank me justified all the hard work that went into it. "She gets it"*

*Last fall myself and Shelly decided to continue being leaders. I received a call from Emily asking if she could be in our troop because hers was disbanding. Emily had impressed me so much at the Savannah trip that I was*



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*more than willing to have her be in our troop. For our first field trip we had the girls volunteer at the "Delhi Haunted House". When I came home later that night there was a message on my answering machine, it was from Emily. Her voice was so excited and she thanked me and let me know how much fun she had. "She gets it". (I kept the message on my answering machine for a very long time, I would replay the message over and over, I just loved hearing the appreciation in her voice. As leaders you understand.)*

*When we would go on field trips, I would always watch Emily, because she truly did love the experiences and loved being with the other girls. She loved Girl Scouts. Having been a girl scout myself, I did not appreciate it till I had daughters of my own. So I always figured when I heard the girls complaining about things, (which they do), I would think they'll get it and appreciate it when they get older. Emily always appreciated it, she always got it. I thought I was impressing Emily, but she was impressing me the whole time. I will be talking about Emily for many, many years to come. I am so grateful that she really enjoyed life for the short time she had. I am so impressed by her wonderful parents, Catrina and Paul, they truly did raise a wonderful daughter in Emily!*

*We love you and we will miss you Emily.*

*Troop 137*

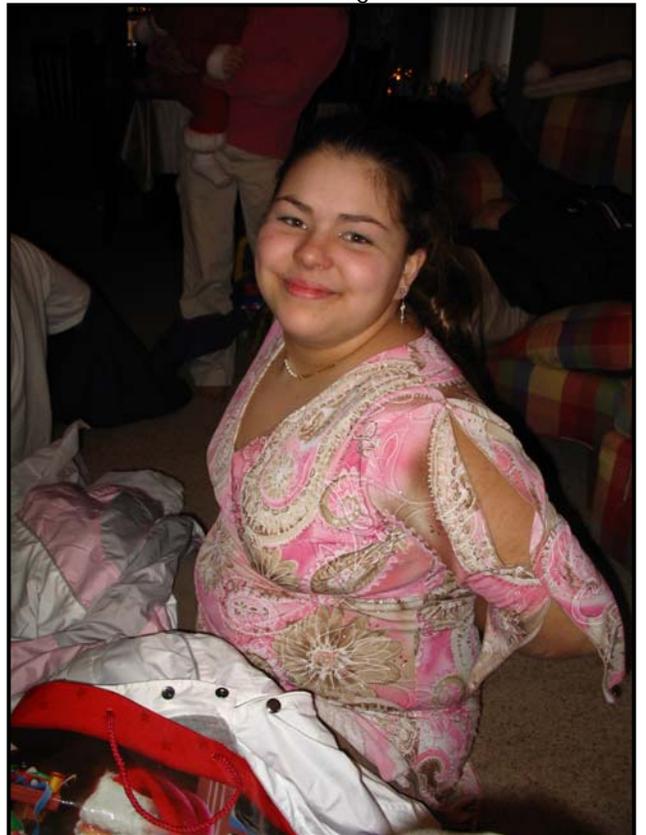
Another story of appreciation was from Linda Liebau, who volunteered to teach Junior Achievement to Emily's class each year. After each teaching, Emily would help Linda cleanup the room, papers, etc. Each time she would also *Thank* Linda for volunteering to teach JA. Emily understood the importance of saying *Thank You*.

Emily also understood *Love*. In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade year book, each 8<sup>th</sup> grader has their baby picture and a saying underneath it. Emily wrote "Love is Everything... it is really worth fighting for, being brave for, risking everything for." She loved to give bear hugs... and when she was younger, she would give a running bear hug that almost knocked you to the ground. She loved the movie *Rent* because Emily understood that Love is *Love* no matter what. There was nothing she loved more than her family, especially her mother, Catrina. She could sense when Catrina was not feeling well or was heart broken – Emily would go to work to remedy the situation.

Emily was born with eczema and had many environmental allergies and unfortunately severe food allergies to nuts. She was allergic to dogs and cats – she would have loved to have had either. She wanted a pet badly, so she came home one day and asked if she could have a corn snake from Mrs. Teepen. The deal we made was that Emily had to get a 90 or above on her next test. Emily had ADHD also, so she had to work extra extra hard just to get a C. She would bring home a 75 and be absolutely thrilled. Anyway, she worked so hard for the 90 and achieved it and more... she loved her new pet albino corn snake, balboa.

Her eczema was severe when she was younger, but was localized to her feet, knees, and elbows later. She was so brave when she was young – willing to have blood drawn for an eczema study to help other kids.

Emily was always very helpful – most times you did **not** have to beg or bribe her to help you. The morning she passed away, Evan and Paul were cutting grass and working in the yard. Emily prepared two



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large glasses of ice water without anyone asking for them. She prepared Paul's lunch that day. Emily formed a smiley face ☺ out of pickles on top of the sandwich. She would help you and then thank you for letting her help. She had very strong hands and loved to give back or foot rubs. She had talked of being a massage therapist... but in confidence, she told Paul's cousin Ann VonderMeulen a Franciscan nun that she wanted to work for the missions.

Emily loved to *Laugh*. She loved playing pranks. For example, she would hide in closets and jump out to scare you. When she would stay at her grandma and grandpa's house, when grandpa would get up in the morning and go to the bathroom, Emily would wake up grandma – put pillows under the covers to make it look like they were still in bed sleeping – then hide in the closet with grandma – at the right moment they would jump out and scare grandpa. In her last years, she would drive Catrina crazy by yelling "Mom!...." then when Cat would answer Emily would say "Never Mind...". On her last day, Cat had taken a pound of ground beef out of the freezer and put it in the laundry basket to bring upstairs. She forgot about it and asked Emily to get it... Emily yelled upstairs "the white laundry is all red!!..." then after a pause and a frantic Catrina, she said "Just Kidding".



Emily cherished the time she spent with her grandparents. One weekend, her grandparents took her to Louisville to eat at the Spaghetti Factory. Paul, Cat, and the other kids thought it would be great to surprise them and show up too. Well Emily was extremely mad that we had intruded on her special day with her grandparents. We had to eat at another table by ourselves where she could not see us. ☺

Emily had a way to get you to do the right thing. Her grandfather had not taken communion for years... but when Emily would spend the night and go to church with them – she would give grandpa the evil eye until he accepted communion. On Sunday's, she would quiz him to make sure he accepted communion.

Emily knew Jesus and lived her life as Jesus taught us. She left us a wonderful note in her diary. This note was written on the inside cover... not on a page that could be torn out. Here is what she wrote: *"Mom and Dad, if I ever die in my sleep, I just want you guys and Evan and Elena to know that I ♥ you. You were the best parents ever. Remember I am in a better place now. I ♥ you more than the whole world. ♥ Emily."* This message is a gift from Emily. She was so thoughtful, she even wanted to make sure we were okay if something tragic were to happen to her.

Several months before Emily died, her school asked students to write poems that would be submitted to a national organization for review and possible publication. Several weeks after Emily died, we were notified that Emily's poem was accepted to be published in the book *A Celebration of Young Poets* and also was considered for an award. Unfortunately,

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Emily never knew about this wonderful accomplishment. The language arts teacher told us that she was the only student in 2006 to have a poem selected for publication. Here is Emily's poem and in light of her death, the last sentence is very eerie.

### Trouble in Paradise

I came home from the movies one day and heard a racket from far away.  
I ran outside in the cold winter night, saw nothing and went back inside.

I heard again "what" and a scream I knew right then what it could be.  
It was my brother and my parents in a hot red steam.

I thought to myself "he is so mean, how can he fight every night, and in my dreams."  
I ran upstairs to hug my pillow, to try and feel some comfort in that light blue fellow.

I rolled over too far and fell off of my bed, with a "crap" and an "ouch" I laid there on my floor in a crouch.  
My head was dizzy and my ears were ringing, I couldn't believe the way I was feeling.

I prayed to God on that dark cold night to help me see a way through this heartbreak and fight.  
All of a sudden the noise slowly calmed, I felt a warm feeling in my heart and love that would overflow.

I went downstairs and saw a wonderful sight; my brother was smiling not wanting to fight.  
My mother and father were crying happy tears because they knew what happened, they knew, it was clear.

He had a change of heart on this lonesome night of fear and fight.  
I don't know how and I don't know why but I don't care because deep inside

I know high above in the land of care and love He had helped my family that night with a light,  
A light He gave to me that night, to help my family with their start of new life.

*Emily Vonder Meulen, Grade 8  
St Dominic Elementary School, OH*

Emily was a special person who understood the gift of *Life*. She understood *Love* and understood that *Love is Everything*. And most of all, Emily knew how to have fun; she loved to *Laugh* and loved to make others *Laugh*.

Live Love Laugh



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In Emily's memory, Paul and Catrina Vonder Meulen have setup a memorial fund. The Emily Vonder Meulen Memorial Fund was created in memory of our loving daughter Emily who fell victim to her food allergies and died suddenly of anaphylaxis on April 13, 2006. She was only 13 years old.

### **Our Mission:**

Build awareness of, educate about, and to raise funds benefiting food allergy programs and research. In addition, to award scholarships for seventh grade students attending St. Dominic School who reflect Emily's life, spirit, and dedication to family.

If you would like to donate to our fund, please send your tax-deductible contribution to:

Make checks payable to the Emily Vonder Meulen Memorial Fund  
c/o The Warren County Foundation  
P.O.Box 817  
Lebanon, OH 45036

Thank you very much for your kind donations.

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Paul and Catrina have also created a website to help build awareness and educate others about the dangers of food allergies. The number of children and adults with food allergies is growing exponentially every year. There is no cure or vaccine – only a shot of Epinephrine to give you 15 minutes to get the victim to an emergency room. Please visit our website for information on food allergies.

[www.foodallergyangel.com](http://www.foodallergyangel.com)

*Pray for all those with food allergies and their families who must live with the fear of losing their precious children.*