

Schafers enjoying each ordinary day

Written by Darci Tomky

“How much is an ordinary day worth if you lost it and then came back to it?”

Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* asks the same question. The characters in this play put much importance on moments of ceremony and consequence, and at the same time they lacked any sense of wonder at what passed before their eyes every day.

After the character Emily dies and gets a chance to relive one day again, she asks, “Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?—every, every minute?”

Knowing that every day, every minute is a gift from God, Randy Schafer now “realizes life,” taking delight in each and every day.

After celebrating his one-year double lung transplant anniversary in November, Randy and his wife Joy looked back on the past year and simply savored the idea that they could enjoy all the ordinary things in life.

They, like Emily in *Our Town*, see how people take those ordinary days for granted—those days that now are “so spectacular” for the Schafers.



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Even though nothing out of the ordinary has happened to Randy and Joy Schafer since Randy's double lung transplant a year ago, they are simply happy enjoying the everyday life most people take for granted.

Randy said it's "a night and day difference" before and after the operation.

Having asthma as a child and then deteriorating lungs as an adult, Randy never really knew what it felt like to have full lung capacity.

Primary ciliary dyskinesia (PCD) caused a defect in the action of the cilia in Randy's lungs. He also faced bronchiectasis, which he explained as irreparable lung damage.

With less and less lung capacity each year, Randy was down to 25 percent by April of 2009. It was time to begin looking for a lung donor.

An answer to prayer came Nov. 2, 2009 when the Schafers got the call that a donor match was found. After several weeks at the hospital and the Lung Connection in Denver, Randy had two new lungs and was on the road to recovery.

"God has given me this gift undeserved," said Randy.

Joy added no one knows how many days they have on this earth. "Every single day is a gift," she said.

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Randy was only admitted to the hospital a couple times in the few months after his operation, but he said doctors expect some periods of rejection to the transplant.

One thing they need to watch out for is cytomegalovirus, since the donor was positive and Randy is negative.

Other than that, Randy simply takes several pills a day and makes sure he gets plenty of exercise by walking. He will now visit his lung team every two months.

Life is so normal for Randy, when he meets new people and tells them he had a double lung transplant they have a “jaw dropping” experience!

Randy is again working full time as the Phillips County Administrator, and he definitely has enough energy to make it through the week without “dropping dead” on the weekends. He was thrilled to be able to be there for the recent celebration for the Phillips County Event Center, a project he had spent so much time on.

Before the operation, Randy would use the elevator where he works at the Courthouse. Now he takes the stairs—something most people would take for granted. “I can do it just like everyone else. And I feel good!”

Joy is still in the habit of being the caregiver, but she’s getting more and more used to the fact that Randy can do these everyday tasks on his own.

Within the last year, the couple took a week-long trip to Branson, Mo. One night they had to race to a supper appointment, and Randy could keep up—something he wouldn’t have thought was possible a year ago.

Randy and Joy spent Thanksgiving with family in the mountains, and at 9,000 feet elevation, Randy was still breathing great!

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His oxygen content in his blood is now in the 90s (which is normal) compared to the levels in the 70s he was seeing before the operation.

The lung capacity that was at a 25 percent has risen consistently in the past year, and Randy is proud to report he is now at 88 percent, which definitely falls in the normal 82-100 percent range. Certainly no more oxygen needed for this man!

The Schafers are still overwhelmed at how many people have shown their support in the last couple years. People all over the world were praying, and Randy's fellow Courthouse employees made "Donate for Life" t-shirts, just to name a few ways that people came alongside the Schafers.

Randy still keeps in contact with some of the others who received lung transplants around the same time he did. Mary Goff of Fleming, the woman who got a new heart from the same donor who provided Randy's lungs, is also doing very well after her one-year anniversary.

In an effort to give back, Randy and Joy recently took a class to become mentors—Randy to those who are waiting for a transplant and Joy to their spouses. When they return to the hospital they always know those with lung transplants because they have to wear masks, and the Schafers make sure to take time to talk with them and give their encouragement.

How does one say thank you for a lung transplant? Randy recently completed his thank you letter for his donor's family. He can't directly contact the family yet, so his letter will be passed on to them and it will be their choice whether to contact Randy or not.

Thanks to his donor, team of doctors, caregiver, family and friends, Nov. 2, 2009 was Randy's new birthday, and even if every day since is just another ordinary day, he will take delight in it.

Consider this again: "How much is an ordinary day worth if you lost it and came back to it?"

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