



BEATING *the odds*

By: Dana Jordan Photography By: Chelsea Bren

**CHRISTY HAMILTON
WASN'T SUPPOSED TO
LIVE PAST HER 20TH
BIRTHDAY.**

At the age of 4, Christy was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis, a life-threatening genetic disease that affects the lungs and digestive systems of approximately 30,000 Americans. Thankfully, Christy, who celebrates her 40th birthday this September, is living proof that predictions don't always come true. Her mother, Gail Hubbard, is proof that mothers can give their children the gift of life in more ways than one.

Gail knew that something was amiss when, as a toddler, Christy was unable to gain weight. Though her pediatrician tested Christy for cystic fibrosis, an equipment malfunction resulted in a negative result, and Christy's health deteriorated over the next three years. Only after a hospitalization and another test was her diagnosis confirmed.

Though life would never be the same, Gail and Christy's dad, Jackie, made sure that Christy had as normal a childhood as possible. "My parents let me get involved in any sport or activity that I wanted ... they never held me back from doing something because of my illness," reflected Christy. As an adult, Christy remained determined not to let her disease define her life. After high school, she

earned a nursing degree from Radford University, married, and had her daughter, Casey—all considerable achievements considering the daily battle that cystic fibrosis patients face. They require daily doses of medications to fight infections and help the body digest food, as well as airway clearance efforts to help dislodge congestion from the lungs. Unfortunately, complications are common.

For Christy, the complications reached a crescendo at age 30 when her lung function began to deteriorate and her physicians determined she would need a transplant. A rare blood condition made the odds of finding a deceased donor slim, so Christy's only hope was a lobar transplant from two living relatives—fortunately, Christy's uncle was a match. The other donor proved much more difficult to find. When Christy rapidly spiraled downward and her survival for much longer seemed doubtful, doctors tested her mother, who had previously been ruled out because of her height. Amazingly, Gail's lobe was a fit, and the doctors proceeded with the transplant.

Christy's recovery and rehabilitation were grueling and, for many weeks, she required 24-hour care. Only after three months was she able to return home to her family. And with the transplant came new problems. The anti-rejection drugs, diabetes, and high blood pressure caused Christy's kidneys to fail, but once again, her mother gave her the gift of life.

"My mom has given me life three times: once at birth, once when she and my uncle gave me parts of their lungs, and then



again when she gave me her kidney. She has amazing strength and has always put her family first. That inspires me so much."

For Gail, it's her daughter who is the inspiration: "Christy is an amazing person. Although she struggles every day to do what we take for granted, she still maintains a great attitude and brings much joy to our family and friends."

**"THE NUMBER ONE THING IS
to never lose hope."**

Even with new lungs and a new kidney, Christy continues to face extreme challenges, including diabetes, chronic sinusitis, osteoporosis, fibromyalgia, irritable bowel syndrome, medication side effects, total deafness in her left ear and partial deafness in her right, frequent hospitalizations, and home IV infusions. "There are times when plans have to be cancelled, or times that I can't do the things with my daughter that I would like. We have all learned to cherish those days that I feel good and make the best of those days."

Though a case of the "Why me's?" would be understandable with these challenges, Christy has little use for self pity. "I have always known that my life would most likely be cut short, and that has inspired me to live everyday like it's my last," she says. Plus, she focuses on her family and their future: "Casey has given me the strength to always fight and never give up. Looking forward to her growing up and one day having children of her own has made me fight harder than I ever thought I could. And my husband, Jason—I'm so happy to be with a loving, thoughtful man who takes care of both of us."

Reflecting on all that she has overcome and all that she has learned, Christy says, "The number-one thing is to never lose hope. That is one thing that I have always kept, and it helps me to not give up. Live life to the fullest and find something positive out of each day. Nothing, not even an illness, can take the small, beautiful things away from you."

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