

UW Medicine double lung transplant recipient shares story of perseverance at LifeCenter Northwest's Donation Celebration

Nearly one month after UW Medicine performed its milestone 1,000 lung transplant, double lung recipient Carmel Aronson shares her inspirational story at a gathering of the organ, cornea, and tissue donation community in Bellevue, WA. Her friends and fellow recipients from the UW lung transplant support group were there to cheer her on as she easily walked to the stage, climbed the stairs, and read her story to the group- a feat that would have been impossible four years ago.

Carmel had always been a strong, healthy, and active young woman. Working as a mental health crisis counselor, she walked or rode her bike to work each day, and had regularly practiced yoga for over a decade. However, in December 2013, everything changed suddenly and without warning. Carmel came down with concurrent cases of the flu and pneumonia and had to be hospitalized for several days. Over the next year, she began to notice how difficult it was to return to the physical condition she was in prior to falling ill and that even short walks would leave her breathless and require breaks. Soon after, Carmel was diagnosed with Idiopathic Pulmonary Hypertension – a rare, but deadly disease that affects breathing and can eventually cause fatal heart failure. She was 33.



Carmel, center, with other members of the UW Lung Transplant Support group at LifeCenter Northwest's Donation Celebration, Aug. 4.

After her diagnosis, life became increasingly difficult for Carmel. She was on continuous supplemental oxygen, could not work, could rarely go outside, and often needed help moving around her studio apartment. Plans with friends and family were nearly impossible as daily activity had to be strictly calculated and planned for, and her condition varied from day to day. Eventually she was told that her only hope at survival was a lung transplant.

Despite the severity of her health, and the toll it had taken on her life, Carmel found beauty in the difficult time. She met and married her soul mate, which impacted her life in the most positive way possible.

“Living fully present in the given moment, I was simultaneously dying and the most alive I had ever been,” she says.

In November 2015, Carmel received the call from the University of Washington that changed her life. Since her transplant, Carmel has found a new lease on life and is thriving with her new lungs.

“Life is different than I ever could have imagined,” Carmel says. “I do not feel that I have ‘transitioned back’ to my life before transplant, rather that I have ‘transitioned forward’ towards a new version of myself and a new life.”



Carmel and her spouse, Lynn at their community acupuncture clinic

On the one year anniversary of her marriage and the eight-month anniversary of her lung transplant, Carmel and her spouse opened [Sloth Around Community Acupuncture](#) in Southwest Seattle. She described the clinic as a culmination of all her hopes and dreams from the year prior to her transplant; “that I would survive; that I could reenter the world without fear of running out of oxygen; and that I would have enough time on this earth to positively give back in some meaningful way my intense gratitude for this awesome gift that I have been trusted with.” Carmel uses the clinic as a platform to discuss organ donation and help promote and encourage others to register as donors.

The generosity of one donor has given Carmel a second chance at life. For that she couldn’t be more grateful.

“We simply do not, and cannot, know what life has in store for us. If it weren’t for the forethought and generosity of a total stranger, I would not be here today. I have already lived far beyond what would have been possible had this surgery not been available to me,” said Carmel. “Each of us has an essential role to play in ensuring that donated organs are available for those who need them. You just don’t know, the next person needing help could be you.”

Each year, those who have been touched by organ, cornea, and tissue donation in Western Washington gather to celebrate the gift of life and remember those who gave to others. The annual Donation Celebration is hosted collaboratively by LifeCenter Northwest, the local organ procurement organization, and SightLife, the local cornea recovery organization. This year’s event was held Sunday, August 4, in Bellevue, WA. Attendees included organ, cornea, and tissue donor families, transplant recipients, those waiting on the transplant waiting list, living donors, and medical professionals. This gathering provides an opportunity for the donation community in our region to come together to share stories, grieve, rejoice, and heal together in a safe, supportive environment.



Carmel Aronson shares her story at LifeCenter Northwest’s 2019 Donation Celebration in Bellevue, WA

One donor can save up to eight lives through organ donation, and touch many more through the gift of tissue donation. To learn more about donation, or to register to be a donor, visit www.lcnw.org.

