A Selfless Organ Donors Saves a Father’s Life

Kelvin Smith was always an athlete. He played sports growing up and went to the gym every day as an adult. At age 38 he started experiencing shortness of breath, which forced him to stop working out. He went to the doctor and after a barrage of tests, they diagnosed him with restricted cardiomyopathy and said he needed a heart transplant.

“I couldn’t believe it,” he says. “I was always working out and taking care of myself and now I had a major heart problem.”

His medical team tried several other treatments before the transplant, including a pacemaker and a defibrillator, but nothing worked.

One day, Kelvin woke up in pain at the bottom of a staircase at work. He had fainted and fallen. Nobody else was around and he had to climb up the stairs to call 911.

“That’s when I knew the transplant was the only option,” he says. “It was so hard telling my kids.”

Kelvin was placed on the wait list and his symptoms got worse. Breathing was so difficult that he couldn’t walk around the mall to buy his wife a Christmas gift.

“I had to get her sneakers because Foot Locker was the closest store and I couldn’t take another step,” he says.

 In February 2008, he checked into the hospital.

“I knew I wasn’t leaving unless I got a new heart or died,” he remembers. “It was a very scary time, but I tried to be strong for my family.”

On April 17, 2008 Kelvin received the gift of life from a 21-year-old man in Ohio.

“I woke up from the surgery and the Yankees were on the TV in my hospital room,” he remembers. “Jeter was up at bat and in that moment, I felt like I finally came back to life. It was amazing. I am so thankful to my organ donor.”

Since his transplant Kelvin has written a memoir titled “The Unlikely Candidate: An Amazing Journey of a Heart Transplant Recipient.” He is a father to 5 children and runs his own personal training business.

*August marks National Multi-Ethnic Donor Awareness Month, an initiative dedicated to saving and improving lives in diverse communities by creating a positive culture for organ, eye and tissue donation. 75% of those waiting in the greater New York City area for a lifesaving organ transplant are people of color. Because of this, the initiative focuses on healthy living habits that may prevent the need for an organ transplant while also raising awareness about the power of donation in multicultural communities. To learn more, please visit* [*LiveOnNY.org*](https://www.liveonny.org/)*.*