

Teena Kirkendoll Lung Transplant Journey

The story of my lung transplant journey had a subtle beginning. Suffering from a chronic cough and some shortness of breath in 2009 my doctor referred me to a pulmonologist. I was overweight, out of shape, and expected to get another motivational discussion about those topics. While those points were valid and pertinent, I also heard that I had “interstitial lung disease”. Although he tried to tell me how serious this disease is, I was good at denial and thought I would just have to live with these symptoms. This was my “denial phase”.

By 2017 the disease progressed, and my symptoms worsened. I was referred to Dr. Hamblin in the KU ILD and Rare Lung Disease’s office. This is when the seriousness of my condition finally hit home, and the diagnosis of Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis (IPF) became a reality for me. It was now clear that the disease is terminal, and time was running out. Suddenly life expectancy was a primary discussion item. I was told about expensive medications (that would only slow the progression) and oxygen therapy that would be required to extend my life. But I did not just want to extend it by months. At 61 I still had lots to do and accomplish and unborn grandchildren to meet! We were told that the only remaining option would be a lung transplant, but I wouldn’t qualify because my Body Mass Index was too high. This was my “fight or surrender” moment.

We set about trying to find out what it would take to get a lung transplant. This journey would affect not only me, but a full team of family members, doctors, nurses, physical therapists, dieticians, respiratory therapists, and friendly care givers. My husband and I joined the Pulmonary Fibrosis Support Group for mental, emotional, and practical help. This group of wonderful people helped us to understand IPF and the challenges we faced. They were a great comfort and inspiration to us.

I had the daunting task of losing just over 100 lbs. (through a 10 month clinically monitored program with KU weight management), exercising while managing ever growing oxygen needs. I persevered knowing that this support team was behind me pushing for success.

After 10 difficult months of dieting, exercising, and medications, I achieved the weight loss target required by the lung transplant team. I got my transplant in November 2019.

I am now living my post-transplant life with healthy lungs, no longer tethered to a concentrator dragging around supplemental oxygen just to walk and talk! And while I need to wear masks in public, so does everyone else (pandemic.)

I purchased a t-shirt that sums up how I feel, saying “Grateful, Thankful, Blessed” on it. I am thankful and grateful to all the Doctors, surgeons, nurses, family, care-partner, rehab staff, and support friends who were a big part of my journey. I am especially thankful to the donor who made this gift of life possible. Thanks to everyone who made my journey a life-giving event!



Teena Pre-transplant



Teena Ready for Transplant



Post Look Ma, no O2 tether!