

CONNIE

RECIPIENT OF: ACL ALLOGRAFT



ACL-TRANSPLANT RETURNS MONTANA WOMAN TO MANAGING COUNTRY FAIR; CREATING JOY FOR COMMUNITY

Connie eagerly anticipated her adult son's visit home for Christmas in 2009. During his visit, he teamed up with his former classic rock band for a reunion show at a local pub. Connie's family, as well as the family of another band member, were excited to be together for the holidays and were enjoying the show. Suddenly, trouble broke out in the pub.

"An argument erupted behind me," Connie said. *"I stood up to move to the other side of the table but my snow boot caught on the rung of the chair just as one man pushed another into me, knocking me over."*

Shortly thereafter, as Connie was still lying on the floor, a large man fell onto her legs. Connie sustained serious injuries: her left leg was broken and her right ACL was blown out.

Aside from the pain and day-to-day struggles that dealing with two injured legs presented, Connie's injuries also meant she could not adequately do her job, which she had a great passion for. After serving as Montana's property tax supervisor for 30 years, Connie was at the time working as the local county fair manager. Although the work was taxing (including everything from negotiating entertainment contracts to cleaning horse stalls), she absolutely loved it.

"Seeing smiling faces at a summertime county fair is one of the warmest feelings a heart can experience," Connie said.



As a full year passed after the injury, Connie's broken leg was casted and healed. She wore a brace on her right knee with the injured ACL, and knew her options for that leg were either to live with the injury in a brace for the rest of her life, or try an ACL transplant, using donated tissue from a deceased human donor. Eager to resume an active lifestyle and work for the county fair, Connie opted for the transplant.

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The surgery didn't require any large incisions, only 4 small holes where instruments expanded the skin around Connie's knee for viewing and working. Doctors performed meniscus reconstruction and then anchored the donated tendon diagonally from her tibia to femur.

Following the surgery Connie was excited to get her leg back into working order. However, she was tired of the frequent doctor visits from the past year, and wasn't pleased with the prospect of having to return again for physical therapy. Instead, she set up her own therapy routine at home.

"After a few harrowing days in a recliner I got on an exercise bike. I began slowly pedaling in front of the TV, an hour each morning and night. I had quite a setup. Morning Sudoku and coffee while pedaling to the Today Show, herbal tea and a sitcom at night," she said.

And the training worked; Connie's doctors were very pleased with her gradual improvement in range of motion.

By Spring of 2010, after a year of working from home, Connie was elated to be able to get back to the fairgrounds and the work she loves.

"It's now been one and a half years since my transplant. I still get a little stiff if I don't stay active, but I recently finished my second summertime county fair since surgery and reports from the public are

that this was the best one in years," she said.

Connie reflects on the gift of life that allowed her to return to work with earnestness and appreciation.

"I believe the body is the human's earthly vessel. Our deceased loved ones are hopefully in a wonderful place; their tissue is no longer needed by them. I honor whoever is selfless enough to understand that," Connie said.

"We offer an unused blanket to a shivering homeless man, food to a starving child, spare change to a simple benefit drive or money in the collection plate at church. We give. It's an odd feeling for me to be a recipient of any such gift because I've always been more of a giver, but I feel humbled in knowing someone gave tissue to me when I was in need."

Connie is a registered organ, tissue and bone marrow donor.

"As the old saying goes, if one life can breathe easier because of me, then I've gained my own measure of success. If I could speak to my donor I would say: thank you for helping to make people at a small county fair smile. You're a success.