

Karen Has the Heart to Keep Going!

Written by Administrator
Thursday, 25 August 2016 13:23 -

LIFE is for living, and that's certainly a motto Clonakilty woman Karen McDermott believes, ever since she underwent a heart transplant in 2012.

Four years on, she has found herself representing her country at this summer's European Heart & Lung Transplant Championships, which took place in Vantaa, Finland.

Not only did Karen participate, but also the badminton loving 42-year-old mother-of-two picked up a silver medal in singles badminton, as well as a bronze medal in doubles badminton.

Not bad for someone who only decided in February that she would take part in the games.

It's actually four years this month since Karen – who has two children, Shane and Nicola – successfully underwent a heart transplant and she hasn't looked back since.

'Before the transplant I was always active in sports, especially playing badminton. When I was diagnosed with heart failure back in January 2012, I actually played two matches that week as badminton was my life,' Karen told The Southern Star.

'Of course it was a shock and hard to take it in at the start. When I was told I had heart failure, I was put on the waiting list in June and luckily I only had to wait two months until I got a match. I was blessed really, as there's a lot of people who are waiting for years for a donor.'

While rehabilitation following the transplant took its toll on Karen for a while, she wasn't long getting better and was determined to get fitter, too.

'I remember seeing Team Ireland going to the Games in the Netherlands at the time and I said I would love to take part and it inspired me,' she recalled.

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One motivation for her decision to take part in the games was finding out last year who her donor was.

‘I wrote a letter to the man’s mother to express my gratitude and she made contact with me through the hospital, and we’ve been in contact ever since. That gave me fierce determination to do it for him, and she said he would be so proud of me too,’ said Karen.

‘I told her I had won the medals, and as hard as it must be for her, I think I did bring her some bit of comfort because she feels that I’m going to make the most of my life and I intend to.’

Another event that sealed the deal for Karen was attending the annual Donor Mass in the Mater Hospital back in February.

‘Going to the mass this year was different for me as I knew now who I was praying for this time. Some of the people there were actually talking about the games and I decided then I wanted to take part this year, so they were delighted, as I’m actually considered young to be taking part,’ joked Karen.

Once the seed was sown, it was a matter of training and getting fit, as Karen only had a few months before the games.

‘Clonakilty Leisure Centre gave me a free membership until the run-up to the games and I was able to use the gym to train. I also signed for a ‘Couch to 5K’ run so all this helped and it gives your fierce motivation. Being honest, as it was my first transplant games, I was very naïve as I didn’t think it would be so competitive.’

Karen also had to fundraise to cover the cost of bringing her and her 14-year-old daughter Nicola to the games in Finland and they ended up raising over €3,000 through a variety of coffee mornings, pop-up shops and even a Go Fund Me page.

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'I can tell you there's no place like Clonakilty for generosity. We were dumbfounded by the donations from people from here, and even from London, where my partner Sean lives.'

As well as winning two medals at the European Heart & Lung Championships, the whole experience is one Karen will treasure for years.

'It was fantastic to represent Ireland and I'm so sad it's all over, as I was with an amazing bunch of people. They've all been to that dark black place, but now everyone is so appreciative and it's all positive.'

Karen's opponent in the badminton singles final was from Norway and she admits her opponent deserved the gold but Karen will come back fighting for the gold in two years' time.

'For anyone who doesn't know badminton, it's a fast sport and it's hard work and hopefully I'll be more prepared and fitter for the games in two years.'

'When I was going through my transplant I didn't think anyone actually survives a heart transplant. So if someone is in the same situation as I was, then hopefully they can see what is achievable. It would be great, too, to get people talking about becoming a donor because if it wasn't for my donor, I wouldn't be here now.'

Article courtesy of West Cork People:

<http://www.southernstar.ie/news/roundup/articles/2016/08/20/4124913-karen-has-the-heart-to-keep-on-winning/>

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