

Before and After Transplant

Hi my name is Lucie Wunsch I am 47 years old, and 3 years ago I was given a second chance at life when I received a double lung transplant. I suffered from a lung disease called "Alpha One" Alpha-1 antitrypsin phenotype A deficiency.

I was diagnosed at the age of 31 with asthma, and treated with the usual puffers. My condition continued to deteriorate and I was referred to a respirologist here in Sudbury. Blood work was ordered and I was diagnosed with the genetic disorder A1AD and told that there was nothing that could be done, perhaps a lung transplant would be considered at some time in the future.

I continued with the visits and in 1999 I could endure no more and ask the respirologist to send me for an assessment, to determine if I qualified for a lung transplant. The assessment was set up and off to Toronto General I went. After a week long of intense testing I was told that it was too soon for me to be considered for a transplant. I really was disappointed. Here I was trying to raise 2 children on my own and felt I wasn't doing a very good job, the guilt was more than I could handle. I called Toronto General and told them that something had to be done. My children were suffering because of my condition. They suggested that I attend the

Toronto Rehab Centre. I was put me in touch with West Park where I became an in patient and went home to my children on weekends. Here I was shown techniques to save my energy. We did exercises every morning this continued for two months and then I returned to Sudbury.

I was put on oxygen in 2003; I didn't find it very effective. I was getting better results with a compressor for my treatments (instead of puffers). I continued until May 2003, when I was sent for another assessment, at this time they advised me to get my things in order, get my children settled, put my belongings in storage, and relocate myself to a place 2 hours away from Toronto General Hospital. Well I did it with a lot of support but before I went I wanted to see my daughter start grade 9 and my son start grade 4. Then I would be ready.

Okay now, I am in Mississauga, living with this amazing little woman and her mother. September and October goes by. I am working with my team at Toronto General, made up of a respirologist, fellows. a lung transplant co-ordinator, a secretary, a dietician, specialist of any kind, a psychologist and of course a physiotherapist. They gave me a fine tune up with a weight and cardio program and put my name on the transplant list in November 2003.

The donor has to be brain dead and kept on a respirator until the team of doctors fly to pick the lungs up. The doctors harvests the lungs, puts the lungs in a cooler with preservative liquid and checks them for abnormalities on the way back to the hospital. They only last 8 hours and the operation is 8 hours, 4 hours per lung if everything goes good. So they are racing against time. They will not transplant the lungs unless they are 110% perfect. It happens that patients get false calls. And after lung transplant you wish you could breathe for everyone. I find myself very fortunate. The common age of people waiting for lung transplant is between 50 and 65. When I was there, I got my cheeks pinched several times. They told me I needed medium to large lungs and "O" positive blood.

I got through December and on January 24, 2004 at 9 pm I received my call to go in and get ready for my lung transplant. So my amazing little woman and I went to the hospital and waited while my mom from North Bay and my brother and his girlfriend from Markham arrived. We were told over and over that it was almost time to get ready. Finally at 7 am on January 25th in the wee hours of the morning they said "**it's time**". I had a good feeling; I knew it was Sunday morning and people were getting ready for church, and that a whole lot of people were praying

for me, before entering the operating room I said to God (in my head) "OK God" now it's up to you. The next thing I woke up and I don't remember being on the respirator, I could feel air going through my throat with no struggle. It felt good to breathe.

I'll never forget the first time I climbed a set of stairs, I looked behind me and said "oh my god" I did that with no problem. I was able to walk, talk and chew gum at the same time. I could multi task. What a feeling. Now don't get me wrong, it's not all a bed of roses, There have and will continue to be bumps in the road, but nothing I can't handle, now that I can breathe.

The first single lung transplant was in 1982 and the first double was in 1987. The first double lung transplant recipient was Ann Harrison; she lived 14 yrs. She had A1AD just like I did. My goal is to beat 14 years; today's medications have improved and are continuing to improve every day. I know there will challenges but I will overcome them one at a time, with my family and friends and children, by my side.

This month, June 2008, I can proudly say that I am here for my daughter who is graduating grade 12 and for my son who is graduating grade 8. I am here to congratulate them, give them a big hug and to tell them "**Mom is happy to be here with you to see you graduate**". *By Lucie Wunsch*