

Jane Andrews of East Hartford was seven when her mother died of cancer. "I was almost eight when I got diabetes," she said. Her dad, now a single father to Jane and her three older brothers, was left with the job of managing his daughter's medical condition.

"I took insulin once a day and we had to sterilize the needles once a week because there were no disposable needles then. We also had to check my urine sugars. On Saturday mornings, my father would drive me to the hospital to get my blood drawn," Jane said.

Her life brightened at age 10 when her father remarried – a woman named Ellie who became "Mom" to Jane and her brothers. "She joined our family willingly, lovingly, because she adored my father. Two of my brothers were in their twenties, one was teenager and I had a life-altering disease. And she said YES! My story would not be complete without her."

As she grew up, Jane tried to convince herself that she felt okay. But by the time she reached her mid-30s, "I knew that I wasn't feeling quite right. My thought process was slowing down and I was achy. I was sleeping 10 or 12 hours a night but I would still wake up tired," she said. "I would take a shower and get dressed. When I sat down to put my socks and shoes on, I could fall back asleep for a couple more hours. I was exhausted all the time."

Meanwhile, Jane's dad had been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease. After his death, she went back to the doctor and "we discovered that I had kidney disease."

A few months later, she went on dialysis for three days a week, for four hours each time – an experience that lasted two years. Doctors put her on the organ transplant waiting list for a new kidney. In July 2004, she got the

call. "I sat in the hospital for a couple of hours. The doctor came in and said, 'We're really sorry. The kidneys were not healthy enough to be transplanted.'" With her pancreas now beginning to fail, she was referred to a specialist who put her on the waiting list for that organ. This time, luck was on her side. "Within a couple of weeks, I got the call that ultimately saved my life. I received a pancreas and kidney from a 19-year-old man."

Six months later, Jane received an anonymous letter from her organ donor's mother. "She said, 'It's a very good feeling to know that he brought joy into the world even after he left it. I hope that all is going well with your transplant and that the quality of your life is better, and that you live a long, healthy and happy life.' That was her only son, and her youngest child. What a great amount of strength she had."

Today, Jane's day-to-day activities "are just easier. I used to buy pre-made meals because I didn't have the energy to make meals from scratch. I would wake up some days having fallen out of bed because I couldn't feel my sugar levels changing. It was emotionally and physically draining." Now, she has the energy to plant and tend a garden, take her dog for long walks, and even remodel her house.

Jane, who puts a lot of effort into promoting the importance of organ and tissue donation, is very happy today. "Between retiring three months ago and this gift of life nine years ago, I'm on top of the world," she said.

"A complete stranger saved my life. He was very generous to have given me a second chance. I've said in the past that the only way I can truly thank my donor family is to take care of myself. How can I thank them enough for the gift of life? There's a smile on my face that doesn't go away."