

Burlington woman a living donor for her ailing father

by **Kathy Yanchus**
Burlington Post Staff

You see it in their eyes and the smiles they exchange; you hear it in the laughter, and the teasing.

The Dadson family is tight, and if possible, even closer now after the incredible journey they have shared watching dad David return from death's door with a 'little' help from his daughter Laura.

Their remarkable story actually begins in 2010 when David, now 71, was diagnosed with Primary Sclerosing Cholangitis (PSC), a disease that causes bile ducts to become inflamed and scarred leading to liver failure.

With each passing year, they watched David deteriorate and eventually, the retired teacher landed on Ontario's liver transplant list.

"He continued to plummet. It was frightening," said wife Sheila.

Laura eventually put out a public plea via Facebook in November of 2014 to help save her dad, highlighting the viable option of a living donor because a transplant was the only known cure for PSC.



The happy and healthy Dadson family, from left, Mike, Laura, David and Sheila, celebrate the remarkable end of an emotional journey when Laura became a living donor for her ailing father. | **Nikki Wesley/Metroland**

“I was ecstatic once I found out it was a done deal, that it could happen.”

Laura Dadson

Family members, unfortunately, were not suitable candidates....or at least that's what everyone thought.

At the time of Laura's FB post, she was pregnant with her first child and unable to be tested, so she reached out for help via social media. Little did the family know after a mandatory three month waiting period following her December

C-section, she was determined to apply to be her dad's living donor. Following four months of intensive testing, which included ruling out the possibility she was predisposed to the same liver disease, Laura was approved on July 3, 2015.

"It was scary because I hadn't told these guys that I was applying," said Laura, now 36. "But I was ecstatic once I found out it was a done deal, that it could happen."

Once it was determined his daughter was a match, the transplant went ahead on July 13 at Toronto General Hospital.

David entered hospital on July 12 and as Laura was being driven to the hospital at 4:30 a.m. the following morning, the family noticed

a green ring around the CN Tower, the colour of organ donation awareness.

"Talk about an omen. Why would they have a green ring in July?" said Sheila.

Laura was in the operating room at 8 a.m. and out by about 4:30 p.m.; David was taken in around 11 a.m. with the transplant of 65 per cent of Laura's liver completed by 10 p.m.

"It seemed like two minutes," joked David.

"To you maybe," laughed Mike remembering the long anxious hours of waiting along with his mom, Laura's partner and "lots of family who popped in unexpectedly."

"Laura was so pumped. I think she could have done that surgery without an anesthetic," smiles Sheila.

"I was ready," said Laura.

It's still surreal to know that he has his daughter's liver inside him, and not a day goes by he doesn't think about the gift she gave him, said David.

"I gave her life and she gave me life; she gave me a second chance, so it was really amazing."

And perfect timing, added Mike, because of how quickly his father was deteriorating.

Within a day of the surgery, her husband's colouring was noticeably better, said Sheila.

"His skin colour wasn't so green,

his eyes weren't so yellow," said Laura.

When he sees pre-transplant photos of himself David said he can't believe he's the same man.

When he was fighting symptoms that included severe weight loss, fatigue and jaundice, it didn't really click he was as sick as he was, he said.

"I think the mind tempers things to make it easier," said Mike.

One of the most emotional moments of the entire experience for Sheila was watching her daughter, shortly after her surgery and fighting nausea, walk down the hospital hallway and into her dad's room.

“I gave her life and she gave me life; she gave me a second chance, so it was really amazing.”

David Dadson

"It was nice to open my eyes and see her," said David. "She's a pretty strong woman."

Except for not being allowed to lift her daughter for six to eight weeks, Laura quickly bounced back.

Within 48 hours, the liver starts to regenerate and within two to three months, it's back to normal, said Sheila. The transplanted lobe also regenerates itself.

Laura had checkups after one month and three months — an MRI and blood work — and within four months was pregnant again.

Within 20 months, her daughter had two babies and was a living donor, smiled Sheila.

David had several re-admissions **see We're on p. 8**

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**'We're so lucky because it
doesn't happen for everybody'**

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due to sepsis between August of 2015 and January of 2016, but he is doing remarkably well now.

"Oh I'm great. I'm in very good shape," he said.

"He had the best team; we can't say enough about that team," said Sheila. "We're so lucky, we're so lucky because it doesn't happen for everybody. That whole department, they are so amazing, right from the beginning, from the initial assessments and supports, and it's still ongoing. We have a phone connection line with them where we can leave messages anytime or they can leave information; it's always available."

Since then, the Dadsons have discovered several people, many they barely knew, underwent screening but were not matches and two people, one a relative, found out through the testing process they have liver issues themselves.

Laura has also supported another mom who was a living donor for her mother.

"The more people I talk to about it, I find out just how little people know about transplants, the whole process and what can be done," said David.

"You can make a huge difference in someone's life," added Mike. "That's why it's so important to share experiences and information

with people, because we often assume other people know the same things we do and they don't."

Living donors are desperately needed and they work, said the family.

"It's miracle after miracle after miracle," said Laura.

For more information on the TGH Living Donor Liver Transplant Program, visit <http://bit.ly/1CjuCz1> or call 416-340-4800, ext. 6581.

For more information on the Trillium Gift of Life, Ontario's organ and tissue donation agency, visit www.gifttolife.on.ca/en.

To learn more about being a donor, listen to stories of lives changed or to register, go to beadonor.ca.

There is also a program for reimbursing expenses of living organ donors (PRELORD), which covers travel expenses for tests and surgery, as well as a potential loss of income after surgery. The fund was established by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, which is administered by the Trillium Gift of Life Network.

To view the Post's first story about the Dadsons initial plea for donors and awareness, visit <http://bit.ly/2pSKtDj>.

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