

**Florian Ritteman** celebrated his 18th birthday on July 27, 2017. He received a heart transplant when he was 13 years old. Following his transplantation, not only did he regain good heart function, he started growing very rapidly and became considerably taller. He now plays soccer, is an active member of a table tennis club and is looking forward to doing voluntary work in the cardiology department of a transplant hospital when he has finished secondary school



## THE BEAUTY OF "NORMAL"

### *How are you doing these days?*

So far, I'm doing quite well. I'm living a normal life and I have normal problems like most teenagers of my age, I guess. Apart from that, I am fully occupied: I play soccer with my friends almost every day. Unfortunately, I'm not a member of a soccer club, but I don't really mind. I also dance a lot and stay out late at weekends.

### *So, basically you have a normal youth?*

Yes, apart from having to take a lot of medication three times a day which I already had to do before my transplantation, so I'm used to it. And I also have to be careful about my diet because I can't eat fresh fruit, vegetables or herbs because of the high levels of bacteria. Everything I eat must be cooked.

### *How were you doing before the transplantation?*

I wasn't doing well at all. My physical condition was very poor, I had to take many breaks during the day and have an afternoon nap. If I had to walk stairs, I had to take a five minute break afterwards. I hadn't grown since I was around 10 years old and everything I did was exhausting.

### *How has your life changed since 2014?*

Mostly, I am simply enjoying a 'normal life'. Since my transplantation I started to grow one centimetre per month. Of course, this is not very healthy for the tendons and muscle links which don't stretch that quickly. I am also a member of a table tennis club which is a lot of fun.

### *What kind of feeling was it to hear that there is a suitable heart available for you?*

It was an indescribable feeling! I got my call in the train while I was on a school trip, which was a very hectic moment. I felt happiness, excitement and fear at the same time, I can hardly describe it. But I never had any doubt that everything would turn out right.

### *Can you remember the moment you woke up from the transplantation? What did you feel?*

Yes, I can... I still had the breathing tube in my throat. My mother was there and again it was an unforgettable and indescribable moment... I felt tired and happy but, strangely, also very hungry!

### *What kind of feeling is this - living with a donor heart?*

It is now my heart which beats inside of me. At the beginning my heart felt very big and powerful: I felt every single pump. My whole body contracted with each heartbeat.

### *What are you the most grateful for? What do you still consider difficult?*

There is nothing in particular which I am especially grateful for: it's the total package which makes me feel happy and grateful. I have a whole new life!

### *What are your plans for the future?*

I will continue living a normal life. After finishing Gymnasium (higher-level secondary school), I plan to do voluntary work at a cardiology department of a transplant hospital, eventually Freiburg. After that, I want to do a study and at some point start a family. Just have a normal life... 🇩🇪