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# 25 YEARS ON: TOTS WHO PIONEERED LIVER OPS RECREATE PHOTO

## Reunited.. the children given gift of life

BY MARTYN HALLE and NICOLA SMALL

**FIVE adults sit on a hospital floor together - recreating their part in making medical history 25 years ago.**

Among them is the first British child saved by a pioneering transplant that saw her mum risk her life to donate a slice of her own liver to her daughter.

Now Audrey Carolan, 27, has made a pilgrimage back to the hospital where the op took place.

And, together with four others alive today because of a living donor transplantation in childhood, she recreated the picture taken of them all at King's College Hospital in South London in 1994.

Audrey said: "My mother did the most amazing thing for me all those years ago.

"There wasn't any other parent to talk to who had been there before and had the surgery.

"She was the pioneer and it was incredibly brave to be the first parent donor."

In 1993, 10 per cent of babies in need of a liver transplant died on the waiting list because of a shortage of donor organs.

### RISK

But living donor transplantations - using a segment of a family member's liver - already had the potential to save dozens of children's lives every year.

The procedure had been carried out abroad, mainly in Germany, Japan and America.

But some senior British surgeons believed it was unethical to risk a healthy person's life, even for the sake of their own child.

Yet after a two-year campaign by surgeons at King's College Hospital, the objections were overcome and the Department for Health authorised and funded a trial of five transplants.

First was 14-month-old Audrey, of Stevenage, Herts, desperately ill with liver failure when surgeons were given the go-ahead to carry out the trail-blazing surgery in October 1993.

She weighed just 15 pounds - the size of a baby half her age - and had only six months to live.

She was born with biliary atresia, a condition where the bile duct is blocked, and her only chance of life was a liver transplant.

**SAVIOR Surgeon Dr Tan, inset, baby Kelly after her op**



ROBBIE

MATTHEW

AUDREY

KELLY

LANI

2019

Five of the 1994 transplant kids recreate the picture taken of them all at King's

1994



And just weeks before her op, there was a reminder of just how dangerous it could be. A 29-year-old German mum had died giving part of her liver to try to save her child.

Over 12 hours, leading transplant surgeon Dr Kai-Chah Tan removed the left lobe of her 41-year-old mum Veronica's liver and transplanted it into Audrey.

Today Audrey is fit and well and working for a sexual health charity.

Veronica also made a full recovery. Audrey said: "The transplant saved my life and meant that I had a happy, healthy childhood.

"I did have to have a full transplant in 2002 due to complications, but now I'm fighting fit again."

Veronica, now 67 and a Church of England vicar in Whitby, North Yorks, says: "I had faith it would be all right. I also felt I had very little choice. My husband Eddie and I were told that without a transplant our daughter - my only child - would be dead by Christmas.

"If anything was a spur to go ahead, it was the thought that we were so close to losing Audrey."

Since that first operation a quarter of a century ago, nearly 500 more lives have been saved in the UK thanks to living donor liver transplantation.

Among the others recreating that picture of the groundbreaking tots was Kelly Young - eight months old and just 36 hours from death when Dr Tan transplanted a slice of her mum Denise's liver into her in August 1994.

Swimming teacher Kelly, of Minchinhampton near Stroud, Glos, is now 25 and has competed in six World Transplant Games, winning medals.

Denise, 57, said she didn't need to think twice about becoming a live donor to save her daughter, who also had biliary atresia.

But she was reminded of the risk she took when she was rushed back to theatre post-op to stop a life-threatening bleed.

Denise said: "When you are told your daughter doesn't have much longer to live, you don't take in the risk. We knew there was a risk to me, but for Kelly death without a transplant was inevitable. I had been through all the counselling and for me there was no turning back."

Matthew Pitman was four and dying from extra hepatic biliary atresia when he had a segment of his mum

Janet's liver transplanted into him in May 1994. Now 29, he lives in Shepton Beauchamp in Somerset and works for Taylor Wimpey in Exeter.

The others recreating that 1994 photoshoot were Robbie Sheargold, who had the op in February, and Lani Ward who was saved the following month. Heather Greig, missing from the adult line-up, had her transplant in June 1994. Reflecting on the part he played in British medical history, Dr Tan - now practising in Singapore - told us:

"We couldn't stand by and watch children dying while we had a technique that could save their lives. But we

didn't have an easy time convincing people we had to convince our own ethics committee at the hospital, the Royal College of Surgeons, doubting colleagues at other transplant centres and health ministers."

He added: "It was one of the most satisfying operations. It's the greatest gift a parent can give to a child."

Lisa Burnapp, lead nurse for living donation at NHS Blood and Transplant, said: "It is wonderful to celebrate this important milestone in living donor liver transplantation, which has saved hundreds of lives in the UK in the last 25 years."



KELLY'S HERO With mum Denise [nicola.small@sundaymirror.co.uk](mailto:nicola.small@sundaymirror.co.uk)

To find out more about organ donation visit: [organ donation.nhs.uk](http://organ donation.nhs.uk) or call 0300 123 23 23