

Organ recipient tracks down donor's parents

Couple to meet woman who received their daughter's heart

AUDREY TAN, THE STRAITS TIMES

It has been two years since Mr Mark Kok Wah, 46, and his wife, Madam Ariess Tan, 43, received the worst news any parent could hear. Their 18-year-old daughter and only child, Carmen, had died.

Carmen, who was studying to be a nurse at Nanyang Polytechnic, had suffered an arterial rupture in her brain.

But in death, Carmen helped save the lives of four others. Her heart, liver, kidney and pancreas were donated.

Her parents signed their consent for her organs to be donated under Singapore's Medical (Therapy, Education and Research) Act, which was what she had wanted.

Recently, her Malaysian parents, who live in Penang, heard from the Singaporean woman who received Carmen's heart.

Ms Serene Lee, 37, had messaged Mr Mark on Facebook to ask if she could visit them. She had tracked the couple down after reading about Carmen's death in *The Straits Times*.

The reunion will take place in Penang on Friday, and ST will be making the journey there with Ms Lee.

Before she received Carmen's heart, Ms Lee, a part-time clinic



Carmen Mark, 18, died in 2015 after suffering an arterial rupture in her brain.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARK KOK WAH

assistant who is married with three children aged between seven and 14, had no heartbeat of her own.

Her heart was instead fully powered by a mechanical pump that ran on external batteries that had to be recharged every 12 hours.

She suffered from dilated cardiomyopathy, a disease of the heart muscle that weakens the heart such that it is unable to pump blood efficiently.

This condition often leads to heart failure.

"I will treasure this heart and live life to the fullest. I'm grateful to Mr Mark... as he could have chosen to say 'no'.

"Now I want to carry on Carmen's legacy (of helping others) and promote organ donation together with her parents," said Ms Lee, who volunteers at the National Heart Centre to help patients waiting for heart transplants.

RAISE AWARENESS

Mr Mark and Ms Lee said they are coming forward with their stories to raise awareness about organ donation in this part of the world, so more lives can be saved, and for Carmen's legacy to be continued.

Mr Mark is a specialist construction applicator and his wife, a financial consultant.

"I hope that (our) coming forward can create an impact and change people's mindsets about the gift of life," Mr Mark said.

"The taboo among Asians on organ donation is hindering many lives from being saved."

He added that he had faced objections when he signed the form allowing Carmen's organs to be donated.

"People said she must go in a complete body. It was very hard for me, but I had to do it, for I believe she is not completely 100 per cent gone. She is still around in Singapore to me."

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