

"The most selfless, giving act"

By KAREN SNIDER
Staff Writer

On Sunday, April 29, a 13-year-old boy lost his life. His grieving parents had the presence of mind to make an important decision on that fateful day that saved the life of Catherine Stivison.

One life ended much too soon, while another life was extended indefinitely.

Stivison, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Stivison of Eunice, still gets emotional when she thinks of the young boy whose liver is now hers. "There's not a day that goes by that I don't think of him and his family," she says tearfully. "It's still really hard to talk about that aspect of it," she says.

Stivison points out that most transplant recipients have conflicting emotions on this subject. On the one hand, they're happy to be alive. On the other hand, they aren't happy that the donor is not. There is nearly always some guilt associated with receiving someone else's organs.

Still, Stivison says, "It's one of the most selfless, giving acts" that a grieving family can perform.

Stivison, who lives in Houston, clearly remembers the day that she got the call from her hospital in Dallas. "I was in Eunice visiting my parents. They called my home, then they called my sister. She knew where I was," she says. While the
(THE _____ 5A)

hospital got in touch with Stivison, her sister, Lorna Marsh of Arlington, Texas, was trying to book a last-minute flight to Dallas.

The call from the hospital came as a total shock because Stivison had only been on the transplant list for nine months. Most recipients remain on the list anywhere from one to three years before receiving their transplant, but both Stivison and her donor had the same rare blood type. Luckily, she was the next one on the list with that blood type.

With a donor liver on the way to Dallas, Stivison had to race the clock to make it to the hospital on time. That left her only a few hours.

Unfortunately, Stivison missed her first plane by five minutes. There just wasn't enough time to make it to the airport. This wouldn't stop her, however. She eventually chartered an air ambulance and was on her way.

"All I did on the way was worry if I was doing the right thing. It's a freaky thing to think about. I was scared," she says.

Marsh and her husband, Dale, met Stivison on the runway when she got to Dallas. "We went straight to the hospital to check in," she says.

"Luckily, everything was a match," Stivison says. The surgery was performed successfully, and Stivison was on her way to recovery.

She did have some setbacks along the way, though.

She had a bile duct leak, cytomegalovirus and went into rejection four times. She spent ten days in the hospital and three months at Twice Blessed House, a recovery center near the hospital. All of these conditions, however, Stivison says are "common" in transplant recipients, especially those who receive a liver.

Marsh was there with Stivison through the entire ordeal. "We've always been really close," Stivison says. Marsh spent countless hours at Stivison's bedside, making sure that her sister was as comfortable as possible and never got lonely. Stivison even sometimes calls her "Sister Angel." Her parents were also very supportive, as were many

other family and friends.

Despite all of the pain she has endured, Stivison feels that she definitely did the right thing by having the surgery. Though the disease that destroyed her own liver, Hepatitis C, still ravages her body and her immune system is suppressed due to the anti-rejection drugs that she will have to take for the rest of her life, she is still in much better health than before her transplant. Without the new liver, "I honestly doubt that I'd be talking to you right now," she says.

Stivison now volunteers with several organizations that help transplant recipients, including Lifegift Organ Donation, especially in April, since it is National Donate Life Month. "I feel like that's my way of giving back,"

she explains. "I'm letting people know that organ donation really works."



A healthier Stivison, left, poses with sister, Marsh, at right.