

Hi, my name is Jim Carns...

I am much like many of you... I am a husband, a father, a brother, a grandfather, a friend, Organ Donor, and probably like some of you, I also received a "Gift of Life"!

You see, a little over 37 months ago, I was at Temple University Hospital in Philadelphia receiving my "Second Chance at Life"! I was the recipient of a new lung!

I would like share with you a little bit of my journey.

My journey toward transplant probably started prior to 2009, but I probably wasn't smart enough or sick enough to realize it, but...

In July of 2009 I became more aware that I probably had health issues. We, my wife Karen and I, were invited to go hiking in Colorado with friends. While hiking, I often found myself struggling to keep up with our group. They would pass me on the trail as they were coming down the mountain and I hadn't yet reached the top. Normally this would not have been so bad, but they had the snacks and the adult beverages with them. I would jokingly tell them that I thought they were trying to kill me, but in all honesty this trip probably saved my life.

When we returned home to Pennsylvania, I reluctantly made an appointment with my primary care physician who suggested I either had a heart issue or it was a pulmonary problem.

They ruled out heart problems early on, and contrary to what some people may have thought, I do have a heart and a strong one at that.

In 2010, I was diagnosed with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. Imagine being told you have a disease you have never heard of, a disease with no known cause for which there is no known effective medical treatment and no cure. Your future has been instantly shortened to three to five years. There is no magic pill to cure this disease and even a lung transplant is not a guarantee.

What is IPF... You know as well as anybody that it is a debilitating, unpredictable and ultimately fatal disease caused by

scarring/hardening (fibrosis) of the lung making it difficult if or impossible to breathe.

This diagnosis sure put a damper on our day. How does one comprehend that I am probably going to die from a disease I never heard of, and as you know millions of others have not have heard of either.

What caused me to be afflicted with this disease? That's a Million \$\$ question my answer has always been... it could be from anything.

- **Smoking in my teenage years**
- **Working in the steel mill**
- **Could have been from being exposed to chemicals during my year long vacation in Vietnam, but the VA disagrees with that assumption.**
- **How about the environment as a cause?**
- **It could be familial, that means I could possibly pass that gene on to my kids.**
- **The list goes on, it could have been, could have been, and could have been anything!**

Over the next couple of years I continued my doctors' visits and necessary testing.

In late 2012 it was suggested I might want to get my affairs in order. We needed to decide what transplant hospital we wanted introduced to. We chose Temple University Hospital in Philadelphia.

During January 2013 I spent two weeks undergoing a pre-transplant evaluation. During these many tests, they told me by the time they were over I would know more about my body and health than I ever dreamed about knowing. Boy, were they correct about that statement. If I had known about this testing, I may have paid more attention in my 6th grade class. To some people's surprise, I even passed their psychological testing.

Initially, I was not accepted into the transplant program, I was deemed too healthy at that time. That was not completely unexpected by us, but none the less, it still was a disappointment.

In June 2013 my health appeared to go downhill a little quicker than anticipated and I was listed for transplant. Earlier I said being diagnosed with IPF put a damper on my day... Well let me tell you when I received that letter saying because of “end stage” pulmonary fibrosis I would be listed for transplant; to me “end stage” anything had ominous connotation that I wasn’t thrilled to hear.

Little did we realize... on September 22, 2013 as we were getting ready for church and at 7:15 a.m. the call we had been waiting for arrived. They said they had a lung and we needed to get to the hospital as soon as we could safely get there.

Karen and I had our moment together in the kitchen; we held each other, shed a tear or two and said a prayer. On the way I made some very difficult phone calls to the kids. We were at Temple University Hospital by 10 am and the Transplant Team was waiting for me. I was on the gurney and wheeled into the Operating room by 11 am and I was home in Harrisburg after a short eight day stay in the hospital.

And as they say the rest is history.....

I received the left lung from an unknown 36 year old male Organ Donor. This is the only information I know about him. I have reached out several times to the family, but as of yet have had no response. I would honestly like to meet this family and personally thank them for this gift I received and to let them know their son, father or brother still lives in me. Will I ever meet this family, well I don’t know, but I will continue to write to them and at the very least, they will know the gift they provided is still healthy and helping to provide life to another.

Each night before I go to bed, I thank God for this gift I received and thank my donor family for allowing his organs, especially his lungs, to be donated so others can have a second chance at life.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the importance of caregivers and the part they played during my journey with IPF. I can’t say enough about caregivers, especially my caregiver who just happens to be my wife and best friend. I am sure if you would ask her, she would say this just happens to be part of the marriage contract; I guess she is looking at the part that refers to “in sickness and in health.” Karen

has been by my side at every test and doctor's appointment I have had since my journey with pulmonary fibrosis began in 2009.

She was with me when I was going through my difficult times during my journey. She was the one sitting in the waiting room as I was going through various procedures during my transplant evaluation. She was the one who took the phone call from Temple University Hospital on that Sunday morning in September telling us they had a lung for me and she was the one who waited anxiously for word about how my surgery was progressing. Her smiling face was not only the last one I saw as I was being wheeled into surgery, but hers was the first one I saw when I woke up in the ICU. She has been my nurse, my cheerleader, my gopher, my sounding board, my chauffer, my biggest supporter, and as she is fond of saying, she has been my drill sergeant throughout this journey.

In my mind, after God, the transplant surgeon, the caregiver has the most important role in your recovery!

Thank you for allowing me to share a little bit of my journey.