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'The person I'd most like to thank...'

Whether it's a stranger they've never met, or a thoughtful family member, these women have special reasons to be grateful to someone. Here's why...



'I have him to thank for being alive'

KAREN JACKSON, 41, a solicitor from Liphook, Hampshire, was given 18 months to live after her heart collapsed, but a transplant gave her a second chance

'Arriving home from a brisk walk in the woods today, and feeling the steady beat of my heart, I thought about the young man whose death saved my life. I wondered if he liked country walks, and I hoped he'd

think I was making the most of my new healthy heart.

I was born with a hereditary heart condition that killed my mum when she was 50. Although my condition remained stable, I couldn't enjoy activities most people take for granted, like swimming and running. But I still managed to go to university, train as

a solicitor and meet my wonderful husband Chris, who I married in 2001. But in 2005, my heart collapsed and I had a pacemaker and defibrillator fitted. Things didn't improve and three months later my consultant explained my only option was a heart transplant, or I could be dead within 18 months. I went on a waiting list and life ground to a halt—some days I was so exhausted I felt ready to die. Thankfully, six months later, a heart was found. I was lucky, as there's such a shortage. Hundreds of people die every year waiting for a transplant. Sitting on the anaesthetist's table, Chris held me tight and I felt everything would be fine.

When I woke two days later, I was astonished to feel this roaring beast in my chest. My heartbeat was so loud I couldn't focus on anything else. After years of having to feel around for the faintest pulse, this was incredible. I couldn't wait to start running and dancing—

I was even looking forward to doing housework! But I kept thinking about whose heart I'd been given and, a year later, I contacted my transplant nurse. It was very emotional to discover the heart had belonged to a young man. I didn't ask for the details of his death, but wrote to his family, thanking them for saving my life, and the hospital passed it on. I needed to show my gratitude and I hope they gained comfort in the knowledge their son's heart saved me. Chris and I are thankful for every day together and we're living life to the full. Not a day passes that I don't think about how lucky I am.'

■ For more information, visit www.uktransplant.org.uk

RIGHT: Cancer brought them together, but Karen (left) and Jo are now friends for life



'Karen was a star when I needed her most'

JO BUCKETT, 46, a secretary, from Frome, Somerset, needed help when breast cancer threatened her health - and her finances

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2007, I thought my world was collapsing. As a single mum to William, who's now 15, with a mortgage to pay, taking time off from work to go into hospital was a terrifying prospect. I know it sounds crazy, but I was more worried about money than the cancer.

I had two operations to remove the cancerous lump and surrounding tissue, before being told I'd need a mastectomy. I opted for a double mastectomy for peace of mind. I'd already had a lot of time off work and I knew that the chemotherapy would mean more sick leave. How would I continue paying my mortgage? In a panic, I trawled the

internet for advice and I found the Breast Cancer Information Centre in Bath. I called them and when Karen rang me back, I burst into tears. I couldn't take in what was happening to me and when I tried to explain my situation, it all became too much. Karen was wonderful, though. She works for the Citizens Advice Bureau, but is funded by Macmillan Cancer Support to provide help to cancer patients. "Get all your paperwork together," she said calmly. "We'll see what help you can get. It will be OK." I felt hopeful and, at our first meeting, Karen told me I could get tax credits and disability allowance to top up my salary, because by then, I was on half pay. She also secured a £500 grant from Macmillan. My head was all over the place and all the form-filling was too much for me, particularly when I started chemotherapy. But Karen did it all—even managing to get a reduction in my fuel bill.

She'd hug me when we met up and after every session I could feel the weight of the world lifting. I also felt more able to enjoy time with William—I wanted life to remain as normal as possible for him. In July last year I had reconstructive surgery and I've recently finished my course of Herceptin. I've been given the thumbs up from my consultant and I'm getting my life back on track. I met Karen as a breast cancer patient, but I know we'll stay in touch now I'm on the road to recovery. We formed a bond and I feel so very lucky to have her in my life.'

'When I finally woke two days later, I could feel this roaring beast in my chest'



'A random act of kindness cheered up my day'

'I was recently having a terrible weekend. My heating had broken down and, after spending the morning trying to find a plumber, I was really looking forward to meeting my friends for lunch. However, I was running late and when I got to the car park, I discovered I had no change to pay for a ticket. I sat in my car fuming, convinced the world was against me. Just then, someone tapped on my windscreen and handed me their parking ticket, as they were leaving

early but had paid for the whole day of parking. It's amazing how much that random act of kindness cheered me up. If that stranger hadn't been so thoughtful, I would have just given up and gone home to bed!' **Amy Lyddall Fell, Sutton, Surrey**