



## ***Carlos' Story***

My name is Carlos, and I received a heart transplant on May 13th. I grew up in a single-parent household after my father passed away when I was very young. My older brother and I were raised by our mother, who instilled in us resilience and determination.

From a young age, I was athletic and driven, excelling in both football and baseball. Baseball quickly became my passion, and I had the opportunity to pursue it at a high level, with the potential to play professionally before an injury cut that dream short. Despite that setback, I carried forward the lessons of discipline, teamwork, and perseverance that sports taught me.

I never had any health issues until 2020, when my journey with heart disease began. I was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and had a pacemaker implanted. I followed up regularly with my cardiologist, and though I believed I was doing well—having turned my life around and gotten into the best shape of my life—I had no idea my heart was actually getting worse.

On January 11th, I woke up not feeling great and assumed I was dehydrated. When I went to get out of bed, I collapsed, falling on my face. What I didn't realize at the time was that my heart was giving out. Thankfully, my girlfriend was with me. She helped me into a chair, but when I tried to stand again, I couldn't. I turned gray, passed out, and she immediately called 911.

I was rushed to the hospital by ambulance, but on the way, I went into cardiac arrest. My heart stopped for 50 minutes, and I coded twice before being brought back. Doctors placed a balloon pump in me, and I was transported to CPMC in San Francisco, where my journey toward transplant truly began.

I was then put on an Impella device, which essentially acted as life support by keeping my heart beating. Without it, I would not have survived. I remained in the hospital for 4 ½ months. Because of my size and antibodies, my wait time for a donor heart was even longer, and I couldn't leave the hospital during that time. Not being able to work or live my normal life was one of the hardest experiences I've ever faced, but I stayed positive and never gave up.

When I finally received the call that they had found a heart for me, it was the best day of my life. I went into surgery strong-minded, full of faith, and I knew I was going to be okay. After the surgery came all of the after-care—learning about medications, recovery steps, and



training for both me and my family. As I got closer to being released from the hospital, Annie, my social worker, introduced me to a few programs that could help, including housing assistance. Because I had to attend appointments two to three times a week, plus labs in between, we were fortunate to be accepted into an apartment just a mile from the hospital for transplant patients. This was a relief, since I live about 45 minutes away, and the traffic back and forth would have been overwhelming during such a critical time in recovery.

This is where Denise from *Heartfelt Help* stepped in. Because I had been unable to work for months due to being hospitalized, her program helped cover the rent for the apartment. This support was truly a blessing during such a difficult time, allowing me to focus fully on healing. It also gave me peace of mind knowing that I was so close to my doctors that if something had gone wrong, help was immediately available.

The transition into getting my life back was made so much easier by that first month in the apartment. I will always be grateful to Denise and the Heartfelt Help Foundation. They played a part in saving my life and helping me get back on my feet.

Today, I am profoundly grateful for the gift of my transplant and the second chance I've been given. I look forward to living life with renewed purpose, carrying gratitude in my heart for every day, and honoring the journey that brought me here.