



Ashley Kay Cates

August 10, 1992 - May 17, 2026

Ashley Kay Cates passed away on May 17th, 2026, surrounded on all sides by people who loved her dearly. Born in Lebanon, Tennessee on August 10th, 1992, Ashley's life took her in many directions before bringing her back home.

She began where many of us do—with humble dreams and inherited beliefs—but she loved the world and that kind of love can't help but change everything.

You might remember her as a young missionary in India, as a social worker in refugee resettlement, or even as a realtor in Nashville. You might have met her in a pottery class, at a neighborhood wine night she hosted (everyone was always invited!), at a protest, or even in the ROS-1 lung cancer group that became a lifeline for her.

One thing is for sure: everyone who knew Ashley at any point in her life, speaks of her joy, generosity, and tremendous gift for bringing people together. To be with Ashley was to be loved, to be uplifted, to belong. She laughed easily (and had the best laugh). She loved pizza, antiques and houseplants, taxidermy mice and Jack Black movies, traveling the world and covering her arms in small black and white tattoos. She went to the Drew Holcomb Christmas show every year. She stopped believing in any religion and found herself able to love people even more fully afterwards.

Ashley had a heart so big and was loved by so many, that her “family” extended far beyond the narrow confines of DNA. No obituary could contain all the names.

While it's true that Ashley was brave and strong, and fought to live for as long as she possibly could, her cancer was NOT a battle that she lost. Her life was a journey, an adventure with some unwelcome twists and turns, that she walked courageously until there was nowhere left to go but into the unknown.

A life cut short will always read as a great tragedy, as a life not fully lived; and yet, if there was anyone who demonstrated that it is not the length of a life that matters, but its depth, it was Ashley Cates. She didn't need a diagnosis to live like she was dying. She was already doing it.

On behalf of Ashley, may you find the courage to advocate for yourself when things don't feel right in your body, to live a life that is authentically yours, and to show up for those you love who are facing the unimaginable.

Ashley is survived by her husband, Blake Gonzalez; her mother, Loretta (Robert) Barrett; her sister, Sara Cates; and the Miller family—Gary, Kathy, Ryan (Kayleigh), and Julie Mayerlen (Corey)—who considered her one of their own.

She will be buried at Larkspur Conservation in Westmoreland, Tennessee in a private family ceremony. Larkspur is open to the public for hiking from dawn to dusk. You can visit her there in the meadow, among the wildflowers.

A Celebration of Life will be held for everyone who loves her at a later date (to be determined).

In lieu of flowers, please consider donating to Ashley's gofundme, which will cover her remaining medical and funeral expenses.

https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-ashley-and-blake-and-the-pups?attribution_id=sl:2dbf8714-2fab-4078-9265-79f3e81ff830&ts=1778702739&utm_campaign=natman_sharesheet_dash&utm_medium=customer&utm_source=sms