THE COSMO





Trine (right) received Amanda's liver after the child died of a brain tumor.

"A CHILD'S LIVER SAVED MY LIFE"

Twenty-four years after receiving an organ transplant, Trine Engebretsen met the family who made a selfless decision in the midst of awesome grief.

As told to Julie Weingarden Dubin

By the time I turned 2, I had almost bled to death five times. It was gastric bleeding, accompanied by a severely distended abdomen and terrible jaundice—even the whites of my eyes were a deep yellow. Doctors were baffled at first, but after we visited 12 different hospitals throughout the United States and abroad, my parents finally received the grim diagnosis: alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency, a genetic disorder that causes the liver to harden. Without a transplant, the disease would kill me.

This was the early 1980s, when liver transplants were largely experimental; no one from my home state of Florida had ever had one. My parents were told that there were already 50 sick children under 5 years old in the U.S. waiting for a liver transplant. And even if I were somehow lucky enough to be offered one of the precious organs, I'd have only a 30 percent chance of living...for six months.

The Call

On January 19, 1984, when I was 2 and a half and gravely ill, a little girl named Amanda DeLapp from Mayfield, Kentucky, died of a brain tumor. She was only 18 months old. Her family donated her organs, and since doctors believed I had less than 24 hours to live, I was moved to the top of the organ-recipient list.

The transplant was to take place at the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, in Pennsylvania, and so within a couple of hours of receiving the phone call, my family and I boarded a private Lear jet in Miami. After 18 hours of surgery, I became one of the youngest people ever to receive a liver transplant, and my new liver began working immediately. (My mom said my original one looked like a rotten potato.) I had to take medication daily growing up, but I was allowed to be active—I did lots of swimming and gymnastics.

When I was about 24, I finally tried contacting the DeLapps, but I never heard back. I figured they didn't want to have any contact. Then one night about a year ago, I got a MySpace friend request from a 23-year-old girl

AP/Wide World (2)

POST

How to Become a Donor

1. Most states let you indicate that you want to be an organ donor when you apply for or renew your driver's license.
2. To find out if your state has additional rules, go to donatelife.net/CommitToDonation and click on your state.
3. Even if your state doesn't require family consent, talk to loved ones about your decision so they know and understand your wishes.

named Keisha DeLapp from Mayfield, Kentucky. My eyes welled with tears, and I practically fell off my chair. There was a picture of Keisha, and the message read "I am Keisha DeLapp. I am Amanda DeLapp's sister." I hadn't even known Amanda had a sister—she was born after Amanda died.

Keisha explained that her family had actually been trying to find me for years. Last July, I made plans to meet Keisha and her mom, Alisha, during the 2008 National Kidney Foundation U.S. Transplant Games, in which I was competing as a swimmer. Coincidentally, our reunion was in Pittsburgh—the city where I'd had my transplant surgery—on what would have been Amanda's 26th birthday.

As soon as I saw Alisha and Keisha at the convention center, I burst into tears. There were news cameras everywhere because local TV stations had heard about our reunion. As my mom stood beside me—she was bawling too—we hugged, and I gave Keisha a butterfly pendant I had bought for her. We spent the whole week together going to events, and when I competed, the DeLapps were there to cheer me on. When I won a silver medal, I gave it to Alisha.

Earning It

I know that I'll never replace Amanda, but I think of Alisha as a second mom. Keisha and I have gotten close over e-mail, and I've asked her to be a bridesmaid in my wedding later this year. I view the DeLapps as my extended family.

I'm now a grad student studying biomedical science and working at the Life Alliance Organ Recovery Agency. I'm also applying to medical school, and I hope to one day be the medical director of a nonprofit organ-procurement organization.

Today, I don't take any medication for my liver, and my life expectancy is the same as any healthy woman's is. I'm determined to make the most of my gift of life—every single day. I talk to medical students about organ donation and attend board meetings for donation- and transplant-related organizations. I feel the need to honor Amanda's memory, and I want to make the DeLapps proud.



Meeting Keisha (her donor's sister) was emotional.

(From left) AP/Wide World; courtesy of subject.



Margaret lobbies Congress and foreign dignitaries on behalf of her dad.

Her Dad Is Imprisoned in the Middle East

After her father was given a life sentence for spying, Margaret Downs, 20, began fighting for his freedom.

By Zoë Ruderman

When Margaret Downs was 8 years old, her family moved 8,000 miles away from her home in Houston, Texas, to the Middle Eastern country of Qatar. Her dad, John, had been offered an oil-industry job working for the Qatar government and said he thought the experience would be life-changing for the family. He never could have guessed how true that statement would be.

At 16, Margaret moved back to the U.S. to finish high school. Not long after she returned, she got a call from her then-19-year-old brother, Nick, who was also stateside, attending Duke University. He told her that their father had been arrested—the police were investigating two e-mails he'd sent to a foreign embassy. But it didn't sound like it would amount to much more than a slap on the wrist. "At first, I kind of laughed it off," Margaret