



Warwick (Recipient)

I first contacted my donor family, anonymously through the hospital as you had to in those days, at five months post-transplant. My feeling then, and 31 years later still is, was that as they had made the ultimate gift to an unknown person in a time of enormous grief, the least I could do was to both thank them and tell them a little about myself.

I told them I had three young sons, and their gift was more about the boys having a father than it was about me.

Not long later my donor mother replied. She said that the day after receiving my letter they happened to notice sitting in front of them at the football a dad with three young boys. At that moment, their gift became so much more real, more human, and I think helped them with their grieving process. If only just a little bit.

We already knew a few facts about my donor (*Warwick at Base Camp displaying and the letter told us a some more, but when we a photo of his Donor Hero Samantha*) discovered my wife was pregnant with our fourth child, I contacted the hospital to say if we had a girl we would love to name her after my donor. Maybe the fact that it was such a rare occurrence in those days (our baby was only the fourth-born post-liver transplant in Australia), I was told my donor's Christian name. **Samantha.**

Caitlin Samantha Alexandra Duncan was born almost two years to the day after my transplant. The name Alexandra was in honour of the medical staff at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, where I had my transplant.

So the reason for my second letter to my donor family was to tell them about our daughter. I told them Caitlin's full name, not giving the background on to how we named her, just letting them think whatever they wanted to think.

Again, my donor mother graciously replied, congratulating us on our news.



Over the next few years I didn't want to intrude in their lives, but nearing my tenth anniversary I had the urge that I should make contact again. I wanted to tell them everything that I had achieved in Samantha's name, to prove to them their precious gift was not a waste. I even sent them one of the Gold Medals I had won at the World Transplant Games.

By now the contact had to be made through the South Australian Organ Donor Agency, a precursor to Donatelife. After that exchange, SAODA enabled us to sign releases so we could communicate direct. I soon mentioned that I would be happy to meet if they ever wanted to.

One Thursday my wife and I received a letter saying they will be in Melbourne for the football on Saturday - in two days! Only two days to come to grips with the idea! Bloody hell!

We met them of course, brought them home to meet our kids and take them out for dinner. We found out so much more about Samantha and how she died. One of the photos of her I still carry with me everywhere I go - and always will.

They explained WHY they donated. They thought that if only a small part of Samantha could live on, then that would have to do. They didn't want another family to go through what they were going through.

When my donor mother met Caitlin, now eight or nine years old, she sat down, pulled her closer and touched her face - and said: "Oh, she has blue eyes." Sam had brown eyes.

Over the years since then, we have been in regular contact. I have met Samantha's two sisters (I'm even a Facebook friend with one of them) and my donor parents have met my own parents. We catch up in person whenever we can, usually every few years.

I visit Samantha's grave whenever I'm in Adelaide, on one occasion even taking Caitlin. That was confronting, as you may imagine.

I am so grateful, and incredibly lucky, as knowing my donor family has been such an amazingly rewarding experience.

Knowing them helps me remember.