

2012

Back in the game!

by Keith Anderson, Gift of Life

"I wanted to pick out my wedding dress before I lost my sight so I could picture myself on my wedding day." This is the optimism and can-do spirit that Lisa Zimmerer of Kansas City, Mo., exudes as a volunteer speaker for Gift of Life. Selected as the organization's volunteer of the year, she engages students with the details of a journey that includes a life-saving transplant and losing her sight along the way. Life dealt her a shuffled deck and now using braille cards, she uses those same cards to beat friends and family in poker.

She is back in the game! If anyone can inspire young people deciding to register as organ donors, that person is Lisa Arthur Zimmerer.

The transplant chapter of her story begins in 2006 with the diagnosis of both kidney failure and diabetic retinopathy, complications of the diabetes she had struggled with since age eight. Her health was failing and she knew that her eyesight would soon fade. Fortunately, she had the support of her fiancé, Bob Zimmerer, parents Willene and Lawrie Arthur, and three aunts known to her care team as her "Mother Hens." Lisa endured four hours a day on hemo dialysis at home and waited for over a year to receive a kidney/pancreas transplant.

Lisa received the gift of life on September 3, 2008, through The Transplant Institute at Research Medical Center and thanks to a family that made the decision to donate the organs of a loved one. That day was the end of daily insulin shots, daily dialysis, and the anxious wait that is so familiar to many in need. Lisa had a new life, a new wedding dress and the love of a wonderful man she had met years before playing a game she enjoyed – the card game! She wore her dress when she married Bob on May 8, 2010. The memories of that day are ones she shares with students as she informs them about organ donation and encourages them to share their decision with loved ones.

Lisa continues to inspire others, especially those waiting for a transplant. She understands their dark and sad days but she also understands the need to share hope, encourage others and the pleasure of getting back in the game. As they say at the poker table, "A Big Hand for the Little Lady!"

Lisa and Bob Zimmerer

