

Transplant recipient goes from ICU bed to racing around the world



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"Just breathe."

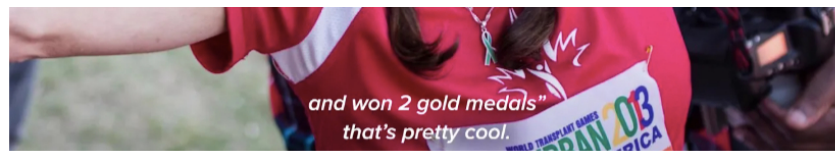
Margaret Benson heard her respiratory therapist whisper this into her ear when she was in VGH's ICU 20 years ago after receiving a double lung transplant.

"He was this big man, but had such a gentle way about him," says Margaret. "I remember his calm demeanour, he would tell me about his family, and would whisper in my ear 'just breathe, Margaret' when I was trying to get off the ventilator."

"It's nice to hear after a long career that someone appreciated what we did and that was meaningful for her recovery," says Kim Dobischok, a VGH respiratory therapist who Margaret still remembers. "I treat people as if I were the patient, how I would want to be treated."

Margaret is one of 240 people that received a life-saving organ transplant at VGH in 2019. Last year she received a kidney – in total, there were 122 kidney transplants, 46 lungs, and 68 livers.





The number one genetic killer of children

Margaret was a sick child, diagnosed with cystic fibrosis at 14 years old.

"I remember the doctor saying that the life expectancy is 15," she says. "So basically he said go and live the last year of your life."

Cystic fibrosis is "the number one genetic killer of children and young adults in Canada," explains Margaret. At the time there was only a cystic fibrosis clinic for children, as no one made it to adulthood.

Margaret decided to make her life about more than her health condition, becoming active in school clubs, dance, and cheerleading.

When she had congestive heart failure in her late thirties, a double lung transplant became necessary for her survival.

"There was a long recovery -- I had a stroke and a seizure as well," says Margaret. "I remember the doctors saying 'she may not remember anything, she may not walk again, she may not talk again'. I remember hearing that and thinking 'I'm walking out of here.'"



From the hospital to the world transplant games

Margaret did more than walk again – she began to compete in race walking. She has competed in world and national transplant games. At the World Transplant Games 2009, in Australia, she broke the world record in the race walk for her age category. The record still stands today.

"One of the things I wanted to do to honour my donor was to be athletic and win at the world and national level," says Margaret. "It's not about the medals. It's about promoting organ and tissue donation and saying look, this is what we can do afterward. We're healthy, we're active, we can run, we can jump, we can do all of these things."

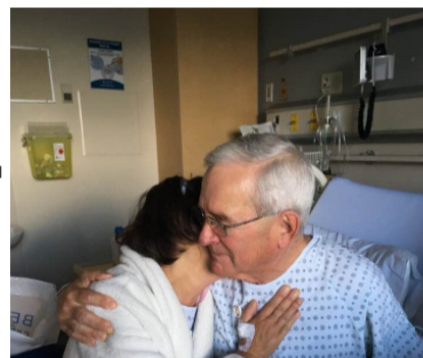
Additionally, Margaret enjoys dragon boating, kayaking, rowing, and teaching Zumba dance.

A gift of life from a brother

After two decades of transplant drugs, Margaret's kidneys began to fail. Last year, she was given another gift of life, from someone close to her.

"When Margaret told me about her failing kidneys, I thought it wasn't fair," says her 73-year-old brother Jim, who recently gave one of his kidneys. "It was an easy decision and a relatively easy procedure and recovery. I would do it again in a heartbeat."

Throughout Margaret's health care journey, it's the



people who care that have helped make her life about more than her health issues.

“Over the years I've had incredible doctors, nurses, and RTs who have literally saved my life,” says Margaret. “For me, with healthcare, it's all about the people. They all have different personalities but they all care. They all care hugely.”



Register your decision

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