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Kidney patients share in 'miracle'

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For Karyn Tokimura and Alejandra Solivan, Dec. 12, 2005, is the date of dates — forever locked in memory.

From the tragedy of a Big Island woman's death has come what both O'ahu women refer to as "a miracle" of hope and happiness.

Sarah Fay, 34, was seven months' pregnant when police say she was brutally beaten by her boyfriend on Nov. 25. Declared brain dead, Fay was kept on life support at The Queen's Medical Center until her baby son could be delivered 17 days later.

Josiah Darcy Fay was born on Dec. 12, premature but healthy. Fay was then taken off life support and Tokimura and Solivan became the recipients of her kidneys at St. Francis Medical Center — Hawai'i's only transplant facility.

"His birthday is something that we aren't going to forget," said Tokimura, 55. "It's the day we had our operation. He came out in the morning, and we went in in the afternoon. So, he was born the day we were kind of reborn."

Solivan, 56, added, "I feel like we were born on Dec. 12, the same day the baby was born. It's just been like a miracle."

Both women acknowledge an immense sense of gratitude to Fay for the gift of a healthier life. Tokimura and Solivan, strangers until shortly before Fay became their mutual donor, now share a close bond.

"I said to her, 'Oh, I think we're related now because we have part of the same woman,'" said Tokimura, who calls Solivan her Filipino sister. "She just laughed and said, 'Yeah, that's true.'"

Tokimura and Solivan, who had waited for a transplant two years and eight months and 18 months, respectively, are faring well and recovering at their homes. They drop by St. Francis facilities frequently, though, for various health checks. They met there yesterday morning for a routine blood test.

Before the transplant, dialysis treatments kept Solivan tethered to the medical center and kept her from visiting family in the Philippines for three years. Now, she'll be able to go back in about 12 months, after her recovery.



Denver residents Mike and Carie Fay have brought baby Josiah back to Colorado with them, with the intention of adopting him. Josiah "Baby Joe" Fay was delivered on Dec. 12, premature but healthy, from Mike Fay's sister, Sarah Fay.

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- For information about donating a kidney, visit Organ Donor Center of Hawaii at www.organdonorhawaii.com/.
 - To read more about Sarah Fay, visit www.sarahmariefay.com/.
- kidneys. Statewide, there are about 420 patients on the kidney transplant wait list. The average wait for a kidney transplant in Hawai'i depends on the blood type, and ranges from 1 1/2 years to nine years.

Source: St. Francis Medical Center

"I'm planning to go back in December to see my parents, brothers, sisters, cousins," she said. "All my family lives there. I am the only one who lives in Hawai'i."

Tokimura said her transplant experience also has strengthened a friendship with a former co-worker. She met Kathy Higa a decade ago while the two worked in admissions at Pali Momi Medical Center.

After last month's surgery, Higa, who lives in 'Ewa Beach with her family, became Tokimura's self-appointed caregiver, driving each day to Tokimura's Honolulu home. Higa also shuttles her to appointments, runs errands, cleans her home, fixes meals and does her grocery shopping.

"It's not easy for her, because she's been through a bout of polymyositis (a disease that inflames muscle fibers)," Tokimura said. "But she's always cheerful and never complains. She is a saint."

Sarah Fay's brother, Michael Fay, and his newlywed wife, Carie, intend to adopt Josiah "Baby Joe" Fay. On Tuesday, all three boarded a plane to Denver, where the couple lives.

The ashes of Sarah Fay are with her mother, Fran Fay, in Oregon. Later in the year, the family plans to travel to their hometown of Champaign, Ill., and then to the Big Island to scatter the ashes, according to a report in yesterday's Rocky Mountain News.

Sarah Fay's two children from a previous relationship, Adahy, 10 and Wahliya, 7, were not at home when she was allegedly assaulted.

Marwan Jackson, 25, Fay's boyfriend, has been charged with her murder, in addition to charges of sexual assault, kidnapping, robbery and violation of a restraining order.

Typically, donor identities are kept confidential and neither Tokimura nor Solivan would have known the name, or that each received the same donor's kidneys. But news coverage surrounding the Fays' case was so intense that the women deduced before their surgeries that she was the donor of the "healthy, 34-year-old kidney" they were to receive.

"It was kind of hard for them not to know — it was all over the media," said Catherine Bailey, St. Francis' transplant coordinator. "It's not the normal route to get the story out."

A third person received Fay's liver. The name of that individual has remained confidential, although Bailey said yesterday the recipient is doing well.

Tokimura and Solivan say they feel a bond with Josiah because of his mother's gift of life to them. They'd like to be a part of his life in some way because through him, they would be able to see a part of her.

"One day I would like to sit down and talk to Josiah and tell him what an honorable and gracious mother he had," Tokimura said. "He should be very proud of her."

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