

Film with a rough start has a happy ending

B.C. woman's life is transformed on the screen as she battles with cystic fibrosis while waiting eight months for a double lung transplant

BY GRAEME MCRANOR

At first glance, Eva Markvoort appears as lively as those around her. She's pretty and thin — maybe too thin — as she's filmed dancing with friends in someone's backyard.

Then she coughs, a vicious, racking spasm. She puts a hand to her chest and a friend puts a comforting hand on her back.

Markvoort has cystic fibrosis, a fatal genetic disease affecting the lungs and digestive system, and is waiting for a double lung transplant.

These are the opening images of the award-winning *65_RedRoses*, a locally shot documentary that screened at this year's Vancouver International Film Festival and airs Monday on the CBC's *Passionate Eye*.

It's the story of 23-year-old Markvoort's wait for healthy lungs and her connection to two other young women with cystic fibrosis (CF) in the United States, both of whom she talks to frequently via the Internet.

Because the hospital visits are frequent and lengthy and the risk of superbug infections pass-

ing between CF patients is high, the Internet has become a precious lifeline for her and others suffering from the disease. It's through online support groups that they can meet people who understand fully what they are going through.

Markvoort, whose screen name is *65_RedRoses* — red is her favourite colour and, as a kid, she pronounced cystic fibrosis as *65 Roses* — is particularly close with 19-year-old Meg Moore from Portland, Ore., whose screen name is *MEGMUCAS*; and Kina Boyce from Girard, Penn., whose handle is *SPIRIT_OF_MINA* and who'd already received a lung transplant.

"I remember the day that I discovered [the support group]," Markvoort said in an interview. "I showed it to my parents and said, 'Can you believe this? Look at this, look at this! There's another girl in the same place I am. ... Look at this person, they like beer and they have CF too!'"

"All these similarities between people around the world. ... Just to find all these people who knew exactly what it was like to be a young person and be in hos-



Eva Markvoort, the subject of the locally shot, award-winning documentary *65_RedRoses*.

pital and dealing with these types of issues, it was mind-blowing."

The film is co-directed by Nimisha Mukerji and Philip Lyall, both of whom are around the same age as Markvoort. In fact, before taking film at the University of B.C. with Mukerji, Lyall took theatre at the University of Victoria with Markvoort.

"Just as we were about to graduate, Eva had fallen ill," Lyall explained. "She had been taken back to Vancouver and was in hospital."

"I was really close with her at UVic, but we kind of drifted apart a bit, and then when she went into the hospital I started visiting her. ... It was interesting in that I didn't even know what organ donation was, didn't know she was that sick, didn't realize how bad cystic fibrosis was."

"Nimisha and I had wanted to make a documentary. Eva, she was so dynamic and interesting, so I said to Nimisha, 'Why don't we do a film about my friend, Eva?'"

Once Markvoort was put on the list for a transplant, the film

crew began tracking her daily. But Mukerji says Markvoort had put on a brave mask for family and friends and wasn't comfortable being interviewed by Lyall.

"Because I didn't know her as well as him, we decided that I would do all the interviews, so it kind of ended up helping me that I didn't know her. I went in to it less as a friend and more as a filmmaker. Now, we're great friends, but at the time she wanted to trust that the person was thinking about the story and the film and not trying to make her feel better."

Tough for friends, family and filmmakers was the fact that Markvoort's story could end in several different ways: She could die waiting for a transplant; she could die from surgical complications; or, post-transplant, her body could reject it.

Or, positively, a successful transplant would enable her to have her first crack at a normal life.

After eight months of waiting,

Markvoort — who like all potential organ-donor recipients wears a pager — gets paged.

"The pager going off took over every inch of my body and it just felt like chills. I was just shaking," she said. "Everything that I had dreamt for and hoped for and wished for combined with that small sliver of fear."

"I just wanted everyone I loved around me as soon as possible. It was the most heightened feeling I've ever had in my life."

And, not surprisingly, that also was the effect on the filmmakers.

"That was the hardest," Lyall said. "We couldn't have our cameraman that day and I was the only one shooting and Nimisha had the boom mike. When Eva's pager went off, I was crying and shaking as I was shooting her. It was like I was watching a film unfold in front of me."

"The emotions hit afterwards," Mukerji said. "In the moment, it was just pure adrenalin. It was such a raw and powerful moment and it was so overwhelming just watching Eva go through it. For Phil and I, we trusted each other enough to know that we were capturing everything we needed so that this moment would play in the film."

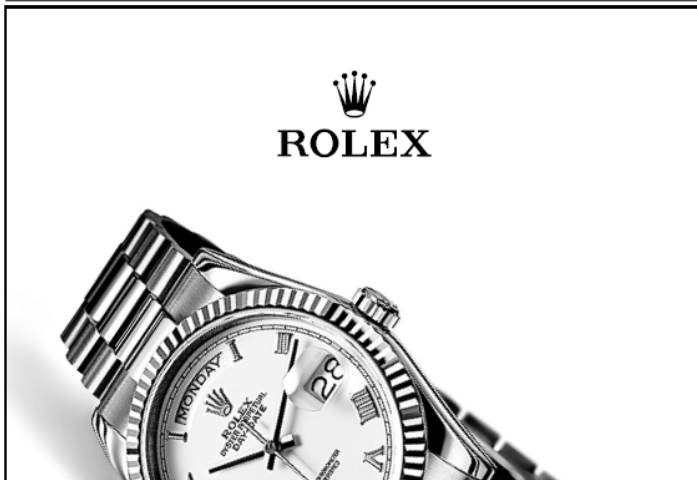
Lyall added: "I actually don't remember shooting it."

Markvoort got her new lungs two years ago. That day, Vancouver General Hospital set at least a provincial record for the most transplants in a 24-hour period, with 10.

"Once you see this piece, you should become an organ donor," Lyall said. "I think the biggest gift you can give is after death. You can save another person and they can go on and live a beautiful life."

"I think it's a beautiful thing," Markvoort is living, breathing proof of that. Asked what she would say to the donor if given the chance, she exhaled and, voice slightly shaky, simply said: "Thank you."

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