



## Emma Leilani Judy Bennetts Holmes

October 29, 2025

Emma Leilani Judy Bennetts Holmes passed away at home in her parents' arms the evening of October 29, 2025, from acute myeloid leukemia. We were so very fortunate to have her for 23 years.

Emma was born with a full head of red hair on May 28, 2002, in Seattle, Washington, by emergency c-section when she had no heartbeat or movement on her due date. After a week, she was taken off life support with the tenuous goal of making it home to die, but despite physical and cognitive impediments, she survived and thrived. Two weeks before passing, a genetic study finally showed that those impediments were due to mRNA splicing issues.

Emma was a happy, jolly girl with an infectious giggle and big belly laugh. She woke up every single morning with a smile, even in her last months when she was in great pain. She loved to kick her legs in her bouncy chairs and rock them until the frames snapped. She loved going on walks, playing with musical and spinning toys, and swimming, which she began as a baby.

Most of all, Emma loved music and listened to it continually – children's songs (Frog Went A-Courting), old-time ballads (Clementine), and patriotic music (Star Spangled Banner). She loved songs recorded by her mom and adoptive dad into her toys. Emma also loved funny noises and sound effects, and

delighted in being told “YAY for Emma! Yay yay yay!”

When she was three, Emma moved to Fort Collins, Colorado. She attended preschool at Bauder and Traut, and repeated kindergarten at Johnson Elementary for three years. Emma loved little children, and they loved her and didn't notice any difference.

Emma inspired her mom to start GoodHealthWill, a medical equipment and healthcare supplies nonprofit organization. She could often be found there with her mom, and on deliveries and pickups.

Emma craved routine and consistency, and would let you know if you varied. She loved standing in her stander and playing with toys, tearing it up in her beloved jungle gym, swimming, attending therapy (usually), walking in her gait trainer, riding in her bike trailer, and doing adapted horse riding. Emma loved bathtime, towel time, and her bedtime routine. After an hour of cuddling she would sign “Good night,” “I love you,” and “You're cute.”

Emma travelled across the U.S. and to Alaska, Canada, and Asia many times. She travelled in small boats, cruise ships, ferries, trains, subways, planes, taxis, RVs, and OTVs. She hiked, camped, and hotel'ed. She loved motion and delighted in airplane turbulence, earthquakes, and sudden braking.

Emma loved being outside and squealed in joy in a good downpour. She loved walking along the beach. Wild animals were drawn to her, with deer, foxes, and even bear and bison trekking right up to her all the time. She once had a seizure outside at night, and a doe came up and touched noses with her. For 24 hours before Emma died, a great horned owl came in the yard and hooted mournfully.

Emma was silly, spunky, sassy, snarky, sly, stubborn, and smart, so very

smart. She understood a great deal and would lift her left arm to say “yes” or “more,” and right arm to say “no.” She communicated with nuanced vocalizations and insisted on “talking” on the phone with her mom and adoptive dad if they were gone. She tried to get therapists to play the “I’m/You’re cute” game instead of exercising. Emma loved to explore by chewing on things and pushing things onto the floor.

When Emma was 15, the family moved to Eaton. Emma loved walking the small town and became a fixture at the rec center. But by the time she turned 17, she started to get very tired and her health inexplicably declined. A biopsy showed that she had bone marrow failure.

When Emma was 20, the family moved back to Fort Collins. Her new house had a ceiling track system, and she loved running around in a harness like a typical kid. She was a regular on the pathway systems, taking long daily walks with her dog. But the bone marrow failure converted to myelodysplastic syndrome, which converted to leukemia, and by the time Emma turned 23, she wanted cuddles and sleep instead of therapy. She was so brave and tough and courageous.

Emma was a very special human being, whose passing leaves an unimaginable void for her mom, Heather Marie Judy (Holmes) Bennetts and her adoptive step-dad, Steven Anthony Bennetts; they loved Emma more than life. She will be met on the other side by sister Brandy Bennetts.

Emma’s biological father was Stephen G. Holmes and her little half-brother was TeJay Holmes.

Emma was embraced by the extended Bennetts clan when she was adopted, and will be greatly missed by brother Nicklas (Neoma) Bennetts and family,

Becca and Hannah and family, and everyone else.

Emma's grandparents were Clark H. Judy and Karen K. Hosick Judy, Carole J. Hildebrand, and Michael (Kristine) Holmes; her uncles and aunts were Brad D. Judy, Amy C. Sullivan, David (Stacy) Holmes, Christine (Brian) Fessenden.

Emma was beloved by her great-aunts and uncles – Karen Gissenaas, Glover and Ed Gale, and Charlene Wiley – and her cousins, including Wren Judy, Amanda and Adam Kessler and family, Jake and Jody Gale and family, Tia and Talan Gale, Heidi and Mark Raddatz and family, Todd and Gretchen Wiley and family, Scott Wiley and family, Cale Buskist, Jennifer Rhoades and family, and so many more dear cousins and relatives.

Emma had two adoring and dedicated caregivers, Vera Dominguez and Sarah Seville, for many years. Thank you.

Emma leaves behind so many friends and their families, who loved her so much: Cindy and John Custer, Linda and Jim Garfield, Supriya and Ketan Desai, Joyce and Dan Kessler, Loretta and Harry Strharsky, Fran Levine, Kaitlyn Cummings, Judy and Joe Lovato, Burris colleagues and friends, GoodHealthwill colleagues and friends, our Rigden Farm neighbors, the extended Ball State family, Emma's special needs friends and families, Janice and Bob Elshof and family, Jeff French, our Eaton neighbors, Susie Box and the girls and moms of her Brownie troop, and many others whose names have slipped our minds at this trying time but who mean just as much to us. Please know how important all of you were to Emma and us. Thank you.

Emma's wonderful health would not have been possible without her loving therapists, many of whom became dear friends: Gay Koopman; Tina Akuta; Jessica Albers, Ashley Maulsby, Kristin Holman, Sue Flynn, and everyone at Colorado in Motion; Deb and Tim Shafer; Nikole Johns; Kathy Maguire; John

Murray; Barb Tessely; Front Range Exceptional Equestrians; Louise Wagner; LymphWorks; Linda Garcia and everyone at Evergreen/Aveanna HHC, and many others who slipped our minds at this difficult time, who greatly improved Emma's quality of life. Thank you.

Emma's long life would not have been possible without her caring providers, including Dr. Jennifer Markley and everyone at Pediatric Associates; Colorado Children's Hospital; Tim Allen; Pathways Hospice, Emma's dentists and orthoticians, and the many doctors, phlebotomists, M.A.s, admins, and other folks at UCHealth who made her visits and life so much better. Thank you.

Thank you to the City of Fort Collins, Larimer County, and the State of Colorado for caring so much for those with special needs, enabling children like Emma to be loved and cared for at home and be a valued part of their communities.

Lastly, thank you to everyone who touched Emma's life every day. Please know that your presence DID make a difference and was greatly appreciated, whether a greeting directly to Emma, a smile at the store, a hello on the pathway, or an opened door; letting Emma sit in a class or appointment with her mom, making room for Emma when she tagged along, or a kind word or inquiry. These acts of kindness and inclusion were so very important to us.

In lieu of donations to a charity, please take time to directly support disadvantaged children and their families by anonymously paying student lunch bills, medical bills, utility bills, any bills. Make an effort to include kids who are different or from chaotic homes. Befriend a special adult. Send an anonymous gift to single parents of special children, who may never receive a Mother's Day bouquet or Father's Day socks. Volunteer with disadvantaged children and special needs adults. Practice the A's that made such a difference in Emma's life: ask, allow, accommodate, and acknowledge.

Emma was cremated and her ashes will be scattered in the ocean that she loved to walk along. In lieu of a service, a memorial video will be shared later on. Emma's family will observe a mourning period through November 9, and welcome anyone touched by her life to stop by during that time to say goodbye to her, at 3132 Chase Drive, Fort Collins. Condolences may be sent directly to her family or in care of Goes Funeral Home.

We miss you so much, Emma. You'll always be mommy's cowgirl.

# Tribute Wall



“ *Heather & Steve - our hearts go out to you and your family. I know Emma will be so very missed. All the love to you both.* ”

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**Lori Perry** - November 04, 2025 at 01:26 PM