

SPOKANE

Life is full of surprises for transplant recipient

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Staff writer

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Cindy Scinto is still going strong, and that's quite an accomplishment.

The Spokane woman received a heart transplant in 2005 after she had had so many near-fatal heart attacks she said her doctors stopped counting. Her own heart was patched up and failing rapidly. Then Danielle Martinez died, and her 28-year-old heart was transplanted into Scinto's 44-year-old chest. From then on, things began to look a lot better for Scinto.

On Sunday, she'll be reading from her new book, "A Heart Like Mine" at Mt. Spokane Church, where she'll also talk about the importance of being an organ donor and how harboring someone else's heart changes you.

"You can't get up in the morning and not think of the person whose heart is beating in your chest," said Scinto. In March, she met Martinez's mom, Charlotte Cano, for the first time. "We are like family today," said Scinto, adding that they talk every week. Cano, who lives on the west side of the state, will attend the reading Sunday.

It hasn't been all smooth sailing since Scinto got Martinez's heart. She recently had to quit her job at a publishing company after a combination of too much work stress, medication and eating too many peaches almost killed her.

"Yes, too many peaches. I figured I was having a heart attack," said Scinto, who was driving home when it happened. It turned out she was experiencing temporary kidney failure.

"Something about the potassium in the peaches and one of my medicines acted up," Scinto said, in her matter-of-fact way. "I was stuck in traffic, praying I'd get out of it in time, and hey, here I am, I survived again."

Her faith has clearly helped her through one medical crisis after another.

Pastor Bob Smith of Mt. Spokane Church heard of Scinto before he met her.

"She had given a copy of her book to a church member, and I borrowed it. It just blew me away," Smith said. "As a pastor, I felt the book, beyond Cindy's incredible story of survival, also shares a great depth of spiritual insight." Smith added that a nurse from the church came up with the idea to invite local health clinics to perform free screenings at the event.

Scinto's many friends have helped her stay positive as well – including Robin Walter, who made a quilt in Scinto's honor.

"They didn't tell me what was going on," said Scinto, about how a group of friends invited her to visit the A Heart Like Mine quilt shop in Spokane Valley. "It was a surprise party and the quilt was there – it was just so beautiful."

Walter recently made an addition to the quilt.



Quilters, from left, Pat Lafky, Laurie Kunkel and Robin Walter cooperated to produce a quilt about the experience of heart transplant patient Cindy Scinto, right, which they will display Sept. 21 at a health fair at Mt. Spokane Church. (JESSE TINSLEY The Spokesman-Review)

Audio
Heart transplant patient Cindy Scinto talks about what it's like to have someone's heart inside your body

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"Cindy asked me to add a piece to the quilt to remember Charlotte (Cano)," Walter said. The quilt will be on display at Mt Spokane Church on Sunday.

Scinto continues to volunteer for the American Heart Association, and she's an avid promoter of organ donation.

"Some people don't register as organ donors, it's like they think 'what's one more person?'" Scinto said. "There are so many people waiting for organs. And I am grateful that I got a heart and got to see my son grow up."

Scinto speaks

Cindy Scinto is speaking at Mt. Spokane Church, 6311 Mt. Spokane Park Drive, on Sunday at the 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. services. Health screenings are available all morning as well. Call: (509) 325-0494.

To learn more about Scinto and her battle with heart disease, visit www.aheartlike mine.com.