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AN EXCLUSIVE MAGAZINE FOR THE RESIDENTS OF AMHERSTBURG

# AMHERSTBURG

AUGUST 2025

*Living*



*Maddie Simone:*

A LIFE OF LOVE, LOSS AND LEGACY

POWERED BY



COVER PHOTO BY NICOLE LESPERANCE: MAGNOLIA DESIGN STUDIO

# Maddie Simone:

## A LIFE OF LOVE, LOSS AND LEGACY

Photos by Nicole Lesperance: Magnolia Design Studio

I never imagined that the sound of a phone ringing could leave an imprint on your soul.

The first time it rang, it was my sister in law. Her voice was faint, like a shadow trying to hold form. "Maddalena... it's time. He wants you to come home?" Those words are carved into my memory. It's time. My chest tightened as I clutched the phone. I knew. Even before the words left her lips, something inside me knew this was the end of his fight. My hands trembled as I grabbed my car keys. I drove home to Guelph quickly as if each minute would give me back what I was about to lose.

He had already battled so much. Four years earlier, he'd survived an aortic dissection—an event so severe most people don't survive. It was a medical miracle at the time. But then cancer came. He fought that too, bravely, despite his fear and sadness. But in the hospital room that day, there was a different kind of silence. He smiled when I walked in; his eyes tired, but peaceful. We didn't say much. His brain had been overcome by cancer, he was joyful without worry or many words. There was nothing left to say that hadn't already been said in a thousand shared laughs and tears. The love between siblings doesn't always need words.

He passed two days later while I held his hand. He was 39.

Grief is strange the first time you meet it—loud, confusing, and hard to carry. I thought I understood sorrow then. I didn't know it could come again so quickly—or hit even harder. Four years later, the phone rang again. This time, it was my dad's voice. He was trying—failing—to soften the impossible. My little brother had died suddenly of a full thoracic aortic rupture. No warning. No goodbye. Just... gone. He was 29.

I was at work. I sat down on the office floor, knees tucked to my chest, unable to process what I was hearing. My ears rang. My mind refused to believe it. My baby brother. I'd watched him grow up. I had always protected him. And now he was gone. Numbness swept over me like a tide. I didn't cry right away. It was as if my soul had turned to dust.

What made it worse was how close we were. He had lived with me for four years while in school. My house was his home away from home. We shared meals, late-night talks, dumb TV shows, and dreams. He was one of my best friends. Every year, like clockwork, we went to Bon Jovi concerts together. It was our thing—our escape from life. He loved music, big dreams, deep conversation, and people. He was a dreamer, yes—but more than that, he was a doer. Every dream he had, he chased. He made us all believe anything was possible.

And then he was gone.

The loss tore a hole in me. With both of my brothers gone, I felt like part of my identity had been erased. The sibling dynamic, the inside jokes, the shared history—vanished. I was numb, but underneath that numbness was an ache I couldn't shake. I was the only one left.

We didn't understand what was happening to our family. How could two young men—strong, healthy, vibrant—be taken by the same invisible force?





*My brothers*

Grief has a way of rewriting your DNA. But in my case, it quite literally did. After their deaths, our family underwent genetic testing and discovered we carried a rare mutation of the MYLK gene, something so rare and dangerous that it causes spontaneous rupture of the aorta—life-ending events with no notice. In simple terms, your aorta can tear or burst at any moment, often with no warning. No symptoms. No chance. My brothers were victims of this invisible time bomb written into our code. I was positive for the mutation as well.

The reality of that was unbearable. I'd already lost so much. Now I had to face the terrifying possibility that my own heart could betray me instantly. What do you do when you're told you could die at any moment from the same thing that stole your brothers? You breathe. You keep breathing. And eventually, you start rebuilding.

But even in my fear, there was hope for new life. I wanted children. And then, I chose to get pregnant, twice. The medical world braced itself. Aortic rupture during pregnancy is almost always fatal. But not for me. The doctors warned me. Pregnancy puts an enormous strain on the heart and blood vessels, and with my genetic mutation, the risks were astronomical. I was told, gently but firmly, that most women with my condition don't survive childbirth. But I did.

I became the **first person on medical record to survive pregnancy twice with the MYLK gene mutation**, with both babies—and myself—alive and well. My story lives in two medical journals. I live with it every day. I still look at my children in wonder, because they are more than just my heart—they are proof of resilience, of beating the odds.



Their names are Aria and Anthony. They carry the same gene as me. It was heartbreaking to learn, but also empowering—because knowledge is power. We know what to watch for. We know how to act quickly. Every year, we travel to Toronto for imaging and follow-ups with a specialized medical team. It's our version of taking control. It's a tradition I wish we didn't need, but one that binds us together in strength.

Despite the looming shadow of this condition, our home is filled with laughter and noise and joy. Aria is in grade 4. She's fierce and graceful, flipping through the air as a competitive cheerleader. She never backs down from a challenge. Anthony, in grade 1, is full of laughter and energy. He loves soccer and plays like the world disappears when he's on the field. They are young, joyful, beautifully unaware of just how exceptional they are. Watching them live life with such fearless joy heals something in me.

My husband, Eric - he's the calm in our storm. He chose to love a woman carrying grief in her bones and danger in her blood. He knew what our future might hold—and he chose it anyway. There's something sacred in that kind of love. And that's the kind of love we've built a life on. Born and raised right here in Amherstburg, he introduced me to this town through



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his favourite places—summer stops at Waterfront Ice Cream, wonderful dinners at Ricardo's, and now new memories made at The Pepper Cat. His roots became mine. His love built our foundation.

We now live on our dream property in the county area of Amherstburg—36 acres of peace, history, and open sky. The land once housed a beloved candy shop and “pick-your-own” strawberry farm, a nostalgic spot that many locals still remember fondly. There's something healing about land with history—a place where joy and sweetness once grew.

Amherstburg has become more than home—it's my grounding place, my sanctuary. I find calm on morning walks along the water, where Detroit River stretches endlessly, reminding me to breathe deeply. I kayak through River Canard with the sun on my back, drifting between past and present, pain and peace. On special days, Eric and I enjoy a quiet glass of local wine at VIN Winery or sitting in our back yard with perfect views of Sanson Winery, letting the beauty of this place wash over us. Amherstburg is a small town, but it's big in heart—and it's helped keep mine beating strong.

In the wake of all this—after the funerals, the diagnoses, the fear—I found myself asking: What now? What do you do with all this pain? How do you live when the people you love didn't get the chance? That's when Lymphology Skincare was born.

The grief, the trauma, the endless doctor appointments—all of it could have swallowed me. But I made a choice. Rather than live from a place of sorrow, I decided to help others and empower them to take their health into their own hands. Lymphology Skincare was born from that mission. A self-care line designed to support the lymphatic system—something most people know nothing about until it fails them.

I didn't want to build something just to pass the time. I wanted to create something that helped others feel empowered in their bodies, especially when they felt like their bodies had betrayed them. Lymphology Skincare is a self-care brand rooted in healing. We serve those with lymphatic conditions, those in recovery, and those seeking wellness and prevention. It's not just skincare—it's a statement. A reclaiming of agency. Each bottle of cream, each brush, each blend of tea, is a small act of empowerment. A ritual that reminds people their bodies are worth tending to.

But more than products, we offer hope. We serve people with lymphatic diseases like Lymphedema, people recovering from surgeries, people with chronic illness, people on their feet all day, people who just need to feel cared for. We meet them where they are—with compassion, education, and empowerment.

Running my business from Amherstburg has allowed me to stay deeply rooted in community. It's where my healing began, and where I now get to help others heal, too. That's why it was such an honour to be recognized



by our community this year—I was named a finalist in the Amherstburg Business Excellence Awards 2025 Entrepreneur of the Year category. That moment was bigger than me. It was for my brothers, for my children, for everyone who's ever carried something invisible and still chose to rise. When I speak with customers, some fighting invisible battles of their own, I recognize the strength behind their questions. I recognize me. Every time someone tells me my products helped them feel better, I remember the quiet promise I made to myself: You will not let grief win. You will turn it into something beautiful.

That's what Lymphology is. It's my love letter to the people I lost. It's my gift to those still fighting. It's proof that even when your heart breaks, you can still find purpose. I don't pretend this life is easy. I still feel the ache of missing my brothers like a pulse. But I also feel them with me—when I tuck my children in at night, when I send out a Lymphology order, or when I laugh so hard I cry.

We don't get to choose the cards we're dealt. But we do get to choose how we play them. And I choose love. I choose purpose. I choose life—however uncertain, however fragile, however beautiful.

I am not just a medical miracle. I am a mother who watches her children chase dreams. I am a wife held up by love. I am a sister carrying the memory of two remarkable men. I am a businesswoman fueled by empathy. I am Maddie Simone. And this is my story of love, loss and creating legacy in my small town of Amherstburg Ontario. It's also a story for anyone who has lost, and still loves. For anyone who fears, and still hopes. For anyone who grieves and still grows.

You are not alone.

And you are stronger than you think.

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