

News

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Two transplant patients reveal how they beat the odds

A new lease of life

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NOTHING will ever be the same for Chelmsford organ donor patients Justine Laymond and Yvonne Stannard, whose lives have been changed for the better following two successful transplants. They tell their incredible stories to Piers Meyler and Anne Fitzgerald.

WHEN Justine Laymond's lungs finally collapsed her father did not think she would make it through the night.

Now in full recovery from one of medicine's rarest diseases, former fitness and dance instructor Justine, 33, is looking forward to a new lease of life.

Her first lung collapse occurred when she was 21-years-old: "Doctors told me this was not uncommon for very athletic people, so I accepted it. But gradually I became more concerned. There were times when was out with friends I would have to check myself into A&E with terrible pain and not being able to breathe properly."

But Justine's life was turned upside down when, after her left lung collapsed in April 2005, she was diagnosed with end-stage lymphangioleiomyomatosis (LAM), a rare disease of unknown origin affecting little over one in a million people and currently incurable.

"I didn't know what it was and although I was advised against it looked it up, so I was mentally prepared when the diagnosis came through."

She was told she would need new lungs within six months and was put on the list for a transplant. That was one-and-a-half years ago.

Until then Justine was working at Esporta Sports club in Chelmsford and had always prided herself on the active life she led.

It was there she met her fiance, Jon Kohn, described as her rock and a huge support in helping her beat the odds.

After her diagnosis she started an online diary



LIFE AND SOUL: Justine was a fitness and dance instructor before her illness struck.

which has had more than one-and-a-half million hits.

But Justine's lungs were disintegrating and breathing was a constant struggle. Her right lung had completely failed and she only had 30 percent lung capacity from her left lung.

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TERRIFYING ORDEAL: Justine shortly before her operation.

Coach company's dramatic hospital dash

A CHELMSFORD couple's coach trip to the Suffolk coast ended with a dramatic diversion to hospital, but it proved to be their best ever day out.

Yvonne Stannard, 56, from Crocus Way, North Springfield and her partner Peter Patience, 65, were expecting a tranquil Tuesday when they booked the trip with the High Easter-based coach firm Lodge's.

But the excursion turned into a life-changing venture when, during a stop off for coffee at Capel St Mart near Ipswich, Yvonne, who had been waiting for a kidney transplant for 10 years, received an urgent call to go to

Addenbrookes Hospital in Cambridge immediately, as a suitable donor organ had become available.

Coach driver Gary Barker, 51, who lives in High Easter, swiftly called for help from Lodge's who dispatched a car to take the grateful couple to hospital for the operation.

Now the couple have had a re-union with Gary to thank him and Lodge's for their help.

Yvonne, who previously had dialysis three times a week at Broomfield Hospital, said: "We were at a bit of a loss about how we would get there and I was trying to phone my

sister in Lowestoft to see if she could come out to pick us up. Peter explained to Gary the driver why we would have to leave the trip and straight away Gary said he would ask Lodge's to send a car to take us to Addenbrookes.

Grateful

"The transplant operation went well and of course I will always be so grateful to the donor and family too. The kidney worked straight away and my life has completely changed, as I don't need dialysis any more.

"Now we are looking forward to

"I used to get terrible panic attacks when I couldn't breathe. It was just terrifying. I felt like I was drowning. It was horrific. I got to deal with them by picturing wide, open beaches and sunny days," she said

Justine suffered 13 lung collapses as the disease took hold and ravaged the lung tissue. Then in February 2006 she experienced a major collapse while living at her parents'.

"My dad said he didn't think I would make it through the night. I was in A&E struggling to breathe for 10 hours. I was transferred to Harefield Hospital in Middlesex and underwent a four hour operation to pin my lung to my ribs. I was on life support for three weeks after that.

"When I woke up I didn't know what had happened, I was on breathing apparatus and a machine that helped drain my lungs."

Transplant list

On the last day of March she was put back on the transplant list. However, a series of three false alarms were huge disappointments for her.

"I did talk to Jon about us getting married in hospital but I always remained positive and always thought I would get my transplant. You have to keep believing and the support and care at Harefield Hospital was amazing."

On July 9 the call came that Justine had been waiting for and she is now recovering at the Waterhouse Lane home she shares with Jon after a successful double lung transplant. The couple are planning to marry next August.

"Being alive is incredible. It's a miracle I survived. When you almost have everything taken away and then get given it back you appreciate everything.

"I am sad that someone had to die for me to live and when I have fully recovered I want to write to the family of the donor to say thank you."

She is now passionately urging more people to sign up to be donors: "Life is so important. I think a lack of education is an important part of why people don't sign up. It takes just second to sign up but you go on to help someone else for a lifetime."

being able to do a lot more trips with Lodge's in the future."

Gary, who is Lodge's longest serving employee said: "I've never had this situation before, but obviously time is of the essence with a transplant. If they had had to return to Chelmsford then get transport from there it would have meant quite a delay.

"Once I knew a car was on its way I was able to continue with the day out with the other passengers.

"A lot of people have been asking me how everything went for Yvonne so it is good to be able to let them know that there was a happy outcome."

Be a life-saving donor

LAST year the Essex Chronicle ran Be Remembered For Life in a bid to boost the county's organ donors. The appeal was a tribute to the life of 23-year-old donor Clare Ekins, killed in a road crash in January 2005. Clare, who lived in Boreham, was a strong advocate of organ donation, and always carried a donor card. To pledge your support and join the NHS Organ Donor Register, call 0845 60 60 400.

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