



LOCAL

Cherishing every beat

By BRENDA SCHORY - bschory@kcchronicle.com

People say home is where the heart is. But Donna and Rick Stout know now that once you have a new heart, you really can come home.

The Batavia couple received the best Christmas present possible when Donna Stout got a transplanted heart to replace hers, which had stopped functioning.

Weak, but deliriously happy, she came home in time for Christmas with her husband of 29 years and their daughter, Heather, 21.

"How can you possibly thank someone for an organ donation?" Rick Stout said, his voice breaking with emotion. "It's a double-edged sword. Somebody has to die for your loved one to live on."

The chaplain at Loyola Medical Center made it easier for Stout to handle the concept: The donor already had gone to God in heart and soul.

"And this is their wishes for an ultimate gift. There is no way you could thank somebody for this gift," Stout said.

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Donna Stout, a healthy 48-year-old part-time bookkeeper, got sick while raking leaves on Oct. 27, a Saturday.

She got tired.

"My legs felt like Jell-O," Stout said.

She figured she would work through her fatigue and get the yard ready for winter, then rest and recuperate on Sunday.

"My legs kept getting heavier and heavier. It got harder and harder to walk. I told my husband, 'Take me.'"

They did not call an ambulance.

Rick Stout, 53, a truck driver for Coca-Cola in St. Charles, drove her to the emergency room at Delnor-Community Hospital in Geneva himself. Donna Stout would have walked into the emergency room herself, but her husband insisted on a wheelchair because she began having trouble breathing.

"She thought this was going to be a short stay. She thought they would just give her a pill in the ER and she was going to stay overnight," he said.

The hospital staff moved her into its cardiac care unit and began treating her for congestive heart failure and fluid on her lungs.

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"At 1 a.m. Monday, Delnor called. 'Mr. Stout, you need to get up here.' That's all they ever tell you," Rick Stout said. "Her blood pressure was 40 over nothing and her pulse was 149 racing to beat heck and not doing anything."

Donna Stout had been scheduled for a 3 a.m. angiogram but, instead, at 4 a.m., Delnor cardiologists Dr. William Towne and Dr. Terry LaBarre inserted an intra-aortic balloon pump to support her heart function.

"The balloon helps support the heart beating," Towne said.

Stout had dilatative cardiomyopathy, a hereditary condition in which the heart muscle weakens and cannot pump properly, Towne said.

A normal heart's ability to eject fluid is 60 percent with each beat.

"Hers was at 5 percent. Her heart could barely contract and fluid was backing up," Towne said.

Her condition probably worsened so slowly that she did not notice until it was critical, he said. The balloon pump was a temporary measure, a bridge to keep her alive until she would receive a transplant.

Early Monday, Oct. 29, a helicopter flew Stout to Loyola Medical Center in Maywood in eight minutes.

Stout turned 49 on Oct. 31. It was one of the four days she "lost" after the balloon pump was inserted.

She remained tethered to a machine while she waited for a donor heart to become available. Because of her serious condition, Stout was placed at the top of the transplant list.

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Hearts that were available Nov. 14 and Nov. 23 were not good matches. But on Nov. 24, while the family was still reeling from the second bad match, another heart became available.

Stout was prepped for surgery at 6:30 a.m. The heart arrived at 9 a.m. and took its first beat inside her chest at 10:30 a.m.

"This was an early Christmas present," Rick Stout said. "I could not ask for anything else."

So far, all her follow-up tests and checks show Donna Stout's new heart is doing fine.

"I am so glad to be here," she said. "I am so grateful."

How do become an organ donor

The Illinois Secretary of State has a new procedure for encouraging organ donation. A new law effective Jan. 1, 2006, created an Organ/Tissue Donor Registry, which makes a person's wishes to be a donor legally binding, so witnesses and family consent is no longer necessary. More information is available at www.LifeGoesOn.com.

More information about organ and tissue donation in Illinois is available at Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network at www.giftofhope.org.

Facts about organ donation

- About 3,700 transplant candidates are added to the national waiting list each month.
- Each day, about 77 people receive organ transplants and 18 die because of the shortage of donated organs.
- More than 92,000 people are on a waiting list for an organ donor.
- Experts say that each person could save or help as many as 50 people by being an organ and tissue donor.

Source: U.S. Health and Human Services



Heart-transplant patient Donna Stout (left) of Batavia makes dinner recently with her daughter, Heather. (Bob Gerrard photo)