

Hello friends and family,

I would like to thank each and every one of you for all of the support you've given me during this time. It's been overwhelming - in a good way - and has helped me begin to heal.

But this letter is not about me. It's about my beautiful wife Karen Marie Francone, who we lost October 29, 2025 after a fearless, courageous two-year battle against cancer.

Karen, also affectionately known as "Frankie," was the prettiest, smartest and toughest person I've ever known, let alone love. She could solve her way out of any problem we faced. And her trademark smile could light up the darkest cave.

Not one time did she ever feel sorry for herself regarding her condition. She took the news in stride when her doctors first told us she had cancer. And you know Karen. She fought tooth and nail for two years. But when her doctors told her there was nothing else left that they could do for her, she didn't even bat an eye. Later that same day, Karen was even joking around with her nurses and making them laugh. I'm sure that's not surprising to any of you.

Thank you Allison and Vickie, Karen's aunts and her two biggest supporters. Both reached out to Karen almost every single day through phone calls, texts, or in person. Karen's nephew Steve always sent her encouraging texts and phone calls. He also invited us to his parents' house for dinner many times. Several of Karen's other relatives were just as warm and empathetic to her and have always treated me like one of their own. I also thank Karen's closest friends Carol, Rebecca, Janelle, Sally, Sonia and Karen Sammut - to name a few - for spending their valuable time taking Karen's mind off of her condition.

Karen was also known for her huge heart. If she told you "I love you," she meant it. And there are a lot of people in this world she told "I love you" to. So again, I'm sure it's no surprise she spent her childhood wanting to be a nun.

Karen was born in Oakland and grew up in Hayward and Castro Valley. She went on to graduate from San Jose State University, earning a BS degree in Nutrition, Foods and Dietetics. Karen then worked in sales for a few years.

However, Karen found her true passion in another profession: Counseling women who were in recovery. And she used that passion to define the rest of her life! In 1990, Karen helped to start Hope House, an organization that is part of the Service League of San Mateo County. She eventually worked her way up to becoming the Executive Director of the Service League.

And Karen LOVED her job. Not only was she extremely proud of her 39 years of sobriety, she NEVER lost her passion in the 35 years she worked at Service League. When she wasn't physically putting in the hours at the job site itself, she was putting in the hours on her phone or on her laptop during evenings, weekends and vacations. She also spent many Christmas days with Hope House staff and clients giving food to those less fortunate at Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco.

Along the way, she met me. Little did either of us know that one simple dance at a nightclub in San Ramon would lead to the relationship that we ended up having. Karen and I were together for four years before getting married September 21, 2002 in Pacifica. And you knew how much we loved all of our cats and dogs we raised together.

The day we got married to the day she passed away will always be the best 23 years of my life. We had a fantastic marriage! People often told us that we acted like newlyweds. That was not an act. I'll never forget one of our final conversations. We both talked about how much we loved each other and how happy we have been over all these years.

Some of you can relate to this: When you are the highest in command at your job, there are going to be headaches. Karen definitely had her share of headaches. But the joy she got out of seeing a baby born under the Hope House umbrella eventually being reunited with their mother, the joy she got out of a Hope House alum thanking her for their sobriety 20 years later, and the pride she had in nearly 1,400 clients walking through her doors during her tenure were worth every single headache she went through.

Thank you to the Board of Directors at Service League. Under the guidance of president Steve Wagstaffe, Karen felt so supported and appreciated by the Board. And thank you to Naomi, Shawna, Mike, and the rest of the Board for understanding that Karen knew the Service League like the back of her hand and giving her the autonomy to run the organization how she saw fit, turning it into a powerhouse along the way. Karen was also a fan of Mike Scanlon, one of Steve's predecessors as Board president.

Karen wouldn't have done everything she accomplished at Service League if she didn't have any help. Thank you Anna, Janice, Josh, Jeff, and Haley - Karen's right-hand people - for making her job a lot less difficult than it would've been without you. Just like Karen, you are all very passionate and work hard at your jobs. Karen always spoke highly of you when we were at home talking about our day. And she had great admiration for the rest of the staff at Service League and Hope House.

Karen is a member of the San Mateo County Women's Hall of Fame, and has left an incredible legacy in the county. How many of us will be able to say that after we're gone? The joy and passion she had for her job were the reasons she continued to work diligently these last two years. She finally decided to stop working during the last week of her life. Thank you Dr. Reddy and Dr. Hazra for working together to extend Karen's life. And thank you to all of the nurses who took terrific care of Karen during her stays at the hospital, especially her final one.

We have lost a beautiful, vibrant, electric woman who had such a zest for life. I may be a little biased, but the mark she left on all of us will never be matched by anybody.

Thank you,

Kenny Hart