

Be Careful What You Ask For...

By John ten Barge

I am the dad to two little girls. Caroline, my 19-month-old, and Elise, my 3-year-old who has Tay-Sachs disease. When my wife was pregnant, a friend of mine said time and time again that when we had our baby, "It's the end of the world as you know it, not bad, just different." I knew what he meant, but it sounded funny to us when he said it. Boy, was he right.

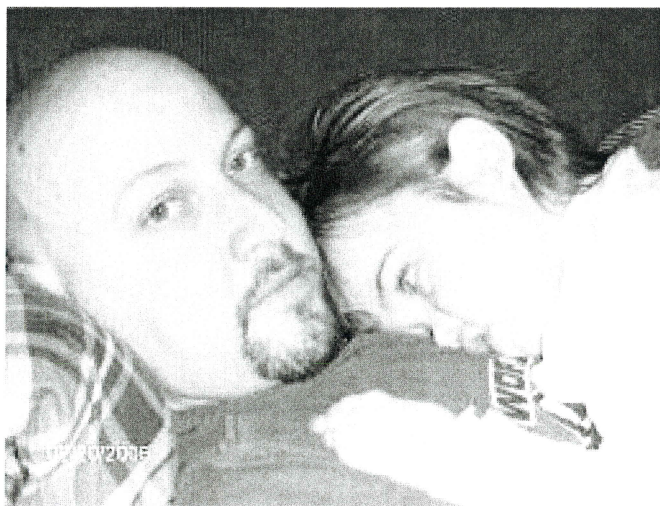
Elise was born. We started in with the regular things – bottles, diapers, no sleep at night, staying home more, no more going out to eat for a while, and so on. Then, as time went on, we started to see that there was something special about Elise. She started showing signs that things were not right. We went to doctors, and hospitals, and had test after test. It took six long months to figure out what was going on. I just wanted to know what was going on with her. I said to everyone that I just wanted to know. **BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU ASK FOR!** I found out.

When I first learned that my daughter, Elise, had Tay-Sachs, I was devastated to say the least. How could this happen to such an innocent, little girl? She didn't deserve this. I knew that we were in for hard times, but I thought that we could just try to spend as many hours with her as we possibly could.

Then, reality set in. I had to go to work everyday, and I hated it. That meant time away from Elise. To this very day, I still struggle with this. I have had a very hard time explaining this to anyone. Laurie, my wife, gets to stay home every day with Elise and

Caroline, while I have to go work and deal with what seems like nonsense to me when I think about what is going on at home. I wish all the time that I could stay home.

I had been thinking of a way other than the bunch of pictures on my desk to keep Elise with me always and everywhere. I told Laurie that I wanted a tattoo of Elise sleeping on my shoulder just like she does every night. Well, after an e-mail to a tattoo artist in October of 2005, I flew to Miami and had a tattoo done. It was an overnight trip, and the tattoo came out better than I had ever hoped. Elise was always going to be in my heart, but now, she was here with me, sleeping on my shoulder forever.



So now I go back to the phrase, **BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU ASK FOR!** I said that I wished I could stay home. In December of 2005, we had a good snowfall on Friday, December 9th. We did not have a nurse the evening before, so I had been up for over 24 hours. I figured I would take Friday off from work, clear the snow from the driveway, and play with Caroline in the afternoon snow. Instead, I had a freak

accident where I got my right hand stuck in my snow blower, severing two of my fingers, breaking all three and bruising a fourth. I wound up in the hospital for three days and had emergency surgery. I came home from the hospital and had to stay at home for the next two months due to my injuries. Except for the pain, it was the greatest two months I've ever had. I spent every day with my sweethearts! All three! When I had to go back to work, it was really depressing. Caroline, Elise, Laurie and I had spent some of the most quality time together we ever could.

Now I am back to work, hoping to win the lottery so I can spend more time at home again. I joke and say that maybe

I should chop off another couple of fingers, but that's not going to happen. It's funny that a bad hand injury wound up being therapeutic for my heart and soul.

I love my family, especially my little Elise. She has brought me through some sad times, as well as given me more love, understanding, education and the ability to cherish every single moment. She may never know just how much she has changed me, but

I'll keep whispering in her ear every night when she lays on my shoulder—sleeping, cuddling, dreaming....

John's tattoo of his daughter, Elise, was done by world-renowned portrait tattoo artist, Kat Von D, in Florida. John appeared on the show, "Miami Ink," which aired on The Learning Channel (TLC) on February 28, 2006.