

Double lung transplant gives new life

By PAUL MITCHISON
Burlington Post writer

Scott Young knows how lucky his is to be alive, following a double lung transplant two years ago that has given him a second chance.

"I was able to get to a different level of life, full of energy and spirit," said the 30-year-old, who has had cystic fibrosis since birth, but who says he's now in the best physical shape he's ever been.

"Today my life is wonderful. I have few physical restrictions and I work out regularly," said Young, guest speaker at last week's annual meeting of the Lung Association, Halton Region.

The Lung Association pays for education programs and research into diseases of the lungs.

Very grateful

The energetic Hamilton man poured out his gratitude to the people in his life who provided support in the months and years prior to his life-saving transplant, including the volunteers from the Lung Association. "I'm a concrete example of the work the association has done, and I thank all of you very much."

Young, who was born and raised in Hamilton, talked about how his cystic fibrosis — a chronic disease of the mucous glands — had little effect on his life until he reached his late teens.

A strong athlete with aspirations toward a professional hockey career, Young at first refused to accept that his illness would adversely affect his health and his ability to live an active life.

Finally, at the age of 25, a gradual decline left him in a Toronto hospital with a life-threatening lung infection.

A doctor explained that without a double lung transplant, he couldn't survive. "It was like someone hit me with a ton of bricks," he said.



Photo by Paul Mitchison

Scott Young received a double lung transplant two years ago. He feels healthy and is writing a book about his experience.

Feeling or irony

In his depressed state, he remembers the feeling of irony when he reached for a newspaper and saw a story on his childhood friend and sports rival, Allan Bester, playing in the NHL.

By contrast, Scott was only able to watch hockey on television, and come to grips with his own mortality.

During the first few months waiting for his transplant, Scott saw his marriage fall apart. When he wasn't in hospital he was forced to take an oxygen machine with him, so he just remained in his apartment.

But his attitude and outlook

soon changed.

His mother left the family business in Colorado to return to Hamilton and help nurse him. A transplant support group gave him comfort.

Then he met a woman who loved and supported him.

She saw him for the person he was before he lost weight and lived next to an oxygen tank. "She saw what was inside me, and raised my spirits."

After one false alarm when lungs became available but were deemed unsuitable for Scott just prior to transplant, a suitable donor was found in Thunder Bay in May of 1992. The transplant was a success.

No rejection

His body has not rejected the new lungs, removed from a 25-year-old male who was declared brain-dead following a shooting incident.

Since the operation, Scott said he has felt strong and healthy, and is writing a book about his experience.

While he still has CF, the transplant has meant the end of his suffering, and he actively encourages people to agree to contribute their organs after death.

"Not everyone does as well as I have, so it's important that a cure be found," he said, noting that many people still die at young ages from the disease. "They isolated the gene that causes it I'm confident there will be a cure found soon."