

Fellow Kin,

Wow December is already here, where has the time gone. This is always such a busy month. I will keep it short.

I was surfing the CCFF (Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation) web site and found this article. With the Winter Olympics coming to Canada in February, I thought this article was appropriate to use as this month's news letter.

## Dreams Do Come True If You...Believe

**By Margaret Benson**



I was diagnosed with CF when I was 14 years old. At that time, the life expectancy was 15. The doctor told me to go home and enjoy the last year of my life. I remember telling him he was wrong; I was going to live until I was old and grey-haired. I knew if I believed in myself I would be okay.

As far as CF was concerned, I was one of the lucky ones. My digestive problems were minimal and my lungs fairly clear. I was active in all sorts of things and used physical activity as my method of physiotherapy. My life-long dream was to become a teacher. The CF doctors thought I was crazy to choose teaching as a profession. They felt I probably wouldn't live through the stress of university, let alone teach in an environment filled with spores, molds, bugs and germs.

But I completed my teaching certificate, and at the age of 21 was living my dream as a school teacher. In 1988, I married Brian, a friend I had known since elementary school, who was very understanding about CF and all that comes with it.

## Waiting for 'the call'

My health started to fail in my early 30s. I continued to work full time and spent holidays in the hospital so not to miss work and my students. In 1998, as a result of a terrible lung infection, I went into congestive heart failure. I spent many days in ICU and was given my last rites by the hospital priest...I was dying of CF. My only hope was a double-lung transplant. It took over a year to be placed on the transplant list – the longest year of my life. Every time the phone rang or my pager went off, life would stop for a moment in hopes it would be "the call". Weighing in at 100 pounds, on full-time oxygen and living a sedentary life, the call for my transplant couldn't come soon enough. In September 1999, I had to make the toughest decision of my life. I was too sick to return to work. My heart broke when I turned off the lights in my classroom for the final time.

On November 30, 1999, a family who tragically lost a loved one was able to look beyond their grief and donate their loved one's organs, saving my life, and four others that day. I will be forever grateful to the donor family. On December 1, 1999, I received the greatest gift of all – a life-saving lung transplant. My life changed forever.



### Life after transplant

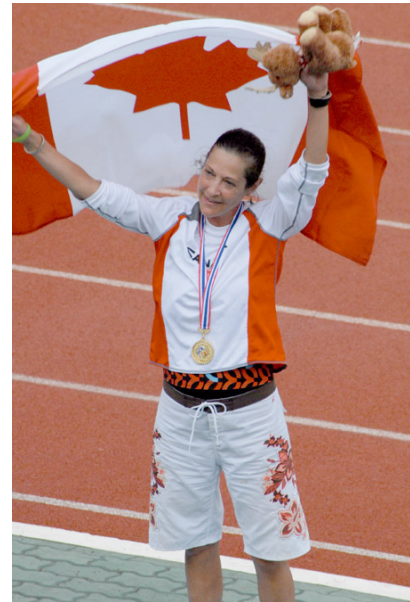
While recovering, a physiotherapist gave me her Vancouver Sun Run bib and told me to go for it. On that day I decided the best way to honour my donor and donor family was to run. I had also heard about the World Transplant Games, the Olympics of the transplant world. My mind was set; I was going to the World Games no matter what it took.

My recovery was slow because of complications related to the surgery, but I was determined to walk, run or participate in athletics no matter what. My first big endeavour was the Vancouver 10 km Sun Run in April 2001. It was tough, but exhilarating all the same. I remember crying tears of joy as I crossed the finish line and raised my hands in the air in honour of my donor... something I continue to do.

My first World Transplant Games were in Nancy, France in July 2003. What an amazing experience. 1,500 transplant athletes from 60 different countries, all ready to compete in Olympic-style events. What a feeling to be with so many people who understand what you have been through...they just “get it.” I came home with three medals, one of each colour, all in running races. I was hooked. I have since competed in two other World Games, and two National Games. I have won many medals, but it isn't about the medals – it is about celebrating life, giving back and honouring my donor and donor family.

Many of us living with cystic fibrosis have been saved because of organ donation, and without donors, our fight would have been lost. Being an organ donor and giving the “Gift of Life” is the greatest gift you can give. Gaining my life back and being able to participate in sports is extraordinary. To imagine what my life was like ten years ago to what it is today is unbelievable. Dreams do come true if you...believe.

Margaret will be competing in her fourth World Transplant Games in August. She will also be celebrating her 50th birthday and 10th anniversary of her transplant this year.



The moral of this story is to never give up. When you put your mind to something **Dreams Do Come True If You... Believe**

---

Yours in Kin,

Paula Mayer

(Home)

[plmayer@persona.ca](mailto:plmayer@persona.ca)

(705) 692-3148 (H) or

(Work)

or [pmayer@reliableclean.com](mailto:pmayer@reliableclean.com)

(705) 675-5281 ext#210