

VOLUNTEERS GIVE THE GIFT OF LIFE TO OTHERS

by Edward Gulewitz, Jr., Volunteer, Mid-America Transplant



Edward Gulewitz, Jr. volunteering at Fiji event

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My name is Edward Gulewitz, Jr., and I was born with cystic fibrosis (CF). Most people are diagnosed with this disease in their infancy or early childhood; I was diagnosed at age 30. There is no cure, only treatment for symptoms. CF weakens the immune system and patients are unable to fight off infections.

Despite treatments, my illness eventually progressed to chronic lung failure. My doctor told me that I should consider a double lung transplant. After additional testing, I was added to the national "waiting list" on October 15, 2013. My health had deteriorated and there was a good chance I would not survive long enough to receive a transplant.

Being on the list made me both hopeful and scared. You realize that you need a transplant and a transplant can only come from a deceased donor. I wrestled with the emotions of guilt and fear. A transplant recipient alleviated some of my anxiety by explaining to me that for some families, an organ or tissue donation gives meaning to the tragic death of a loved one since it gives the Gift of Life to others who have no other option. I got "the call" on January 4, 2014, at 8:30 p.m. My procedure went very smoothly and lasted only four-and-a-half hours, instead of the anticipated eight hours.

I regained my strength very quickly. I was standing two days after my surgery. I walked 1,000 feet and climbed a short flight of stairs the day after that. I walked every day until I was released, just 12 days after surgery. My new lungs are always at risk for infection and rejection. I take a large regimen of medications in order to prevent this, but I can do almost anything a "normal" healthy person can.

My donor's mother wrote me about her son, Brandon, whose donation saved my life. It is emotional to read about the family and person who gave you another chance at life. I am extremely grateful for and humbled by my donor's gift.

I volunteer for Mid-America Transplant. One day they asked me to help with a donor registration event—it was the 2016 Fiji Academy! I'm a member of Phi Gamma Delta, a fraternity with more than 180,000 initiated brothers since 1848. As a Fiji and as a recipient of a lung transplant, it was as if God had placed me in this situation to further the Fraternity's efforts to increase the number of people registered as organ donors. The Fiji brothers welcomed my contributions. I'm closer to the Fraternity that has blessed me and the brotherhood continues to grow every day.

I will always be in debt to the family of my donor and those who have supported me, especially my amazing wife of 15 years, Anita. They have given meaning to my life in ways that are beyond description. Please speak with your family and loved ones about organ and tissue donation. Consider the Gift of Life that we all possess.