

'I was very blessed'

Lisle mom gets word of transplant five days after diagnosis

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By JEFF DANNA Sun-Times News Group

It was divine intervention that caused Colette Jordan's phone to ring the morning of Oct. 31, 2006. There's no other way to explain it, she says.

Just five days before, she had been diagnosed with liver disease and told she needed a liver transplant immediately. She was placed on a waiting list -- at number 1,742. The phone call was a doctor letting her know a potential organ donor had been identified.



Colette Jordan of Lisle had a liver transplant two years ago and has dedicated her life to raising awareness about organ donations.

(Herb Shenkin/For The Sun)



Colette Jordan of Lisle, who had a liver transplant two years ago, received this charm as a Christmas present to represent the surgery that saved her life.

Herb Shenkin / For The Sun

She had most likely been sick for quite a while before she was diagnosed, she said.

"Being a mom of three and working two jobs, I was probably ignoring myself and my own health," the 48-year-old Lisle resident said.

Now, more than two years after her transplant, she is making the most of her life as she works toward a degree at College of DuPage and volunteers at Gift of Hope organ procurement organization based in Elmhurst.

In the months after the operation, Jordan focused on recovery.

"You have to be sick enough to get (a transplant) but well enough to survive it," she said.

When her doctor told her she could not work out at the gym, she was devastated. She took comfort in her neighbor, though, whose father had been an organ donor. The friendship simultaneously helped Jordan recover physically and emotionally.

"We just clicked," Jordan said. "We started walking about a mile and a half a day, and that progressed to 10 miles a day."

When Jordan found out her neighbor had gone back to school, Jordan was encouraged to also. And with the support of her husband, who had gone back to college himself in 1990, Jordan made the decision to enroll in COD's adult fast track program for human services.

Her first semester of the program included a service component, which required students to team up with organizations for a hands-on experience.

Given her history, it made sense for Jordan to work with Gift of Hope.

She has been volunteering at the organization ever since, serving as an advocate for organ donation. And in February, she will become an intern at Gift of Hope.

Jordan also has been instrumental as an organ donation advocate on campus.

She started a COD chapter of Students for Organ Donation, which has grown to 37 members. She even led COD to a first-place finish in the statewide Donate Life 2008 Campus Challenge, in which schools compete to see which can add the most names to the state's organ donor registry.

"I kind of found my competitive spirit since this transplant," she said.

In November, she was chosen COD's nominee for the Lincoln Academy Student Laureate Award, which is given each year to a student in the Illinois community college system, and she also was named one of the college's two nominees for the All-USA Community College Academic Team sponsored by USA Today.

Those nominations are an honor, Jordan said, but it's her work as an organ donation advocate in her community, at the college and statewide, that fulfills her. And she will never forget that she has gotten the second chance at life that many people never receive.

"Most people wait a long time (for a transplant). Over 6,000 people died waiting last year in the U.S.," she said. "I was very blessed."