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consultation. “They said I was definitely a candidate for a lung transplant but it depended on the timing of finding a pair of lungs that was a match,” she says. Kristin was sent home.

“I grew so sick I ended up at St. Barnabas Medical Center again and the doctors there called my family in to say their goodbyes. I was 24 years old and don’t remember much about that terrible time. I went downhill very quickly and was at the end. Then, the miracle happened and I was transferred to Columbia to get my new set of lungs.”

Kristin says a lung transplant is not an experience for anyone without a very strong will to recover. “I was in the hospital for a month and a half then went to rehab for physical therapy and occupational therapy I had to learn to use my body all over again.”

Kristin says coming home after the six weeks was “both exciting and scary.”

Our Mission is...

To help ease the heavy financial burden placed on CF patients and their families and to provide needed information. No other cystic fibrosis organization in New Jersey offers the same type of focused financial assistance combined with education and counseling.

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“I was on over 20 different medications and an IV. There was just so much to learn. It was overwhelming.”

By then, it was summer and Kristin had the chance to spend some good times with her sisters and their children. “And after I healed enough I went back to college and got my degree from Keane University, a B.A. in psychology,” she says.

Today, Kristin says she has fought the good fight and wants to hold onto the positive things in her life. “The people I care about are all important and I am now thinking about what to do with the rest of my life,” she says. “I have been given the gift of continuing life and need to figure the path to take.”

Kristin says she deeply believes her life was “meant to be continued.”

“I was at the very end until my father fought so hard to get me on that transplant list. The way I look at it, both he and the universe conspired to keep me alive.”

How to Donate

On-Line

Making a donation on line is simple and convenient. Just visit our website—njsocf.org—and click on “Just Give.org.”

Memorial Gifts

A memorial gift to NJSOCF makes a lasting tribute to a departed loved one. A special occasion gift can be used to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and even be given in lieu of wedding favors.

Matching Gifts

Many medium-sized and large companies offer a matching gift program. Your employer will match your personal tax-deductible donation to NJSOCF with an equal amount of company funds.

United Way

Employees that participate in the United Way payroll deduction program at work can designate their contributions 100% to NJSOCF.



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Revisiting a Miracle on 168th Street: Kristin Frees Eleven Years Later

Fighting like a tiger is in the Frees family bloodline.

Kristin Frees’ Dad, Robert, did battle for her life with the world-famous pulmonary department at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, where she was hospitalized near death in 2006. He knew the only thing that could save his 24 year-old daughter was a double lung transplant. His persistence paid off and the famous hospital, located in New York City on 168th Street, found a pair of lungs that was a match for Kristin only one day after she was admitted.

Kristin had successful double lung transplant surgery on June 19, 2006, a day she now considers her second birthday because she says “I got a new life.”

But with her Dad’s part of the battle pretty much over, it was now up to Kristin. And she has succeeded, overcoming a host of obstacles to today leading a quiet but happy life surrounded by the love of family and good friends.

“More than a decade later I am still experiencing the after effects of the surgery,” she says. “There have been many bumps in the road but with the help and support of my family and friends, I have overcome them as best I could.”

Today, Kristin lives at home in Linden with her parents Robert and Carolyn, and her youngest sister Kelly-Anne, 32.

“I have three more siblings,” she says. “Kathleen, now 39; Ryan, 37; and Kara-Lynne; 34. “We are all very close and I spend a lot of my time caring for my seven nieces and nephews. We often have sleepovers, which I really enjoy. They are one of the great pleasures of my life.”



Kristin says she is also careful to fashion what she calls “me-time” for herself. “I spend time with my friends and am well enough to do things I enjoy like going for hikes in the woods. I enjoy hunting for fossils in a nearby stream. Life is quiet, but good.”

But getting to her current “good life” required a battle that spanned many years.

Kristin says that cystic fibrosis didn’t affect her that severely when she was a child, but by the time she got to middle school, the symptoms got worse and really bad by the time she was in high school.

After graduating from Linden High School she started college, but her battle with CF kept her from getting very far.

Right after Easter of 2006, St. Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston admitted and treated her off and on for several weeks.

“But I grew weaker and weaker until I got to the point where I could barely stand,” she said.

Knowing the transplant center at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in Manhattan was Kristin’s best hope for survival, her Dad got Kristin an appointment for a

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Special Events – Coming and Going

A Night in Honor of Wesley William Purves

Last December 14 friends and family of Wesley Purves gathered once again at Bardi's Bar & Grill in Pequannock to celebrate his life. His mom, Catherine Daly, organized the event. Bardi's served a special cocktail in Wesley's honor and the band PomOak entertained the crowd with contemporary rock. This annual event brings together those whose lives were touched by Wesley.



Second "POCKETBOOK BINGO" Draws Big Crowd



Two hundred fifty friends and supporters of NJSOCF filled the Pompton Lakes Elks Lodge to the brim this past April, playing Bingo to win beautiful luxury handbags including Coach, Michael Kors, Kate Spade, and other upscale brands.

Spirits and enthusiasm were high, food brought from home was abundant, and a great time was had by all.



"This was a really fun evening with 'the girls,' said NJSOCF Executive Director Debra Sikkema. "In addition to playing Bingo, we had a bountiful tricky tray, featuring many lovely gift baskets and a 50/50 raffle completed the evening. This is the second time we have held Pocketbook Bingo and it definitely won't be the last. We raised nearly \$14,000 for our cause, and we will be putting another one on our event schedule."

Coming in 2017

34th Annual Golf Tournament



Beefsteak at the Brownstone

Keeping the fun going from previous years, NJSOCF will hold its annual Beefsteak Dinner at the Brownstone in Paterson on October 19, 2017. We will provide details as they become available. Don't miss this one!!

Bowl for CF Awareness

The annual Bowl for CF Awareness fundraiser will be held on a Saturday in November at the New North Arlington Bowl, Schuyler Avenue, North Arlington. NJSOCF board member, George McDermott, will once again chair the event, raising funds and bringing awareness about cystic fibrosis to the community.

Mary Ann Gambino: Late in life diagnosis gives a second chance

In a day and age when most CF patients are diagnosed in infancy or early childhood, Mary Ann Gambino, a resident of Carteret, did not know she had the disorder until she was 47.

"People are always very surprised to hear this but, even though I was always sick as a child with various respiratory problems, no one ever pinpointed CF," she says. "I went into the nursing profession and while getting my R.N. degree, one of my instructors said she thought I had CF. But I just blew it off."

By this time Mary Ann was 25 and married to her husband, Roy. "We decided it was time for children and I got pregnant, but miscarried. My second pregnancy gave us our wonderful daughter, Valerie."

After Valerie was born, Mary Ann felt worse and worse. Nursing is a demanding profession, so she left her career and, in 1993, got a job as a teaching assistant.

"By 2004, I was really really sick," Mary Ann says. "I was coughing up blood and was admitted to Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City."

The diagnosis finally arrived.

"My doctor walked into my room and told me I might have cystic fibrosis. I was 47. The tests were done and came back positive. We could not believe it, but found out it was true after repeating all the tests over again at a New Jersey hospital. I started CF treatments, stopped working and went to Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center to start testing procedures for a double lung transplant."

"But because of timing and logistics it never worked out. Instead we switched to the University of Pennsylvania

Hospital, where I got on the transplant list in 2006 and got my new lungs on September 11 of 2008."

Rehab in Philadelphia lasted for three months, with the family renting an apartment to be close to the hospital. "Rehab went well and I was scheduled to go home December 12 but got the bad news I was going into rejection. They changed my medications and sent me home. I recovered. The bright spot in all of this was my daughter getting engaged. She got married in 2010 and had her son Lucas in 2012."



The birth of Lucas marked a positive turning point in Mary Ann's story. "He is the love of my life and today I feel well enough to do just about everything. I babysit him, take him to school and pick him up. I am strong enough to clean the house, work in the garden and

cook a good dinner every night. I will be on anti-rejection drugs for the rest of my life."

Now age 62, Mary Ann has some other health problems related to her drugs but is determined to keep an upbeat and positive attitude.

"It's now nine years since the transplant and I would describe my condition as stable," Mary Ann says. "I want to do everything I can for my daughter and Lucas and Roy, and I have taken the family to Disneyworld twice. So life is pretty good."

Mary Ann says she has made a vow not to ever complain. "God has given me the chance to live my life twice," she says. "The past nine years have been very fulfilling to me as a Mom and a Grandmom. None of this would have been possible without the lung transplant and, even though I got it late in life, it worked out very well."

Visit our website for more information on Special Events www.njsocf.org