

# REAL LIFE

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EVERYDAY HERO

## Memory Maker

Kate Carter helps families cope with the loss of loved ones by creating touching home movies

by AMY PATUREL

**ON ANY GIVEN DAY OF THE WEEK,** filmmaker Kate Carter, 64, turns her digital camera on a dying stranger, making beautiful documentary-style videos of people whose lives are fading. Her goal: to create a virtual memory for loved ones, without charging a cent. It's a calling that has its roots in her own brush with mortality—20 years ago, the mom of three seemed to be on her deathbed due to complications of ulcerative colitis. She survived, though, and began a career in television production.

In 1998, when Kate learned that her best friend, Tairi, was dying of breast cancer, a lightbulb went on in her head. "I wracked my brain for something to do for her kids, and it came to me—I could make a video of their mom," she says. But Tairi's cancer took her before Kate got her on tape. The day Tairi died, Kate formed LifeChronicles, a nonprofit that helps families cope with impending loss by recording life stories. The first year, she shot two videos. (Families find her through hospital social →

workers and hospices or when they contact her directly at [lifechronicles.org](http://lifechronicles.org).) Today, she does more than 130 a year nationwide, each about two hours long. To cover costs, she raises donations online and through fund-raising events in her community.

The Frantzis family of Melbourne, FL, has been just one of 1,500 so far to benefit from Kate's kind actions. When Joe Frantzis learned that he was dying of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease), he was 46 and the father of three girls, and his wife, Tracy, was pregnant. Kate filmed their family life six weeks after their youngest was born. "We wanted to preserve his memory for our girls before his disease progressed," says Tracy, 45, a real estate agent. "I lost my father when I was 18, so I know what it's like to have a void. Once my dad passed, I just wanted to hear his voice one more time."

Thanks to Kate, Tracy's girls have tangible memories not just of what Joe looked and sounded like, but of how it felt to be loved by him. Kate captured his reassurances that he would always watch over them; his embrace as he pulled them close and kissed their foreheads; and the words he wanted Tracy

to hear before he left this world. She also incorporated footage of where he had grown up and played baseball. Most important, Kate helped the family forget about the cameras and connect in their special way. "There's footage of the girls playing Candy Land and joking with their dad," says Tracy. "Those memories are irreplaceable, and knowing that they were there gave him such peace."

Kate does most of her filming solo, though a volunteer crew helps. She spends around three hours with each family, usually in their home or in hospice. "Families can draw on the experience repeatedly for comfort," she says.

For Tracy Frantzis and her family, the rewind button became a lifeline. After Joe's death, Tracy struggled to understand why she had been left to raise the kids on her own, but "I could turn on the tape and hear him saying 'It will be OK,' and I felt like he was right there with me." Her youngest, Lilah, now 14, has no firsthand memory of her father. But after she watched the LifeChronicles video for the first time, "it made such a difference to her," says Tracy. "It was no longer stories everyone told her about her dad — it was *Daddy*. You can't put a price tag on that." ♦



#### LIFE LEGACY

Kate talking with client Larry Crandell, 92, who died in August 2016. "Filming lets families slow down when everything seems out of control," says Kate.

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