



Community Page

Local man gets second chance at life

Mother donates teenaged son's heart following tragic accident

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

It's not often someone can say he has come face to face with an angel. But one Monday night just over a month ago, when David Moorhouse knocked on a Cambridge door and looked into the eyes of an English woman in her fifties, he knew that's just what he was doing.

There was no halo, cascade of curls, or gentle glow. Just a well-worn face all-too-familiar with tragedy, and kind eyes desperate for a measure of comfort.

But Mr. Moorhouse, a long-time Milton resident, wasn't about to be fooled by this angel's unlikely appearance. He knew.

It was to this woman's abundant generosity that Mr. Moorhouse owed his life.

It was to her son's untimely death that Mr. Moorhouse owed every beat of his heart.

Literally.

For just over a year, Mr. Moorhouse has been living with a new heart and a new lease on life. On April 27, 2003, the now 56-year-old received a heart transplant.

And almost a year to the day later, in April, he finally had the opportunity to say what no words could to Christine Guest, who made the ultimate sacrifice of organ donation after her 15-year-old son died in a tragic accident.

Mr. Moorhouse's story — one he shares as a tribute to Ms Guest — began six years ago when the accountant and father of four sons suffered a massive stroke.

Glancing at her husband across the kitchen table, Kathy Moorhouse described how the stroke made it impossible for Mr. Moorhouse to talk or even swallow for three months. His food was administered through a tube, and he was confined to a wheelchair.

Unbeknownst to the couple at the time, the stroke was a blessing in disguise, Ms Moorhouse said, because further tests alerted them to his enlarged heart.

About three years after the stroke, Mr. Moorhouse was sent to the hospital after gaining about 25 pounds of water in five days. Doctors knew he had an enlarged heart, but didn't realize how serious the situation had become.

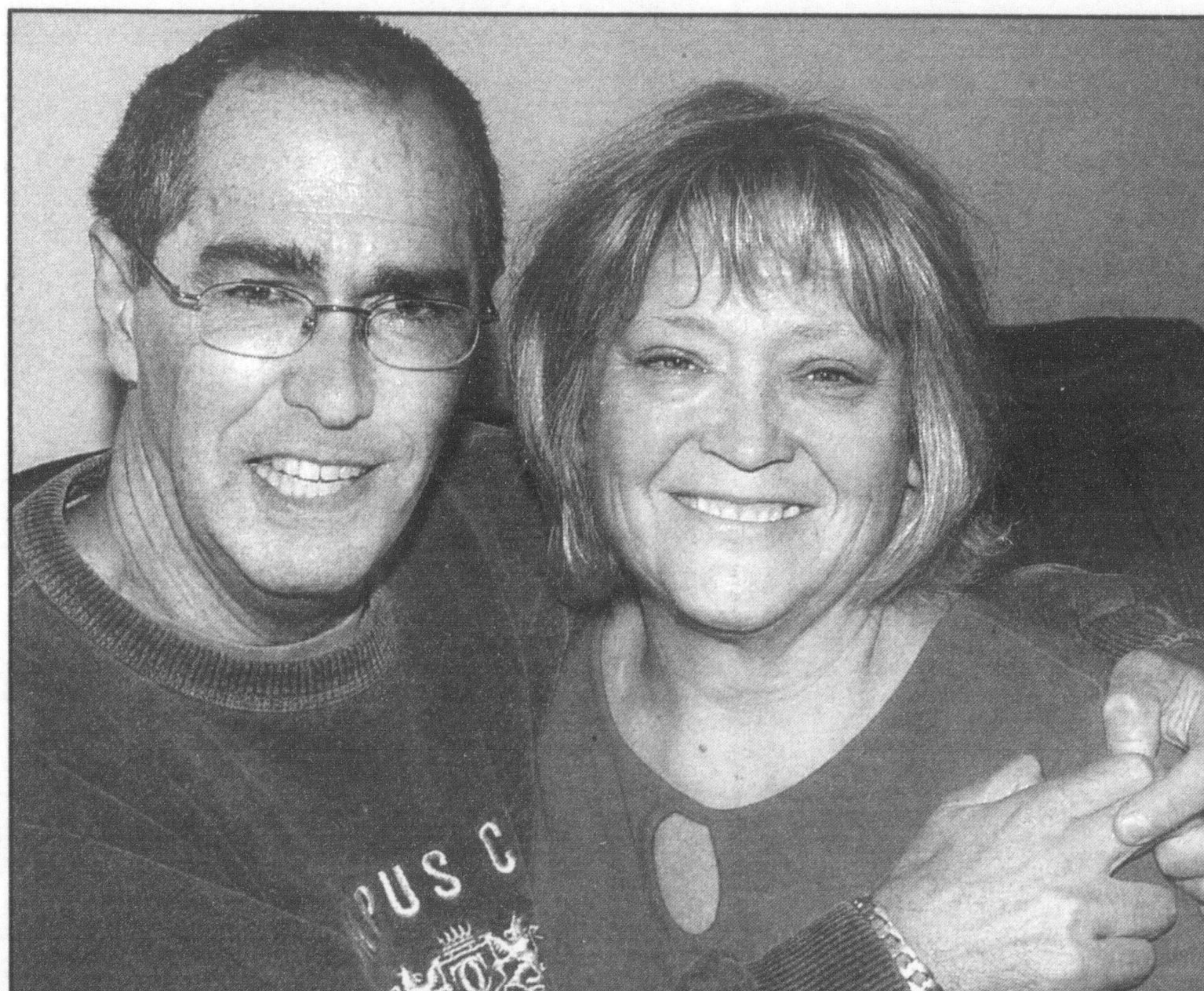


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

David and Kathy Moorhouse tried desperately to contact the woman who agreed to donate her son's heart. After a lot of digging, they were successful.

Almost immediately, Mr. Moorhouse was put on the list for a heart transplant. Without it, he would die.

"Almost 30 per cent of people die waiting," Ms Moorhouse said.

Two years and three months passed. He was admitted to Toronto General Hospital in mid-April last year — the day after Valentine's Day, his wife noted. There wasn't anything doctors could do — just try to keep him alive a little bit longer, she said.

"I almost died," Mr. Moorhouse said in his characteristically soft voice.

To make matters worse, Mr. Moorhouse's hospitalization came during the SARS outbreak, meaning there were no visits allowed between the couple who had been married for nearly a quarter-century.

Then came the news. A heart was waiting.

"I can't say that I was ecstatic, because I (knew) someone else was mourning," Ms Moorhouse said, explaining she knew the donor's death was probably unexpected because hearts for transplants don't normally come from patients with lengthy illnesses.

"I felt a sense of sadness and loss, but I knew Dave was getting a chance to live."

On April 27, Mr. Moorhouse got his new heart. The old one was four times larger than it should have been, he noted.

As Mr. Moorhouse regained his strength and his body began to come to life once more, the circumstances surrounding the death of the heart's former owner began to unravel — but not without more than a little digging by the Moorhouses, who desperately wanted to give their due appreciation to the person who had agreed to donate the organ.

It didn't happen easily. To protect both sides involved, names of transplant givers and receivers are kept anonymous.

One of the nurses had said the heart came from Hamilton, so Ms Moorhouse scoured the local newspaper, looking to see what might have happened. She read an article about a boy falling from a moving van, but thought little of it.

She carefully put away the paper and forgot about what she'd read, she said.

Then the Moorhouses received a letter, with no return address, from Ms Guest. In accordance with regulations, a mediator had blacked out her and her son's names before mailing it.

What hadn't been blacked out, Ms Moorhouse said, was a line about the writer's son falling to his death out of a moving van.

Ms Moorhouse said she remembered the newspaper article, which still lay in a filing cabinet in their home.

"When I read the letter, my heart broke for her," Ms Moorhouse said. "When she said her

son fell out of the van, I knew right away (it was his heart). I pulled out the paper, which was folded open to that article."

The Moorhouses went through obituaries and gathered more newspaper articles.

Like puzzle pieces falling together, the couple eventually found out that Robert Guest was a teenager in custody at a Cambridge correctional facility. On the way back from a Blue Jays game some of the youths were taken to, Robert and his friends decided to attempt an escape.

As the van drove along Hwy. 8 Robert opened the door and jumped. He died the next day from head injuries.

Ms Moorhouse e-mailed the funeral home and was put in touch — directly, without a third party ensuring anonymity — with the woman with whom the couple soon found themselves face to face.

"I had mixed emotions," said Ms Guest of the period just before the meeting. "All I could think was 'Robert's coming home.'"

When Ms Guest answered the door knock and saw Mr. Moorhouse for the first time, she said she felt overwhelmed.

"I had funny ideas, like 'I wonder if he'll know where his bedroom is.' I just kept staring and thinking 'What a miracle it is that my son's heart is now in you.'"

Ms Guest said she knew this meeting was meant to be.

"Part of Robert is in him (Mr. Moorhouse). Maybe it was his heart that was making him find me," she said.

The group soon discovered some startling similarities between Mr. Moorhouse and Robert. They were both born in St. Catharines and had both been adopted, Robert by Ms Guest, his grandmother.

The Moorhouses then saw a photo of Robert — an emotional moment, they said.

"I looked at it, and felt almost like I had fallen in love. I love this boy," Ms Moorhouse said.

"Maybe that's why they don't encourage meeting," she said, referring to the torrent of emotions that swept over her.

For Ms Guest, it was the fulfillment of a desire she'd had for more than a year.

"I wanted to feel my son's heart beat one more time."

As he continues to recover from his stroke, Mr. Moorhouse said he's now back at work part time. Although he enjoys working, he said he'll never again be the workaholic he was before the transplant. His family and the heart he's safeguarding — he doesn't view it as his own — are his main concerns.

"After the stroke, I shifted my priorities to make sure my family comes first."

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Programming Schedule — Tuesday, June 8 - Monday, June 14, 2004

Tuesday, June 8		Wednesday, June 9		Thursday, June 10		Friday, June 11		Saturday, June 12		Sunday, June 13		Monday, June 14	
5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm	Plugged In Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In Late Week Edition	4:00pm	TVCogeco Sports: Sr. Men's Baseball Plugged In — Late Week Edition	10:30am	TVCogeco Sports: Sr. Men's Baseball Plugged In Late Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In Late Week Edition
5:30pm	Seniors Showcase	5:30pm	PeopleSpeak in Halton	5:30pm	Election Candidate Statements	8:00pm	Fergus's Wellington-Halton Hills Candidates Meeting - June 9	7:30pm		5:30pm	Be Inspired	5:30pm	Election Candidate Statements
6:30pm	Optimist TV Bingo (Live)	6:30pm	Be Inspired	6:30pm	Money Week					6:30pm	Seniors Showcase	6:30pm	Faces - Best of Faces
8:00pm	Halton Hills Council - May 31	7:00pm	Swap Talk (Live)	7:00pm	Election Candidate Statements					7:00pm	Election Candidate Statements		
		8:00pm	Auto Experts (Live)	8:00pm	Main Street					8:00pm	Money Week		
		9:00pm	Halton Region Council - June 2	8:00pm	Milton Special Council Meeting of June 7					8:30pm	Faces - Best of Faces		
				9:30pm						8:00pm	Fergus's Wellington-Halton Hills Candidates Meeting - June 9		

Election Candidate Statements - Thursday, 5:30 & 7:00pm