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One gift x two

by Keith Anderson, Gift of Life

She gave this gift of self to her entire family when she became a living kidney donor to her father. Gary Summers lives in Springfield, Mo., and came to Kansas City for a transplant on December 1, 2009. With over 110,000 individuals on the national waiting list, Gary wondered how long his wait would last. Through testing, the family learned that Lee's sisters and her mother were also matches. In cases like this, the hospital social workers work with the family toward a successful transplant and recovery examining best options for all parties. Lee was determined to be the best candidate within her family. She had the career flexibility and was in excellent physical condition. But there are other reasons she agreed to be a living donor to her father – more than just the physical match. She had the desire to help her father and others.

The backbone of her decision was altruism in its purist form. Lee knew that her father could wait for an anonymous donation, and for many parents that might be their preference. She also knew that other family members were a match, so why her? After weighing the options, Lee stepped up to the plate. Her father could wait for months to years waiting for an anonymous donation. She also understood that an anonymous or deceased donor could save another life if she became the donor to her father – not to mention standing in the place of her mother or sisters.

All of this comes back to the spirit of Lee being “present” and listening as they discussed her father's condition. Ultimately her actions saved her father and one other person, helped two families, helped her sister's families and gave another donor family the opportunity to make a difference as a legacy to their loved one.

Lee chose to pay it forward, but her story doesn't end there. She has continued to make a difference by sharing her story and moving forward as a volunteer Life Mentor for Gift of Life, a Kansas City nonprofit. Life Mentors offer

encouragement and support to those waiting for a transplant, new recipients, donor families and living donors. In Lee's case, she has drawn upon her experience as a living kidney donor to answer question and assist other families facing this decision. Ironically, she has worked with another young woman in the same situation who works for a local advertising agency. Lee was able to visit with her and her father, listen to their questions and help them understand how one living donor can change multiple lives.

Many would make that same decision, but Lee saw this as a way to participate in the altruistic community shining light on a path for others who might give living donation the same consideration. The donor registry continues to grow in Missouri and many waiting for a life-saving transplant are not blessed with a living donor option. Lee and her family know the value of the gift. They believe if their act of living donation enables another person on the list to receive the gift of life...then they will have made a difference to their family plus another family and many more.



Lee Summers and her father, Gary Summers, and dog, Jack Henry