

My dear family, dear friends,

"Everything went so fast", too often I have heard this in recent days. I understand that many of you have questions on this earthquake, that shook our family. Therefore, at the beginning of this service, I briefly want to try to describe what we went through these past few months.

One spring season was all it took.

Monday, March 29 is one of the first beautiful days of the year. Temperature is 20 degrees and more. Magda is in Ghent busy with the files of several PhD students. Suddenly, she feels dizzy and she rushes to the toilet. The symptoms linger on and Magda gets worried. She returns to the secretariat and asks Marc to bring her to the university clinic. Supported by Alex and Marc, she safely reaches the emergency department but has increasing problems with equilibrium and vision.

Around 3 pm I arrive at the emergency department, and the results of an initial brain scan are available: it was not a stroke, as we had dared to believe, but much worse, various metastases are found in Magda's brain.

Cortisone quickly relieves pressure in the brain. Magda begins to realize the gravity of the situation. But at the same time she is the one who offers courage. All who appear beside her hospital bed - usually completely upset - are told: "... we will make the best of it ... I could have caused an accident on the highway ... at least we will have time to prepare for farewell..." Again and again a message of strong hope and confidence. Later that week we learn that lung cancer is at the root of all problems. On Good Friday we can go home.

After celebrating Easter intensely with all our children and grandchildren, the preparations for the radiotherapy of the brain start. Luckily we can still spend a nice weekend in Lourdes in France. The radiation treatment lasts for a full week and the subsequent month is becoming increasingly difficult due to the side effects of the radiation. Nevertheless, Magda, preoccupied as ever, is still concerned with the household affairs: the attic and basement have yet to be cleared, Vincent is sent along to buy me a new costume, the weeds beside the hedge along the street should be removed...

On May 10 Magda is unwell again and the cortisone dose needs to be increased. New scans of the lungs and brain on May 25 offer little to no prospects for further therapy. We now have to switch to comfort treatment and pain management.

Day after day the physical barriers increase, but Magda succeeds to minimize them wherever possible. I'm taking on cooking classes from her and realize that helping in the kitchen is more than just filling and emptying a dishwasher. From her wheelchair she instructs me and organizes the planting in the garden. We make trips to the sea and walks along the river Scheldt. The pace of weekly visits to her parents and my mother are to be gradually decreased. During her last visit to pepe and meme on Tuesday June 15, she holds a grand niece in her arms: Alies, barely five days old and just discharged from the maternity ward. Mama Magda is full of joy !

On Friday morning, the situation is suddenly changing. Magda realizes fully that increasing the cortisone dose is no longer an option. With incredible courage and her characteristic enthusiasm she calls all her grandchildren and tells them about her journey to heaven and what she wishes for them for the future. Encouraged by the last sacrament, and enjoying a glass of champagne she says farewell in the evening to her daughters before we go to bed. Saturday morning starts surprisingly well. Magda says: "we get a bonus day, who knows, maybe two".

In the afternoon she immensely enjoys the visit of her nephews, nieces and the smallest two grand nieces. She is full of joy when niece Evelyne tells her that Magda is the middle name of grand niece Alies. But her illness apparently takes her in and within the next hour she is getting very weak. Magda asks to go to bed because she knows she can go into a coma at any moment. With eight of us on the bed, daughters and sons in law, we drink a glass of champagne, and we listen to the song "le temps des cerises" (cherry time).

Everybody gets one last message and kiss, and when the children have left, Magda and I are close to each other and fall asleep.

At night, her breathing is getting heavier but by morning she is very weak. We are all around her, as mama Magda peacefully passes away on Sunday at 10:30 in the morning.

At that time, we feel just how much she has carried us in recent weeks, with an endless courage, everything for us, her beloved.

It was an unfair fight: in a few weeks time, an express train raced over us.

Dear family, colleagues and friends, you have given us these last few weeks to spend within our close family. Thank you for respecting our privacy. The fact that you are so many today to participate in this celebration in memory of our dear Magda, gives us comfort.

Dearest darling, let our last hour, together with so many, be an intensive experience.