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NEWS & EVENTS

Dr. Lisa Britt Competes in Transplant Games

Lisa Britt was a second-year veterinary student preparing for a final exam the weekend her heart failed. She had been experiencing fatigue for months, but had written it off as stress from school and deaths in her family, or maybe a virus. The cause turned out to be idiopathic cardiomyopathy, an enlarged heart due to failure of the heart's muscle.

After months in the hospital, she received a life-saving heart transplant in September 1991.

Today, Britt, DVM, MS, is an assistant teaching professor of radiology at the MU College of Veterinary Medicine. Britt is married to John Middleton, DVM, PhD, a professor of food animal medicine and surgery at the college, and they have two children, Benjamin and Jennifer Middleton.

In addition to her work at MU, she serves as an ambassador for [Midwest Transplant Network](#), which is the organ procurement agency for Kansas and western Missouri, to increase awareness about the need for organ and tissue donors. In this role she works to educate the public about the benefits of organ donation to both recipients and donors, answer questions and dispel myths about organ donation, and lobby the legislature.



Lisa Britt, DVM, MS, and her children, Benjamin and Jennifer Middleton, pose with Blaze in Houston. Blaze, a phoenix, is the mascot of the Transplant Games of America.

In 1996, while doing her residency training at Washington State University, Britt heard about the Transplant Games of America and decided to enter. Held every two years, the games are a multi-sport festival event aimed at spreading awareness about organ and tissue donation.

"After receiving my heart and realizing the extent of the limited energy I had been dealing with, I was eager to take on new challenges," she said.

That year she competed in the games in Salt Lake City, participating in the 5K walk, 25-meter freestyle swim and 1,500-meter racewalk, as well as running a leg of the 100-meter relay for a sick teammate.

"In 1996 the TGA meant so much to me because I finally felt completely normal and absolutely unremarkable for the first time in five years," Britt said. "Even when you are as eternally grateful as I was and am, a 24- to 29-year-old craves being looked at as just like everyone else — not the 'miracle friend.' At the '96 games I did not know to expect that, wasn't looking for that, but reveled in that feeling of being average again."

After facing acute abdominal pain that resulted in emergency surgery in October, Britt decided it was time to return to the games this year.

"It did serve as a further reminder that even when you are feeling great and in good overall health there are no guarantees for tomorrow," she said. "Therefore, I realized there would never be a good time to take off and go to the Transplant Games, so I decided that this was the year I did not let other things get in the way and to commit the money and time to return to the games."

In this year's competition, held in Houston, she walked in the 5K road race, an event open to the public, along with her husband and children. She also competed in the 1,500-meter race walk, in which she placed fifth in her age group. Unfortunately, she suffered a severe muscle



Britt's team, Team MO-KAN from Kansas and western Missouri, placed fifth in the Team Cup Award out of more than 40 teams.



Britt and the family of her heart donor, Jennifer Renee Davis, have stayed in touch in the 23 years since Britt's transplant. "I would do anything in the world for those people," Britt said.

strain at the start of the 100-meter sprint, her best event. Britt didn't place but finished the race, not realizing until later how significant her injury was.

Her team, Team MO-KAN from Kansas and western Missouri, placed fifth in the Team Cup Award out of more than 40 teams.

The games had more than 6,500 people in attendance.

While competing in the games in 1996, Britt felt her first real hope for longevity after meeting a competitor who had received a kidney transplant 25 years earlier, she said.

"This year I had another unique experience, which was to be able to give that example of a long future to several other people, including a newly transplanted young lady who looked up at her husband with hope when I pointed out my two healthy children busy playing that I had after receiving my transplant," she said. "This year I was both excited knowing that at the next games I will get to join the 'Quarter Century Club' and somber realizing that there are not that many heart transplant recipients attending the games that are out past 23 years."

She hopes to compete again in 2016 in Cleveland.

Britt has maintained contact with the family of her donor and visits them periodically.

"I would do anything in the world for those people," she said. "If it weren't for my heart donor, Jennifer Renee Davis, and the love of her mother and father, Rosita and Ronnie Davis, I certainly would not have been there and my children would not even exist. I wore a button with my donor's picture on it and was asked often if I was a donor mom. I replied that I was merely a recipient, and a very grateful mother."

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The Need for Organ and Tissue Donors

Right now in Kansas and Missouri, 2,600 people need lifesaving organ transplants. Thousands more await tissue or corneal donations that can dramatically improve their lives. Across the nation, 18 people die every day awaiting a transplant they so desperately need. The Midwest Transplant Network is determined to meet those needs by encouraging more people to sign up as donors.

Everyone is an ideal donor – it doesn't take a perfect body to become someone's perfect match for organ and tissue donation. Factors like age, weight and even health conditions do not rule out anyone's potential to save or improve lives, so every "yes" carries the hope of a second chance.

To join the effort to increase donor registration in Missouri and Kansas, sign up online at YesTheyWantMe.com.

— Midwest Transplant Network