

# "There is good that comes from everything"

They say everything happens for a reason. But how can we make sense of that when our hearts are breaking? Cathy McCall's family wondered that, too. Yet they learned good can come from anything. Read on and you'll believe it, too!

As she lay in the dark, Cathy McCall was unable to sleep. Tomorrow, she knew, would be the day her family had prayed for. Tomorrow, on Friday the 13th, her daughter's life would be saved. Some might fear that date. But for the Tucson, Arizona, mom, it felt like a sign that a very special angel was watching over them...

Cathy's daughter, Meredith, had been just 16 months old when she was diagnosed with diabetes. And though Cathy watched Meredith's diet and monitored her meds like a hawk, Meredith still sometimes ended up in the hospital.

One summer day, they had a birthday celebration planned for Meredith, but when she awoke, Cathy noticed the child's limbs were floppy as a rag doll's. "Call the hospital," Cathy told her husband, Jay. "I'll take her in."

After a few hours with an IV, Meredith was fine. But when they got home, she'd missed most of her own party.

"Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous."

ALBERT EINSTEIN

## Giving the gift of life

By the time Meredith was in grade school, she was giving herself insulin injections and explaining to her class, "I have diabetes," understanding what that meant. And Cathy and Jay never forgot what that might mean: That someday, Meredith could have life-threatening complications. But today she's just a little girl, they thought. So as she grew, Cathy made sure she had sleepovers and played ball with her sister, Bridget, and brother, Jim.

Then one Monday night, Cathy and Jay found themselves rushing to the hospital—not for now 21-year-old Meredith, but for Jim, 19, who'd been in a motorcycle accident.

"Brain injury" ... "internal bleeding" ... Cathy heard. And even as grief nearly slammed her to the floor, a conversation they'd had at the table when the kids were in high school

came flashing back: "Why wouldn't you donate your organs?" Jim had said. "If anything ever happens to me, I'd like to be a donor."

Just 14 hours later, Cathy was kissing him goodbye. Jim—her baby, whose favorite number had been "lucky 13" because he'd been born on February 13—would never finish college; never open the restaurant he dreamed of. Oh, sweetheart, she cried. Let there be some good that comes from losing you...

In fact, because of Jim, two men could see again. His heart valves saved a 37-year-old man from Ohio, and breathed new life into a five-month-old baby. A young woman got his kidney. Still, there were days when seeing photos of Jim—grinning between his big sisters; wearing his #13 soccer jersey—Cathy's breath caught.

But in the months to come, as February 13 approached, an envelope arrived in the mail. It was a birthday card from the high school counselor who'd received Jim's liver.

Thank you, he'd written. On Mother's Day and Christmas, he sent more cards. And somehow, Cathy felt herself healing.

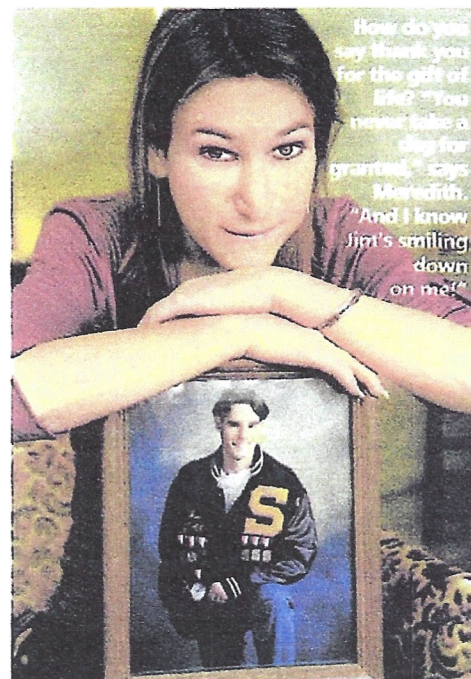
Realizing the impact of Jim's gift, the McCalls founded LifeDonor USA (LifeDonor.org), an organization to spread awareness about organ donation. "Talk to your family about being a donor," Cathy, Jay, Bridget and Meredith were soon telling thousands. "It can change and save lives."

Just as Jim had...

## The lucky 13th

Though her diabetes had been under control for years, Meredith still went for checkups. It was at one of them that her nephrologist announced, "You need a kidney transplant."

Completely blindsided—she hadn't had a single symptom!—Meredith drove to her parents' house. They've already lost one child,



she swallowed. What if this devastates them?

As shocked as they were, Cathy stayed strong. "We know transplants work," she told Meredith. And Bridget volunteered to donate.

But she wasn't a match. So Meredith took time off from her job. She had a port installed for dialysis. And the whole family, suddenly on the other end of organ donation, began waiting for a miracle.

"The" call came the night of August 12. And though anyone might've mistaken her tears for relief, it was her donor's family Meredith cried for. "Mom," she sobbed. "They must be going through what we did when we lost Jim!"

Cathy knew all too well the pain and loss they were enduring. So she prayed: May this gift you are giving us bring you a little peace and comfort, too.

The next morning, she whispered to Jay, "You know what day it is?" And when it dawned on him that it was Jim's lucky 13, he smiled.

The surgery took seven hours. But when Meredith woke up, she was smiling. "I'd like a macadamia nut cookie," she said. And she could have one—because the transplant that saved her life also cured her diabetes!

And she plans to write to her donor's family to say "thank you" for their gift. Because she no longer needs insulin shots. Because she can now go to Italian restaurants and eat pasta with her boyfriend, Andy. Because she's been given a second chance.

"The words don't feel like enough," Meredith says. "But my family knows just how much 'thank you' can heal, and that there is good that can come from everything. And when I think about everything—from Jim's organs being donated, to my family raising awareness, to my transplant—I know we've come full circle!"

—Kristin Higson-Hughes

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