

Transplant recipient marks 25 years and going strong

Strickland says faith sustained her

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

The doctor didn't expect Sherry Vernam to survive. It was April 2, 1948, and Sherry's gray hue was concerning, but there was no apparent cause.

Sherry's parents took her home to Marcola, a small town outside of Eugene. Over the next few weeks, the infant made a number of trips north to Doernbecher Children's Hospital in Portland.

Doctors were stumped. Sherry wasn't expected to live out her first year.

Defying odds, she made it to a year but the prognosis wasn't good. Doctors studied her cyanosis — a bluish tinge from lack of circulation. She was susceptible to ear infections, colds and pneumonia.

She was tough. She survived into grade school but spent many days at home when infections threatened.

At 10, her parents took her to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis for an angiogram, then unavailable in Oregon. Finally a diagnosis.

Sherry had a hole in her ventricular wall.

Surgery in June 1960 brought another surprise. Doctors discovered her heart had no ventricular wall. She had a heart with three chambers instead of four and the pulmonary and aorta arteries were transposed. A Teflon band was placed around her pulmonary artery as a stopgap.

The 12-year-old returned to school and lived life as normally as she could. Sherry felt better after the surgery. Most



Photos Steve Tool/Chieftain

Wallowa County resident Sherry Strickland displays the sweatshirt she received after surviving heart transplant surgery at Oregon Health Sciences University. The 25th survivor of the procedure, Strickland recently passed the 25-year mark of the successful surgery.

of her blue tinge disappeared and she had more energy. Finally her life had a sense of normalcy for her.

"I was just who I was," she said. "It was part of my life. Until I was 10, I wasn't really aware of what was going on with me."

She added that gender roles were more defined back then and girls staying home and coloring or playing with dolls wasn't considered out of the ordinary. Although she still did farm chores indoors — fixing lunches and cleaning house.

After high school graduation, she attended college for a year before marrying her husband, Zane Strickland. Before they married, she told him about her heart issues.

"She was pretty special," he said with a laugh.

The couple enjoyed life on a farm near Eugene

"I rode horses and chased

cows," she said. "I just did life."

Five years into the marriage, Sherry had a miscarriage and with doctors worried about the stress of pregnancy on her heart, the couple adopted two children.

She threw herself into motherhood with zest, volunteering and working at the school her children attended as often as possible, with annual visits to a cardiologist.

After their children graduated the couple moved into the home of Strickland's grandparents in the Wallowa Valley in 1991. She worked full-time as a teacher's aide.

In 1993, the Stricklands fostered a child for three months and her heart problems reappeared. Tests showed that her heart and valve had worn out. The couple tried living in Eugene again, thinking the lower elevation might make a difference.



Steve Tool/Chieftain

The 25/50 club. Wallowa County residents Sherry and Zane Strickland recently passed two milestones in their lives together. Sherry Strickland just passed her 25th year as a heart transplant survivor. The couple also recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

Only a transplant could save Sherry. Although heart transplants were still rare and dangerous, she didn't care.

"I'd spent my whole life with doctors," Strickland said. "They were not scary to me, and I'd already had one open heart surgery. I did well with that."

"It was for me," Zane interjected. "I still ain't sure if I was scared for her or me."

While waiting, Sherry had to reside within an hour of OHSU. On April 1, 1994, she was placed on a waiting list for a donor heart and surprisingly received a call the following day. She was prepped for the surgery, and even had her chest opened in preparation for the new heart.

She awakened from anesthesia and noted she didn't feel any different. Her doctor said that complications along the way had caused the donor heart to become unusable.

“I wasn't worried when I had transplant surgery — I trusted this was God's plan.”

— Sherry Strickland

Sherry wasn't upset because the procedure helped the surgeon find where her old Teflon band was located and allowed him to make allowances for artery length in the next heart.

Her Christian faith helped sustain her.

"God works in wondrous ways," she said. "He's always been in charge of my life whether I knew it or not."

She went through successful transplant surgery three months later after an early-morning summons to OHSU. She spent a month in the hospital and almost immediately felt the difference.

"I had felt relatively healthy before, but after I got out of the hospital, I felt, 'Woo, I know what healthy is now!'"

She returned to work Oct. 31 of that year.

The new heart didn't come with physical limitations, but Sherry follows a very strict diet regimen and takes medication, including anti-rejection drugs, at specific times of the day.

"I have to have something that reminds me to take them," she said. "If I don't, I get busy and I forget."

She has also found that transplanted hearts get stiff

with age, which has resulted in congestive heart failure.

She has an interest in care for dementia and Alzheimer patients, and she offers regular caregivers a respite from their duties.

She has had a chance to thank everyone involved with her ordeal, but she's never met the family of the donor of the heart that saved her life.

"I've never been able to contact them," she said. "I sent letters right away to the Donate Life people, and they forward them, but I've never heard. Every once in a while, I wrote a note to let them know how appreciative I am of their gift."

She has visited several county churches, thanking people for praying for her. At the Wallowa Christian Church, she told attendees that the hardest part was the thought that someone had died so she could live. Pastor Mel Byer interjected, "Twice!"

"How true, first Jesus and now this," she said.

She also spoke at the Joseph Charter School and at both the Lions and Rotary Club. She is open to speaking at other venues.

"I do this to make donor awareness more prevalent," she said. "I want people to think about it and consider it."

Ultimately, Sherry credits God for her second chance at life.

"Faith in God and Jesus Christ has always been a part of me," she said. "I could think 'I would have done this (the heart troubles) differently,' but that isn't what was orchestrated for me. Maybe that's why I wasn't worried when I had transplant surgery — I trusted this was God's plan."

Chief Joseph Days Grand Parade results

Here are the award winners from the Chief Joseph Days 2018 Grand Parade July 28.

Individual: Joseph Fire Department Luke Zacharias Brad Peterson – Party Barge	Lee Greg's Glass Wallowa Lake Lodge	Parade theme: Community Bank	Royalty: Columbia County Fair Happy Canyon of Pendleton Lewiston Roundup
Commercial: LuLaRoe – Ashley	Organizations: Creating Memories WC Fire Prevention Happy Canyon	Riding Group: Wallowa County Search and Rescue Pendleton Roundup Board of Directors	Float: Century Farm representatives

Wallowa County Fair Results

Dog Show
Saturday, Aug 4

SHOWMANSHIP:
1st Year Junior Champion: **Owyhee Harguess**
Junior Champion: **Tegan Evans**
Intermediate Champion: **McKenzie Keffer**
Intermediate Reserve Champion: **Bailey Vernam**
Senior Champion: **Jacob Falk**
Senior Reserve Champion: **Katelynn Diggins**
TRICK DOG:
1st Year Junior Champion: **Tylee Evans**
1st Year Junior Reserve Champion: **Owyhee Harguess**
Junior Champion: **Tegan Evans**
Intermediate Champion: **Devin**

Schreiber
Intermediate Reserve Champion: **Dakota Delyria**
Senior Champion: **Jacob Falk**
COSTUME DOG:
1st Year Jr Champion: **Tylee Evans**
1st Year Jr Reserve Champion: **Owyhee Harguess**
Junior Champion: **Tegan Evans**
Intermediate Champion: **Dakota Delyria**
Intermediate Reserve Champion: **McKenzie Keffer**
Senior Champion: **Katelynn Diggins**
Senior Reserve Champion: **Jacob Falk**
AGILITY:
1st Yr Junior Open Champion: **Owyhee Harguess**
1st Yr Junior Mini Champion:

Mackynzie Melville
1st Yr Junior Mini Reserve Champion: **Tylee Evans**
Junior Champion: **Tegan Evans**
Intermediate Mini Champion: **Dakota Delyria**
Intermediate Mini Reserve Champion: **Devin Schreiber**
Intermediate Open Champion: **McKenzie Keffer**
Intermediate Open Reserve Champion: **Bailey Vernam**
Senior Mini Champion: **Katelynn Diggins**
Senior Open Champion: **Jacob Falk**
OBEDIENCE:
Intermediate Pre-Novice Champion: **Bailey Vernam**
Intermediate Pre-Novice Reserve Champion: **McKenzie Keffer**

IN BRIEF

Grange plans to host neighbors

The Hurricane Creek Grange is inviting everyone in Wallowa County to stop by noon to 2 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 12 to enjoy hamburgers, chips and watermelon. "We love living in a county that has so many wonderful volunteers for every need in the community and would like to invite long- time residents and newcomers to set and visit together," said Grange

spokesman Barbara McCormack. "Our many projects could not get off the planning stage without the involvement of all the good-hearted neighbors we have. The Grange hall is at 82930 Airport Road, Joseph.

'Brown Bag' will feature Adamas

Stephen Adamas is an amateur musician, retired small-business owner and law teacher for a special "music edition" of the Joseph Brown Bag Luncheon program noon Tuesday,

Aug. 14 Adamas is on the board of Wallowa Valley Music Alliance and he installed and rebuilt Wallowa County's only pipe organ.

He is active in the American Guild of Organists. He studies organ in Portland and at the Princeton Early Keyboard Center in New Jersey, where he attends yearly music retreats.

He'll be talking about his experience playing and rebuilding the "king of instruments" and the history of the pipe organ in music. Admission is free; coffee provided. Donations accepted.

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