

THE WORST & BEST YEAR

*Hungarian **Virág Varga**, an acute liver recipient, gives a moving personal account of her experience as a transplant recipient*

2016 WAS THE BEST and worst year of my life. The year when my world turned upside down. On the first of January, I had not even considered that my case of Crohn's disease and the side effects of the medication would be the least of my problems.

Quarantine I went to hospital with an iseemingly innocent fever a few weeks after New Year's Eve. At first, we thought it was only the flu, but I found out we were facing a more serious matter at the end of the week. After the results of my blood tests came in, I was sent to quarantine ant put in a separate room, which could only be accessed in mask and gloves.

I did not understand what was happening to me and the doctors seemed to be only guessing. I spent the night in cold wet sheets with high fever. I could not sleep, everything hurt. I guess I did not realise how big the issue was and in the meantime, I was transferred to the Transplant Clinic. A nice doctor was talking to me, he said there would be no problems, I would sleep for a little while and after that everything would be all right. My family was standing beside me anxiously and I went to sleep.

Awakening When I woke up, I could not even guess what had happened to me, where I was, how much time I had slept. I could not move or talk. The days converged. It took about a week for my thoughts to clear and while I began to comprehend more and more, I still did not understand the main issue.

I knew there must have been a big problem because everyone was very nice and careful with me and I had been instructed by my doctors to take everything slowly and patiently. I had some surreal memories of all the conversations and not everything seemed real but I accepted it and waited.

Reborn It was only days later, after the cannula inserted due to the tracheostomy was removed, while speaking to my mother that I started to understand

what had happened to me. The shock of it all made me cry. I found out that an entire month had passed. My family explained that once I had gone to sleep, my organs began to stop working and only the machines were keeping me alive.

My only hope to stay alive was an immediate liver transplantation. On a Tuesday morning, they received the good news: a liver is on its way! Allocated by Eurotransplant. But at that point I only had days left according to my family. 19th of January 2016. The day I was reborn. On that day, I received the life-saving liver for which I will always be grateful both to the donor and their family.

Joy As the days passed, I was getting stronger although it was a hard and tedious process and I was yet to face the long weeks of my recovery still ahead of me. For example, due to the long artificial sleep I was kept in, I had to learn to move my limbs again. The first joy came when I managed to lift my arm by myself. From that

moment, events began to speed up and a week later I was moved to the surgical department of the hospital.

At the end of March – although still in a wheelchair - I left the hospital and at home my recovery sped up. A few months later I was back to my usual schedule again, with small adjustments. Since then, I have graduated from law school, started to work and I solemnly believe that I am able to lead a normal life thanks to the transplant.

Why? For a long time, I was searching for the answer as to why it was all happening to me. What had I done wrong? Now, I don't try to answer those questions, instead I wonder why I stayed alive. I don't know why yet, but I know it has made me a better person and also in some respect, wiser. I have been given a new chance.

From now on I will value my life a lot more. I feel like I have to make a difference every day, in some way and help the people who have been given the same fate. I

have experienced what it would be like to almost lose my life. All that I'm afraid of is that I will not be able to fulfil the reason why I had to stay alive. I want everyone to know how much organ transplants are able to save life. They are the only reason I am here right now.

Life I want to live my life every day in a way so I can prove I am worthy of the new life I have been given with the new possibilities to lead a better life. I want to show that I am thankful to be alive. I am eternally grateful to the doctors and the nurses of the Transplant Clinic – especially Dr Zoltán Máthé and Dr Gellért Tözsér – who not just with their competence but also their personality are able to give the best quality in their field. They didn't just look after me exceptionally well, but also supported my family throughout. They really believed in my recovery.

My biggest gratitude goes to my donor and their family, to whom I give thanks for my life and that I am who I am now. 🙏

