

OneLegacy Ambassadors – Donate Life Month 2024



Rita Jackson- Donor Mom

"My daughter was a very compassionate person and spent practically her whole 20 years giving to others so there was no hesitation when she got her drivers license to check the box to be a donor. It gives me some comfort to know she continued to give to others even when her life ended. This makes me believe that she will live on in some way. When My Angel took her last breath in my arms at 8:40pm on Thursday April 25th 2013, she took a large part of me with her. She was only 20 years old, just three weeks before her 21st birthday. After the initial shock of losing her, a horrifying feeling came over me when I started thinking that my daughter, who had so many plans of helping others, was never going to be able to fulfill her goals, which would mean she had no opportunity to leave her mark on this world. I can honestly say, there is no way I would have been able to live with that fact. Fortunately, the invitation to the Donor Remembrance Ceremony arrived only a couple months after that terrible day. When I attended the ceremony I caught a glimpse of the huge contribution my precious daughter had made by becoming a donor. That ceremony made me feel hopeful that although her life was cut short she was able to accomplish her goal of helping others. It was only two months later that I joined the Ambassador program which has given me more insight on the impact my daughter's decision to register has made. Not only on the recipients of her tissue donation but to her family, friends and community. I'm proud to say that my daughter, Jasmine Marie Jackson fulfilled her life's goal and saved her mother's life in the process!"



Erika Heranic- Heart Recipient (donor was from Ambassador Dana Stump's son)

"Several factors, like pieces of a puzzle, combined together ultimately trying to kill me led to my heart transplant. 1. GENETICALLY, many males in our family did not live past 50 from heart attacks. It was just accepted. No reason as to why or who else might be affected was ever questioned. Apparently, my heart was weak and i never knew. No signs or symptoms. 2. As a middle-school teacher, i am surrounded by a germ factory-getting sick pretty often. That was the norm. In March 2016, i had a severe staph INFECTION i had a Z-PAK of MEDS plus topical cream to cover the sores on my chest right over the heart area. 2 weeks later, feeling more exhausted than normal, i kept sleeping for unusually long periods of time. I also had a sinus infection causing soreness as well as muscles spasm in my lower back & front. One morning, the spasms were too much so i went to urgent care. Turned out i was having a HEART ATTACK. A lot of fluid was drained around my heart & 2 stents placed. Apparently female heart attack symptoms are not typical of men.

This heart attack was a wake up call. I missed the last 2 months of school as i had a long road for recovery. Diet changed to low sodium. I now had to count carbs as the heart attack trauma triggered diabetes(never had it before). Participation in cardiac rehab was required due to extreme weakness plus i needed to lose some weight. 3. By mid August 2016, i planned to return to work, so a plan was created to accommodate my needs for a better transition into the workforce(aide in room to help students/me as i was limited in walking, extra coverage to help with my breaks for blood-sugar checks/meals/meds, reduced day, etc).

Personally, i thought things were going well. I lost 30 lbs, walking 20 minutes a day, abiding my scheduled diet and med intake. Then Sept 27, 2016 in zero-period(6:30am), i just was feeling 'weird'...like flu symptoms. Decided to ere & went home sick. I took my meds & took a really long nap. I felt better, but since next day was minimum day, others thought i should stay home just in case. Thank God i did ! I woke up again feeling weird. I took my meds, but this time i was not feeling better. Went to ER, ekg showed ARRHYTHMIA. So i was admitted. During the stress test i went into CARDIAC ARREST. From this point on, my health deteriorated fast. I was dying. 4. For the next few months in the hospital, i would go into cardiac arrest many more times, undergo several heart SURGERIES, have an AICD device implanted, have a stroke & be sent to Cedars-Sinai as my hospital could do no more

to save me. I needed a heart transplant. However, i was too weak. Cedars team was not sure i would even survive an LVAD surgery to help me transition to a transplant-several docs had faith and I thank God they did!5. I was able to get stronger. I went from 4 months in wheelchair to 2 months walker to cane. I lost more weight and proved i was psychologically & physically ready to be placed on tx list. I received my heart transplant 4/19/2017. 4 months after being listed.

IMPACT BEFORE: My family, friends, colleagues and especially my students were all impacted. They could not believe i was dying. Quite frankly, i did know how bad it was until after the LVAD. i had been pretty much 'out'. I cant imagine what my husband felt seeing the love of his life with tubes and life-support devices coming out of every part of my body. My two adult children had to witness several resuscitations that traumatized them. My son couldn't stand seeing his mom like that, so he joined the Marines as he felt so helpless. My students needed counselors as some felt responsible for causing my heart attack(they now have 3.7 gpa & no behavior problems-whatever works to get them on the path!)....sorry,,teacher humor)

Once i had the LVAD, i was able to FaceTime them to reassure them as well as educate them on the great medical technologies. I had many past students visit me at home as well as old friends i had not heard from in years. My husband had to become my 24/7 caregiver. So, Everyone became part of the process to my recovery-always checking in. In fact some students wanted to know if i could go get my heart over the weekend so i could come back(had to laugh)..

IMPACT AFTER: After transplant, i did have a 2nd stroke which slowed my recovery, but did not hinder my determination to get stronger. Again, went from 3 months wheelchair to walker to cane, but this time to no cane. I am able to walk over 30 minutes as well as 1 1/2 hr balance classes twice a week. I have lost 70lbs since my journey began. Unfortunately, i have not yet been able to return to work, so i have been able to visit my previous students who are now in high school, help those in college& new teachers, have special day trips & participate again in the student-teacher band. Also, my daughter is getting married in July & i have been able be part of the planning.

DONOR FAMILY

The biggest achievement after tx is meeting my donor family-the Stumps. They are such an inspiration to me. The loss of their son & the 2nd chance of life for me is more than enough motivation to go forward. We realize now that we have a purpose together. Based on each of our experiences, educating others about the importance of Organ Donation(i have a friend this week having a liver&intestinal transplant) while honoring Dylan Stump's memory-continuing his legacy. (For one, We were able to participate in Donate Life Run/Walk). Dana Stump is already an Ambassador sharing her remarkable story with great spiritual strength. I admire her and wish to support the One Legacy mission. Thank you! Oddly, i had been looking to be an ambassador, participate in the run/walk& rose parade float before knowing my donor. But deep down inside, i 'knew' my donor's family would reach out and grateful to be part of an extended family. I encourage you to read my FB page from Beginning of 2017 to see what i posted for the Stump family. so many special sentiments and comments.....it has been an amazing experience and journey."



John Whalen- Liver Recipient

"In January of 2012 I had a terrible back pain. I went to the emergency room and was admitted into the hospital for Sepsis. The doctor determined the infection had spread into my body cavity and was attached to my spine and the nerves going into my left leg. I lost all the strength in my leg and surgery was required to remove the infection. They doctors were unable to determine how the infection had spread to my back. After 5 months of rehab I regained the strength in my leg, so my wife and I decided to have a party to celebrate. I remember setting up for the party Saturday morning then waking up in Hoag Hospital on Wednesday afternoon. I was diagnosed with hepatic encephalopathy (HE) . I had a liver biopsy and was referred to UCSD for treatment. In June 2012 I found out I had cirrhosis of the liver caused by a genetic deficiency, alpha one antitrypsin deficiency, and nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH). I also found out that the reason the infection, in January, spread to my spine was my diseased liver. I spent the next five months going in and out of the hospital due to the HE, ascites and portal vein thrombosis. I was informed I would need a liver transplant. I received the call on February 26,, 2013 and had my transplant the next day. My Donor/My Hero is Jason Gosnell from Arizona. He had a gran mal seizure on February 17th and remained in hospital until the 25th. Since my transplant I have had written correspondence with my donor's mother and have invited her to join me at the run/walk this year. I enjoy a healthy and active lifestyle that includes jogging, cycling, hiking and travel. I give thanks for Jason everyday."



Margarita Hidalgo- Donor Mom

"My son, Anthony Hidalgo, was a wonderful son. He was a selfless person, always putting others' needs before his. He was a very friendly soul and always happy, with a big smile on his face, and would always be joking around. Anthony loved skating and always played video games with his friends. Unfortunately on April 02, 2020, he passed due to a Cardiac arrest. My son first registered as a donor the first time that he obtained his License at the DMV, at first he was scared but after I explained to him the importance of Donating organs and how it would save someone's life, he did not hesitate to say "yes mom I would love to register as a Donor". My son donated bone marrow and his corneas. I want everyone to know that if my son was here with me and he knew that someone was in need he would not hesitate to help, I respect everyone's beliefs but we have lots of people waiting for an organ transplant, and if we can help save someone, why not help. It brings me joy to know that part of him leaves on through the recipients of his donations and he was able to help people even at the end of his life."