Grace Agwaru: Being The First

As she told her story, Grace shared these thoughts :

> *"My surgery became real through a combination of several categories of people. The blood donors are one special group that I owe so much gratitude. They will never know the lives that they save or guess that their blood will be used for a critical case such as a patient in urgent need of heart surgery. Yet they just donate their blood in case someone may need it. Imagine how many liters of blood these surgeries could have consumed. Without the blood donors, no medicine or funding could bridge this gap. I have been a blood donor before but never had I taken deep thought to how critical my donation may have been.*
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> *My 'accidental' contact with The Rotary Global Network for Blood Donation during our Gift of Life reception is something I will always be thankful for because now I realize that every time we save a child through surgery, it was critical that some people needed to donate blood and certainly they did that for me. Let's keep informing the world of this increasing need to donate blood, and the role it has played in the past in saving lives."*

By the time Grace Agwau was four years old, the doctors had already informed her parents that she would not live to more than 16 years of age. She needed corrective open heart surgery, and her condition continued to worsen daily. With no facilities in Uganda to perform the surgery she needed, it appeared as though she would die.

Through contacts made by doctors and the Rotary Club of Kampala, Grace and her family were soon told there was hope. The Rotary Club of Manhasset and St. Francis Hospital, both on Long Island, New York, had offered to help Grace.

Grace's parents were frightened as they considered the long road ahead, but they knew this was her only chance.

Grace and her father traveled to the United States for the operation nearly 35 years ago. (To this day, Mr. Agwaru is still amazed the hospitality he received from everyone he met as he traveled to the United States.) Finally, on the 15th of November, 1975, Grace received her "Gift of Life," at the age of 5.

Since that day, her whole life has changed. Immediately, after surgery, Grace observed that she "got all my energy back".

Grace enthusiastically maintains that this experience has made her feel special.
"I have been given a second chance at life. I have lived so far, for 38 years -- 22 more than the maximum life that the doctors had originally thought," she noted.

Grace also observed that her family helped her to realize the special gift that she is. "God has a special mission for me. To me, Gift of Life is my centerpiece. It has not only given me a new

physical heart, but a spiritual one, too. Having a new life means I should justify my reason for living. That is my challenge."

Grace believes her second chance at life motivates her in important making life choices. Currently, she is completing her master's degree in agricultural extension and management. Through her career with the Pearl of Africa Foundation, she has worked with disadvantaged communities both at her work place and in her home village, encouraging them to appreciate themselves as well as being self-sufficient.

This year, she and her father formed a Rotary Club in her hometown of Soroti. Working with the Gift of Life, she is hoping to help children with heart defects get the same second chance at life that she received.

Grace notes, "I will forever be thankful to Rotary, my family, the many blood donors and the entire Gift of Life family."

http://www.giftoflifeinternational.org/pages/children_grace.php