



"For me to know that he saved all these lives is his ultimate gift, knowing your child's leaving made a profound difference," said Deb Devito, mother of Marco Devito who died after being hit by a car in Glenview over two years ago. *Journal Photo by Andrea Zelinski*

'Marco Saved Lives'

2 Years After Son's Sudden Death, Mother Finds New Life Through Helping Others, Self

By ANDREA ZELINSKI

Journal City Editor

It has been more than two years since Marco Devito died.

The 13-year-old, bright, energetic eighth grader from Glenview was struck by a car while riding his bike near Willow and Pfingsten roads, near his home in Glenview.

It has been more than two years since his parents learned the crash left him brain dead.

More than two years since his parents decided they could take his death and create life.

While in the hospital, Deb and her husband Mark were approached by Gift of Hope, an organization that facilitates organ and tissue donation.

"You could tell by the person's eyes they truly had compassion for my family," Deb, 44, recalled.

Under the most tragic situation, they knew they -- and Marco -- could save lives, Deb said. And that's what he would have wanted.

Today, five people are living with parts of Marco. His liver, lungs, pancreas and kidneys are across the country, helping other people continue to live their own lives.

It brings a whole new meaning of Mother's Day to Deb.

Since the day Marco died, Deb and her family have been different, and it has helped her realize what's important in life. She reached out to Marco's organ recipients, all of whom are in their late forties and early fifties. She has since made contact with two of them and found a good friend in one.

A man named Cecil, of Plainfield, received Marco's liver. Cecil lovingly calls her his "liver mom," she says, and they talk and e-mail regularly. She also exchanged letters with Theresa, a woman from Texas, who received her son's lungs.

"After meeting and speaking with the donor recipients, I felt a strong urge to be part of this," she said. "Marco saved lives."

She started speaking to Gifted Hope, looking for ways to help out in honor of her son. She found an opening, and in January, switched careers, giving up her own business to work as a hospital development coordinator, educating hospitals about and facilitating organ donations behind the scenes.

Its been four full months now on the job, and it couldn't be more fulfilling, she said. "I guess this is where I'm supposed to be."

She gave up her job as an assistant vocational counselor in her own business. Her husband Mark also changed jobs from a sales representative to a financial advisor. Deb wrote a book called "Marco's Gift: A Mother's Reflections on Life, Love and Destiny." She said it helped her both mourn and realize she can be happy again.

"The first year was very, very difficult," she said. "What I looked at was my loss. The hole in my heart. Now I look at Cecil's mother..."

Deb paused as tears welled up.

"...who now has her son that's alive. We've helped people. Theresa's a grandmother and saw her daughter graduate."

In Illinois, 4,700 people are currently awaiting organ and tissue donations, according to Scott Meis, campaign manager for Donate Life Illinois. He said there are 97,000 in need nationwide.

"It's obviously incredibly inspirational for someone to be such an avid supporter of the issue," said Meis about Deb and her family. "Any mother who loses their son, it's incredible emotional strain. I believe this is something that not only helps her with the grieving process, especially with the loss of a loved one, but also serves as an example for others to see the process of organ donation is literally a medical miracle."

As Mother's Day approaches this week, she thinks not only of her own family, but those her and her son have been a part of.

"For me to know that he saved all these lives is his ultimate gift," Deb explained, "knowing your child's leaving made a profound difference."

Deb, her husband Mark and son Christopher, 12, now live in Northbrook.