One out of every three people will need a blood transfusion in his or her lifetime, which means there's a good chance someone you know and love will need to depend on the generosity of blood donors for survival. Blood donation doesn't just affect *other* people; its impact hits close to home.

Just ask the Wade family. Kay and Jim Wade's teenage daughter Kaitlyn has encountered two life-threatening events in her short lifetime. During both events, blood made the difference. Kay and Jim Wade know how vital donor blood is, and they know that one major life crisis does not exempt a person from another.

Dealing with Cancer

In December 1997, Kay took her three-year-old daughter Kaitlyn to the pediatrician. Something was not right. Her normally active, outgoing daughter had become lethargic and complained frequently of pains. Tests confirmed one of a parent's worst fears; Kaitlyn had leukemia.

She was admitted to Children's Medical Center Dallas and immediately given blood and platelets. "*It was so amazing to see her energy return after those transfusions*," Kay recalls. But the relief of new blood was short-lived. This was the first of many times that Kaitlyn was given new energy through a blood transfusion. Chemotherapy began the very next day. The Wades had a long journey in front of them. Weekly clinic visits became routine, and Kaitlyn and her parents became experts at managing the side effects of chemotherapy. Often after chemo, Kaitlyn needed a blood transfusion to regain her strength. The Wades were determined to continue life. They welcomed two new babies to the family during the two and a half years of treatment, which ended in June 2000.

"I always assumed every family had to go through something big – so I just figured that we were done with our 'one big something'," Kay says. She quickly adds, "*That's not exactly how life works*."

Another Blow.

Seven years later, another blow. The night of May 18, 2007 then 12-year-old Kaitlyn and a friend were passengers in a car, driven by the father of her friend. As they drove through an intersection, a repeat drunk driver plowed through a red light and smashed into their car.

It was 10:45 pm when the Wades received the call that there had been an accident. Kaitlyn's friend and her father were taken by ambulance to the hospital, while Kaitlyn, with her dad at her side, was CareFlighted to Cook Children's Medical Center.

When Kay first saw her daughter in the emergency room, she was unconscious but her face showed no signs of trauma. Then she caught sight of the bright pink toenail polish on her daughter's left foot, which was pointing up – and her right foot, which was twisted and pointing down – that's when she began to realize how serious her injuries were.

Kaitlyn's friend had suffered a broken clavicle and cuts to her face. She would heal. However, Kaitlyn's prognosis was grim. Doctors explained that she had suffered a severe brain injury, and that a bolt and drain had been inserted into her brain to relieve pressure. She had fractured

vertebrae in her neck, broken ribs and sternum, a punctured lung, lacerated liver, spleen and kidneys, a broken pelvis and a broken hip and leg. Once again, Kaitlyn was in a fight for her life.

"*She was bleeding out faster than they could get the blood into her*," Kay recalls. "*I think she had 12 transfusions that first 24 hours. The doctors told me they were doubtful she would survive the night – let alone wake up and ever walk again. But I told them they didn't know my daughter and that she would be walking out of the hospital*."

Every day was a battle, and progress was slow. But every little improvement gave hope. Slowly Kaitlyn came out of her "sleep" and by July, she was able to whisper the words "yes" and "no" -- and much to Kay's delight -- "mom."

Road to Recovery.
On November 1, 2007, just a little over five months from the day of the accident, Kaitlyn came home to a cheering block party that included hundreds of friends, a police escort and TV news reporters from every network. The community celebrated what many believed to be a miraculous recovery, but Kay and Jim knew that Kaitlyn's work was just beginning.

Brain injuries are tricky. Physically and cognitively, Kaitlyn is now a recovered teenage girl. There are struggles that are not so evident to outsiders. Because the right side of Kaitlyn's brain was affected, she has virtually no short term memory and is working hard to gain control of her impulses, which is common with frontal lobe damage.

Kaitlyn is also faced with the difficult task of reconnecting to lost emotions. "*This is a challenge in itself, but throw in all the pressures that come with being teenager and the challenge becomes even bigger,*" explains Kay. "*It's difficult, but it's also very important that she goes through this*."

Today Kaitlyn has weekly speech therapy and attends new school that is accommodating her fight to heal completely. "*She will not settle for anything less than an A,*" says her mom. "*She's very determined – and she's always been very competitive and feisty. Truth be told, I don't think I could have done what she's done*."

Receiving and Giving.
Twice Kaitlyn Wade has fought for her life. Twice she has survived. And although it has turned the entire Wade household upside down, the family focuses on gifts received and life lessons learned. "*We've been given so much and our family has been so blessed*," says Kay.

With this perspective the family pours time and energy into giving back to the community that sustained them. Both Kay and Jim have raised money and run marathons with the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team in Training. Both Kay and Kaitlyn have been featured speakers, sharing their story in order to inspire others. And as she has done since high school, Kay gives blood regularly. She was only 17 when she first gave for her father who was having open heart surgery. "*Okay, I did lie about my age, but I really wanted to help my dad*," she confesses. She's been a blood donor ever since, taking breaks only during her pregnancies and Kaitlyn's chemotherapy. "*So many others gave blood so my daughter could survive*," she says. "*I know when I give I'm making it possible for others to survive whatever life throws at them*."