INSIDE THE INSTITUTE
> pg. 3

MARK HRELJAC’S MANY GIFTS
> pg. 5

HEARTS AFLUTTER
> pg. 9

WHAT THE HEART WANTS MOST
> pg. 12

JUMPING IN FOR WOMEN’S HEART HEALTH
> pg. 16

Foundation CONNECTION

Newsletter of the University of Ottawa Heart Institute Foundation

> ISSUE NO. 20 | WINTER 2020
In a world currently facing everyday challenges of human survival, compassion and decency, I sincerely hope you will find this edition inspiring and uplifting. Over the last few months as I often scroll through my social media feeds, I notice I linger longer on the positive quotes, the feel-good videos and the uplifting stories. I crave good news. Knowing the stories that await you in this edition, I am certain they will provide you with those good feels and positive vibes, especially when you know that you, as a donor, have played a role in their outcomes.

Some, like Brock Thom’s story will read like an episode of ER, with a second helping of a Nicholas Sparks novel. Others like Natalie Tommy’s will feel like an extended montage of Rocky.

I first met the Hreljac family almost 20 years ago when I was working in television and covering the excitement around Ryan’s Well. You see, when a young boy from the Ottawa region sits on a couch opposite Oprah— you pay attention. Ryan, in response to a class project took his hard-earned money and bought himself a well in Uganda. Little did he know he had set in motion, the course of his life and that of his family. The Ryan’s Well Foundation has built hundreds of wells now in over 17 countries. What I never anticipated was that just a few months ago, in an entirely new role, I would be sitting in the Hreljac’s backyard, with an entirely different purpose and with no cameras or time constraints. Mark, Ryan’s dad, a patient with the Heart Institute talking about the butterfly effect of the gift of time and how life saving surgery here in Ottawa has impacted thousands of families on the other side of the world.

With Natalie Tommy’s story we embrace her passion to make a difference, so much so that we find ourselves jumping right in. Through JUMP IN™ we have started the conversation and the dialogue so desperately needed for an audience that is under-researched, under-diagnosed and under-treated when it comes to heart health. JUMP IN™ took our nation by storm, from coast to coast, as individuals and their families took in 30 minutes of physical activity for 30 days to help support the Canadian Women’s Heart Health Centre. It required the simple task of getting up and moving and it sparked a conversation we
needed to have. Heart disease is the number one killer of woman here in Canada and 80% of heart disease is preventable through lifestyle. There has been too much loss and heartbreak in the Tommy family, how beautiful to share the upside of what can be done about it.

You may already be familiar with Bill and Elva Holland and the volunteer work they do here— their dedication to the Heart of Gold program. At the end of the day their hearts belong to each other— take a trip along memory lane to see how this duo really conquered love in the most trying of times.

And if you love happy endings, Brock and Melissa Thom will have you wishing you had been invited to their bedside wedding right here at the institute. I won’t spoil the story.

Winter is now upon us, and here at the Heart Institute, February is Heart Month is just around the corner. Typically, this is a time of beautifully orchestrated chaos with events and fundraisers planned throughout the month with cardiac care at the forefront. This year, with the cancellations of most of our events, our team is excited to bring you some new and original ways to interact with us and support the needs of the institute. Stay tuned!

In the meantime, during this holiday season, be sure to take care of yourself and the safety of your loved ones. Cherish the time you have, with all it’s simple pleasures and treasures. I hope we can look back on these unprecedented times with gratitude and a new appreciation for our gift of time.

Sit back, take your time reading through this edition of the Foundation Connection and I look forward to connecting with you in the new year.

Stay healthy and safe,

Much Love,

Lianne

Would you like to make a donation to the Heart Institute before the end of the taxation year?

You can make a secure online donation by credit card until midnight December 31, 2020 at donate.ottawaheart.ca. If you prefer to send a cheque or money order, please use the envelope attached to this issue of Foundation Connection. Be sure to include your full name, address and telephone number with your donation.

All donations $10 or more mailed to the Foundation and postmarked December 31, 2020 or earlier will receive a charitable tax receipt eligible for your 2020 income tax filing.

Call us at 613.696.7030.
Inside the Institute

Before the first case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in Canada, the staff at the Heart Institute were preparing for the unknown. Thanks to our donor community, we were ready. We have asked the leaders of our nursing teams, Bonnie Bowes, Vice President, Quality, Privacy and Health Information and Chief Nursing Officer and Erika MacPhee, Vice President, Clinical Operations, what things have been like for our frontline healthcare teams.

Q1. How has the pandemic protocols changed the regular daily activities of the nursing staff?

This is a BIG question as this pandemic has really affected everyone inside and outside of hospitals. Nursing staff are required to be screened on entry to the Heart Institute, wear PPE including masks and face shields all day (12 hour shifts) while dealing with the angst and uncertainty of changing rules and guidelines with respect to COVID-19, all the while providing the high quality of care our patients and their families have come to expect.

In addition to the exhaustive changes to routine and interactions with patients and families, the staff must keep appropriate distance from each other so the regular get togethers during breaks aren’t the same. Staff need to spread out around the institute instead of in their comfy lounges making recharging during a long shift a little more difficult.

Q2. How does the nursing team help patients who may feel isolated and alone with limited access to visitors?

With limited visiting, the staff are helping patient use mobile devices (their own and some provided by the institute) so patients can facetime, zoom, skype, etc with their families. The staff has also put all our patient education classes online which means these important resources are available to view at their bedside or from home. This has been a tremendous success because they can be watched numerous times if necessary. Virtual solutions have been adapted in incredibly creative
ways to keep patients and families connected to each other, the UOHI and their care team.

For our more mobile patients, the nurses have been able to bring them down to the new glassed in area in the front lobby and family have been able to wave to them from outside. It’s not ideal, but seeing a loved one, even from a distance, can make a difference in a patient’s emotional health and the nurses are attuned to how important this can be in their recovery.

**Q3: Speaking of families, what kind of additional precautions does the staff need to take when they go home to their own families?**

Staff change out of their uniforms at work, get back into their own clothes, go home, launder their clothing right away and shower. And of course, the number one thing they constantly do is WASH THEIR HANDS. With the return to school, there are challenges with managing children with symptoms and navigating getting them tested and following proper precautions to protect their families, themselves, colleagues and patients. The Heart Institute COVID testing centre for staff is now up and running and has really allowed our staff to access testing in a much less stressful way for themselves and their families.

Another impact on some staff members is that they are no longer able to work at more than one hospital site. This is to avoid any cross contamination between institutions.

**Q4. How can the community continue to help the frontline healthcare workers at the Heart Institute?**

The kindness and generosity of the community has been AMAZING!!!!!! We’ve had thousands of masks sewn by volunteers, PPE donated by community associations, individuals and local companies, and area restaurants have donated MANY meals to the staff at the Heart Institute.

At the beginning of the pandemic there were meals donated daily which were deeply appreciated. Every member of the staff has been touched by the kindness and gratitude we’ve experienced from our patients, donors and community and we are appreciative of the signs around the city and social media posts showing support for the role frontline healthcare workers have taken on to battle the pandemic.

**Q5. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments to the community?**

We thank everyone for their continued support and understanding and ask our community to help us keep everyone safe by wearing masks, wash your hands and please be patient when we remind you that visiting is restricted. This is to protect visitors, their loved one (the patient) and our staff. Our donors are part of our Heart Institute family, we are so grateful for the support and know we’re stronger together.
Mark Hreljac’s many gifts

You could call it “the gift of time” for a man who had given so much of himself over the years.

Mark Hreljac was a 58-year-old father of four busy sons, just retired from a 30-year career with Ottawa Police Services but still working hard on his son’s charitable foundation, when he figured he would finally have some time to himself.

But there was one mitigating factor: He had a genetic heart condition. His liver doesn’t process fat as effectively as it should, and that results in the high cholesterol for which he’d been treated for most of his adult life.

“In my late 20s, my cholesterol level was a little high,” he recalls. “Doctors at the University of Ottawa Heart Institute determined it was a hereditary thing. I was on statins (cholesterol reducing drug) to lower it, but my numbers were still always a little high.”

His father Vic had a triple bypass at the Heart Institute when he was 65. Mark was 47 at the time. It could have been an ominous sign.

“I thought I had time because I’ve always been active; I don’t eat fried food, I don’t smoke — and I drink a lot of red wine,” Mark says with a laugh. “I’d been on these meds since I was in my 20s, so I figured I’d be okay until I was at least his age. My dad wasn’t on statins.”

But he wasn’t quite as lucky.

“I thought I had time because I’ve always been active; I don’t eat fried food, I don’t smoke — and I drink a lot of red wine,” Mark says with a laugh.

In early December 2017, Mark had returned from a trip to Ghana in Africa for Ryan’s Well, a charitable organization started by Mark and Susan’s son, Ryan, when he was just six years old (he’s now 29) and supported by Susan and Mark since it was founded. A week or so before Christmas, they visited his brother’s family out of town. That night, Mark had a big piece of lasagna and a glass of wine late in the evening.

EQUIPMENT WISHLIST

**Patient Defibrillator:**

$9,166.67 each

External defibrillators are used either to apply an electrical shock to a patient’s heart during cardiac arrest, or to apply an electrical shock to the heart to correct an abnormal or potentially life threatening arrhythmia in a patient.
I woke up at 2:30 a.m. and thought I had major heartburn because of what I’d eaten,” he says. “We drove home Sunday and I just didn’t feel that hot.”

On Monday morning, in anticipation of a forthcoming trip to mountainous Uganda, he vowed that he was going to get in shape.

“I got on the treadmill and 10 seconds later, I realized something wasn’t right,” he says. “I couldn’t walk.”

Susan took him to the Ottawa Hospital and they learned Mark had experienced two heart attacks over the weekend. He was transferred to the Heart Institute where he underwent angioplasty. He remembers the procedure because he was awake for it. The two surgeons were standing over him and one was saying “I don’t think we’re going to be able to do it — we’ll have to try again tomorrow.” Then the other said, “Let me try one more thing.”

“I’m listening to all this,” Mark says with a laugh. “While he’s [trying that last thing], the other surgeon is saying ‘I can’t believe you did that. That’s great.’”

The surgeons put in three stents and kept him for one night before sending him home to North-Grenville on December 23.

After saving his father, Vic, who is still living well at 83, the Heart Institute saved Mark too, just 18 years later. And both have benefited from the follow-up appointments with dieticians and others through the after-care program. It’s not lost on him that his heart attacks could have happened the following month while he was climbing hills in Uganda, where the outcome could have been much worse.

“All in all, I was really lucky to be in Ottawa in between trips,” he says.

At the time of his heart attack, Mark had been working as executive director of Ryan’s Well and didn’t officially give up the reins until 2019. Susan had also worked in the leadership role at the charity for seven years, while holding down her management position at the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion — part of her 34-year career with the province.

Without the Heart Institute, I wouldn’t be here,” Mark says matter-of-factly. “And with the after care, they really set me on a good path, not that I was on a bad one. It was just really good reinforcement.”

The story of Ryan’s Well began in 1998, when Ryan’s Grade 1 teacher told him some people were sick and dying because they didn’t have clean water. Learning that not everyone lived as well as he did, he decided he had to do something
to help and turned to those around him to raise money for the first well.

Today, Ryan’s Well is working towards its 1,500th clean-water project, having helped more than one million people in 17 countries. Mark recalls many incredible events during their work with Ryan’s Well. “Ryan was invited to appear on Oprah twice to spread the word about clean water. They had to change the taping date for his first appearance because he had made a commitment to be a volunteer peer helper with the kindergarten students at his school and needed to be in North Grenville and not Chicago on the day they wanted him. He also turned down a summer job at a local kid’s camp because he couldn’t start on the day they needed him. What he didn’t tell them was that he couldn’t start that day because he was flying to London to receive the Peter Cruddas Social Innovation Initiative award at Buckingham Palace, where he met the Queen and joined 11 other like-minded kids at a dinner hosted by Prince Edward.”

Mark and Susan enjoy being able to reminisce about those moments, happy to have been the silent guardians to help their boy pursue his dream. If you go back and re-watch the segments of Oprah, somewhere in the clips is Mark smiling and Susan explaining the background to Oprah.

None of this has caused Ryan or his parents to lose sight of the cause. And with the gift of time from the Heart Institute’s capable surgeons, they’ll be able to keep doing good globally. In addition, the Hreljac’s three biological sons will receive ongoing monitoring from the Heart Institute and their family doctors because Mark’s condition has been identified as genetic. Their youngest and most active son, Keegan, appears to share his father’s condition and is already on statins to try to keep it at bay. Their fourth son, Akana Jimmy, came into their family at the age of 13. He had been Ryan’s Ugandan penpal and the two finally met when Ryan was nine and went to Jimmy’s village to cut the ribbon on Ryan’s first well.

Over the next few years, with many letters written and visits in Uganda and Canada, there was no denying the strong bond between Ryan, Jimmy and their entire family. After a terrifying attack by a rebel group on Jimmy’s village, where he escaped capture, that the Hreljac’s expedited their decision to bring Jimmy to Canada.

Susan continues "We hired a lawyer, took out a loan and he was granted refugee status. Jimmy is part of our family now, a son to Mark and I, and a brother to Ryan, Jordan and Keegan.”
“You see how fortunate we are, living where we do, having the health care we do,” Mark says. “In the places we work for Ryan’s Well, there are no medicines. We can take an awful lot for granted. This journey has changed me, I am grateful I had the opportunity to be part of it.”

And as for the Heart Institute?

“Without the Heart Institute, I wouldn’t be here,” Mark says matter-of-factly. “And with the after care, they really set me on a good path, not that I was on a bad one. It was just really good reinforcement.”

Your gift of time to the Heart Institute has changed the lives of families like the Hreljacs. If you would like to learn more about Ryan’s Well please visit their website at www.ryanswell.ca.

Heart of Gold:
Meet Advanced Practical Nurse Joanne Morin.

Joanne works with patients with congenital heart disease and was honoured to receive a Heart of Gold pin from a grateful patient.

In her note of thanks, Joanne’s nominator included the following message with her donation.

“Thank you Joanne for being such a compassionate, skilled nurse who is always pleasant and patient when dealing with me.”

Congratulations and thank you Joanne!
Hearts Aflutter

By Selva Trebert-Sharman

I sit across from Bill and Elva Holland, their home filled with naval memorabilia from Bill’s career as a sailor. I’ve been here before. Bill and Elva have been friends to the University of Ottawa Heart Institute for years, since Bill’s first heart surgery in 2000. For more than 20 years they’ve been dedicated to supporting other patients and the “important work” of the Heart Institute. I’ve had many chats with the two of them and I’ve heard their stories before, but this time is different, it’s their love story, the story of how their friendship began. They speak over each other as they share their memories, not really interrupting the other but rather finishing each other’s sentences, naturally filling in the gaps, the spaces, as though dancing.

It was July 1976 and Bill was posted to the HMCS Skeena, assigned to provide security for the Summer Olympics in Montreal. “The Navy had five ships on harbour duty. Divers went down every day and searched the hulls for bombs, while 100 sailors patrolled the Olympic events. I was an engineer, an officer of blue watch”, remembers Bill. “We’d get shore leave and I would stay on ship and tend bar in the Mess so I could make money to play golf”. Bill is a passionate golfer. Elva was in Montreal working for Bell Canada at the time. “My girlfriend called asking if I wanted to go down to the ships. I wasn’t sure at first, but then I thought, why not? and told her I’d pick her up. So off we went. We got ourselves on the Skeena where Bill was bartending that night”.

“I took one look at Elva and said, that’s my girl. She was all done up sitting under a little cove in the Mess, the lights shining down on her.......she looked real good, she caught my eye”, says Bill with a smile.

“He came up to me and asked, ‘would you like a drink? we only serve doubles’. I said, well sure, I’ll try one”, recalls Elva as Bill looks at her and chuckles. And that was the first time Bill’s heart really fluttered.

A week later Bill called inviting Elva on a date. “I thought, I don’t think so” but lucky for Bill, Elva changed her mind. “We went golfing and then for dinner. She could really hit a ball”, Bill adds. Bill called again the next day, and so began Bill and Elva’s love story. They married two months later and Bill was posted to Ottawa.

It would be another 24 years before someone else would touch Bill’s heart.

By spring of 2000, they were settling into retirement. Bill shares what happened next; “I was working on the roof and as I came down the ladder Elva asked me what I’d done to my
feet. When I looked down, both my feet were swollen - twice their normal size. I figured it was no big deal, probably just from climbing up and down so much. But Elva wasn’t having it and sent me to see the doctor right away - and it’s a good thing too! My doctor sent me straight to the Heart Institute.” At the Heart Institute Bill was diagnosed with mitral valve stenosis and atrial fibrillation. Bill’s valves were damaged, possibly a result of scarlet fever when he was a child.

We were always at the Heart Institute, learning about the new procedures the researchers and the docs where working on. Seeing how patients and their families were treated by everyone, the nurses, the administrative staff, everyone! They’re always taking care of us.”

“If you’d asked me what I knew about the Heart institute before that day, my answer would’ve been ‘nothing!’ But twenty years and two life-saving surgeries later...” Bill’s gaze drifts off. Elva picks up his thought, nodding her head “It’s a good thing we live in Ottawa and have the Heart Institute.”

In 2001, Heart Institute founder, Dr. Wilbert Keon, had recruited Dr. Thierry Mesana (now President & CEO of the Heart Institute,) one of the world’s leading heart valve surgeons. Up until then, Bill’s heart condition had been treated with medication. But the time had come, his degenerative valve needed replacing. Bill may have been the patient, but the consequences of his condition also affected his wife, his best friend, “his girl” – it was a family matter.

“That was the first time that Dr. Mesana and the Heart Institute saved my life” recalls Bill. For Elva, it was the support she also received. “After surgery Dr. Mesana came and told me that Bill was doing good, that he was OK, and that made such a difference. I was so worried”, Elva pauses. “I need him healthy you know, I have a list of things he needs to get done around here”, Elva says with a laugh. While grateful for the outcome, everyone understood that the valve repair was temporary. A second surgery was in Bill’s future. “They told us the repair would only last so long. They kept an eye on me and sure enough, after 7 good years, it was time to replace the valve. And once again, the University of Ottawa Heart Institute saved my life”.

As a patient, participant in the Rehab Program, and involvement with the Ottawa Heart Support Group, Bill and Elva developed a personal relationship with the Heart Institute. “We were always at the Heart Institute, learning about the new procedures the researchers and the docs where working on. Seeing how patients and their families were treated by everyone, the nurses, the administrative staff, everyone! They’re always taking care of us.” And so, in 2013, Bill and Elva decided to take care of the
Hearts Aflutter continued...

Heart Institute, to give back in the most kind and personal way possible, by including a gift to the Heart Institute in their will.

When I ask what inspired their legacy gift, Bill shares; "Our parents lived through the Depression - they had to save, put something away for the next day. That's what they taught us - make sure there's something for tomorrow. Patients need the Heart Institute to keep saving lives tomorrow. Saving someone's friend, daughter, son, someone's husband...someone's girl."

Today Elva is still making Bill's heart flutter, but he now relies on the help of a defibrillator to help him stay in rhythm.

If you would like to know more about including a gift to the Heart Institute in your will, please call Selva at the Heart Institute Foundation at 613.696.7251. If you’ve already included the Heart Institute in your will, we would love to learn more about what inspired your gift and share with you the many ways legacy gifts are changing the face of cardiac care— the kind of impact your gift will have. Most of all, we would appreciate the opportunity to thank you for this immensely kind and personal gesture.

YOU’VE PLACED YOUR HEART IN OUR HANDS – WE’RE PLACING OUR FUTURE IN YOURS!

A Legacy Gift to the University of Ottawa Heart Institute goes straight to the heart of care in our community. Your thoughtful donation will mean that the Heart Institute remains a place for healing, caring and learning for generations to follow.

"Because it is possible for one action to shape a spectacular outcome"

— Dr. Wilbert J. Keon, Heart Institute Founder

To find out more about leaving a gift to the Heart Institute in your Will, please contact Selva Trebert-Sharman at 613-696-7251 or wjklegacysociety@ottawaheart.ca. All conversations are confidential.

Visit foundation.ottawaheart.ca/ways-give/legacy-giving for more information!

Charitable registration number 14081 3452 RR0001.
What the Heart Wants Most

In the days before Brock Thom arrived at the University of Ottawa Heart Institute, the busy 37-year old entrepreneur, who’d started a construction company only a year earlier, was experiencing shortness of breath. He decided to check his blood pressure at his local Shopper’s Drug Mart. Three times, it turned up “zeroes across the board,” Brock says. But what propelled him to call his doctor was when he woke up out of a dead sleep with shortness of breath and pain in his chest.

“At that point, I decided it was probably a good idea to see my doctor,” he says. “My appointment was at 8 a.m. and my doctor did an ECG right there and told me that I was in ‘heart block.’ He wanted me to go to the hospital immediately by ambulance but I thought that was crazy, so I asked my girlfriend Melissa to drive me there.”

Brock and Melissa (Mel) had been together since 2017. They both led fit and active lifestyles. Mel, a massage therapist, ran marathons and is a body builder and Brock is a life-long soccer player and coach. Together, they were looking forward to the arrival of their first child, the baby’s due date was only weeks away.

When they arrived at the Ottawa Hospital, Brock was monitored in their Emergency Department before being transferred to the Heart Institute. Mel shares what happened right before the transfer; “Just as the porters were coming to transfer him to the Heart Institute, I noticed his blood pressure was low — 50 over 17,” she says. “I asked him if he was dizzy. He said ‘no.’ The nurse redid it and it was even lower. They rushed him directly to the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit at the Heart Institute and this swarm of nurses and doctors were there. Twelve hours after the doctor’s appointment, he was in heart surgery to save his life.”

To stabilize him, at least temporarily, doctors put an Impella heart pump in his chest. The pump would take over for the heart by pumping blood to the rest of Brock’s body. This would buy them a bit of time to figure out what to do next.

“I’ve had an irregular heartbeat as long as I can remember,” Brock says “I had gone to various specialists as a child, but there were never any overwhelming symptoms. I only ever suffered from the odd dizzy spell every couple of weeks or months. No one was ever able to determine why I was experiencing the dizzy spells and they could never link them to the irregular heartbeat.” Now, at the Heart Institute, it became apparent how serious it was. Brock adds. “It was totally surreal.”

Mel picks up the story. “They said he needed a pump because his heart wasn’t strong enough to make it through the night, it was probably the longest day of my life. Doctors came out and
What the Heart Wants Most continued...

said everything went great. He pulled through. Everyone else left and I waited till 4:30 a.m. and then I drove home. When I walked in the door, it hit me like a wave that he might never come home again. I shook that out of my head and told myself ‘I can’t ever go there.’”

From that point on, Mel was determined to stay positive. When she explains the story to others now, they say how amazing it is that the trauma didn’t send her into labour.

“That wasn’t an option,” she says with a laugh. “Our unborn baby and I were focusing on “Daddy” so he could be there when it was time for the birth.”

GETTING THINGS DONE ON BORROWED TIME

Taped to the bottom of Brock’s bed in the intensive care unit was an ultrasound photograph of his future child, whose sex the couple didn’t know at that point. They wanted to save that news until the baby was born.

“The doctors and nurses would see the photo on my bed and congratulate me,” he says. “Everyone looking after me became very conscious that that was part of the equation. I was about to be a first time Dad.”

Following the implant of the heart pump, Brock underwent another procedure – the insertion of an external pacemaker. The doctors discussed one more possible surgery but before that happened, Brock and Mel made some decisions of their own.

Brock decided he wanted to propose to Mel and get married immediately, right there, in the institute and together they decided they wanted to find out if their baby was a boy or girl so they could choose a name.

Two decisions that reflected their fear that Brock may not survive the next procedure.

“I just wanted to know as much information about the baby as I could. I was scared I wasn’t going to be around,” Brock says. “That week, the doctors thought I may need a heart transplant. Just hearing those words was really difficult.”

Mel lights up when she talks about her wedding. “I can’t say enough about what Christina and all the staff did for us. Within 30 seconds of me saying ‘yes’, she produced the paperwork to get the license, a cake, a photographer and flowers. She also changed her shift so she could be there for us. Unbelievable.”

STAFF STEPS IN.

Brock’s story had already captured the hearts of his nurses and doctors when he revealed to three people — his sister, his mom and nurse Christina McGuigan — that he wanted to propose to Mel and get married from his hospital bed.

“I was going to propose to Mel, but I didn’t have a ring,” he says. “It was pretty spur-of-the-moment and I was confined to my hospital bed.”

Nurse Christina McGuigan jumped into action. First, she talked to her manager to find out if it was even possible for the two to get married next to his bed.

“My manager was all on board,” Christina, a gregarious Prince Edward Island native says. “She’s a romantic as well so she was pretty excited about it. [Brock] told me he’d asked his friends to bring a ring, but they wouldn’t get to the hospital
before Mel so he asked me if there was anything we could use. I said, ‘Yeah, I’ll find something.’”

In a moment of inspiration, Christina fashioned an engagement ring out of ground wires used with pacemakers and that’s what Brock used to propose to Mel.

But the nurse didn’t stop there.

From outside the room, Christina recorded a video of the proposal (Mel said “YES!”) She also tracked down the forms needed to get a marriage license. Mel and Brock filled them in and Mel took them to a city service office where she could get the license right away.

“Christina went above and beyond her role as my nurse and stepped in as our wedding planner,” Brock says. “The second word got out that we were having a wedding in my ‘room,’ all the nurses started helping out. They made all kinds of decorations. Some of the porters were involved in decorating and preparing for the ceremony, which was unbelievable. “

Christina shares how the wedding was a team effort; “I scrounged around my house to find some lights and other little decorations and one of the ward clerks brought in a lace curtain for behind the bed, so it didn’t look so hospital-y,” she says. “One of Mel’s friends brought in a sign that said ‘Happily ever after starts here’ — I thought it would make sense to put it on top of the machine that was keeping him alive.”

Brock went into the Heart Institute on a Friday, had the pacemaker put in Saturday, proposed to Mel at 4:30 p.m. the following Wednesday and they were married at 6 p.m. on Thursday.

Mel lights up when she talks about her wedding. “I can’t say enough about what Christina and all the staff did for us. Within 30 seconds of me saying ‘yes’, she produced the paperwork to get the license, a cake, a photographer and flowers. She also changed her shift so she could be there for us. Unbelievable.”

Mel called a friend to see if he knew anyone who could marry them the next day and the friend’s mother ended up being their officiant.

Before he proposed, Brock had called Mel’s father in Thunder Bay and he was able to fly to Ottawa for the ceremony. Her mother lives in Ottawa and the mother-daughter duo spent the night before the wedding, searching for a dress.

“We arrived at Bayshore at 8:15 p.m.,” she says, “we bought a dress and two rings before the stores closed at 9:00 p.m. – that’s efficient!”

On top of all the surprises that week, they were in for one more. Heart Institute cardiac surgeon Dr. Fraser Rubens had offered to surprise the bride by singing as she walked down the makeshift aisle. He performed a beautiful version of the classic love song “I’ll Walk Beside You.”

Mel beams at the memory. “It was amazing, so moving, I couldn’t have asked for a better, more perfect wedding.”

After the ceremony, Brock and Mel had another announcement to share with their guests. Mel’s doctor had arranged for her to have an ultrasound on their wedding day.

The technician then put the results in an envelope for them to open with their family and friends. “We were less than two months from my due date and the baby was getting a little squished in there” Mel says with a laugh. “The note said it would most likely be a boy. Before Brock’s surgery, we were able to choose a name together.”
The next day, October 4, Brock underwent an ablation, which destroys tissue that allows incorrect electrical signals to cause an abnormal heart rhythm. Not an uncommon procedure but more complex for Brock because of the heart pump in his chest. His recovering went well and he was able to go home with Mel on October 25.

Their son, Sawyer James Daniel Thom was born Nov. 21, 2019. He was 9 pounds, one ounce and 21 inches.

**LOVE FOR THE HEART INSTITUTE**

“Coming out of my stay at the Heart Institute, I didn’t really have time to think about what had just happened,” Brock says. “Then we had Sawyer. I think I was in shock for a few weeks, but I’m so happy and having him here now, I don’t know if I can put it into words. I feel as though I’ve been given another chance at life. To be able to participate in his life, and see him grow and witness all this is unbelievable.”

He says he’s incredibly grateful to the Heart Institute — the doctors who helped save his life and the nurses who cared for him and worked so hard to produce a perfect wedding for the couple.

“I was aware that the Heart Institute was here in our city, but I didn’t pay too much attention to the fact that it was something that was available,” he says. “I’m so happy that it exists and that I live here. I met people from all over the country who have to travel to make use of this facility.”

His wife agrees.

“While Brock was in there, we met so many people who’d travelled from the East Coast, West Coast, all over, to come to the Heart Institute, but we have it right here in our city and I didn’t realize until we were in that position how fortunate we are to have access to world-renowned doctors,” Mel says. “And the facility is brand new. You’re looking at all this equipment hooked up and you just think, ‘We’re so fortunate, all of this was because of generous donors, we are so lucky.’

Asked if he’s excited about the future, Brock had just two words: “Big time.”

Today, a sign hangs over the buffet in the couple’s dining room. Made by the ward clerk, it has one rectangle per letter, it says “Just Married.” She fashioned it out of file folders and used the strings that respiratory therapists use to hold endotracheal tubes in patients to string the letters together. It hung outside Thom’s CICU room for the duration of his time there.

This simple sign is a poignant reminder of not only the life changing experience Brock had at the Heart Institute, but how the amazing, and dedicated staff made their dreams come true.

---

**Do you have securities that have increased in value?**

By directly donating your publicly listed securities by December 31, you can make an immediate impact in the fight against cardiac disease. You will receive a donation receipt for the value of the shares and you will be exempt from paying taxes on any capital gains.

**Giving is simple, contact Elizabeth Rodgers at 613-696-7253 or erodgers@ottawaheart.ca for more information.**
Jumping in for Women’s Heart Health

Natalie Tommy is hooked on raising awareness and funds for causes near and dear to her heart, specifically the Canadian Women’s Heart Health Centre and the University of Ottawa Heart Institute.

FAMILY TIES

Flashback to the 1930’s when Natalie’s grandfather, Andrew Tommy (Andy Sr.), left his home in New Brunswick and moved to Ottawa. A gifted athlete with a head for numbers, he began an award-winning football career in the CFL with the Ottawa Rangers. Andy played football for 14 years with a break during World War II when he served our nation in the Canadian military. Andy and his wife Helen raised their three sons to be winners: they were competitive, passionate and competent. Together, the Tommy brothers, Andy Jr., Arthur (Art) and Fred took the alpine ski world by storm. Their family name is legendary as each of these young men represented Canada in World Cup and Olympic competitions.

Andy Sr., a strong healthy man and CFL Hall of Famer, retired from the Dominion Bureau of Statistics in 1971. That summer he was adding the finishing touches to their cottage and looking forward to the years ahead with family. The following April, in 1972, Art Tommy received the call that he was gone. He was only 62 years old and taken from his family by a heart attack. It’s a day Natalie will never forget.

For the Tommy’s, heart disease continued to ravage its way through the family. Natalie lost her own father Art in 1994, at age 60. He was one of the best alpine skiers of his generation, co-founder of the Tommy & Lefebvre retail sporting goods chain as well as a partner in the Edelweiss Valley Ski and Golf Resort. Art was also committed to giving back to a community that had given him so much, coaching several ski teams, supporting hundreds of local racers, and leading the Canada-wide Master Retailer Program in 1985 that raised over $1,000,000 to support the National Alpine Ski Team’s drive to the 1988 Olympics in Calgary.

Art’s death was a wake-up call for the whole family. Natalie’s Uncle Fred, the youngest of the three Olympic skiers, tried hard to listen to his body. He loved yoga, walking his dog and cycling, and was always full of fun and laughter. In February 2004, he went into cardiac arrest and died at age 62. Before the year was out, in November 2004, Natalie’s last remaining uncle, Andy Tommy Jr., a father and man who worked tirelessly building ski runs, lodges and managing Edelweiss, died at the University of Ottawa Heart Institute at age 71.
The repeated, heartbreaking loss of loved ones to heart disease has motivated the women of the Tommy family to pay attention to their own heart health.

During a vacation in Costa Rica, Natalie’s normally fit and active mother, Marilyn Tommy, felt tired and out of breath. She was excited to be on holiday but more and more, she felt she needed a nap in the afternoon. Both Natalie and her mum put it down to humidity and the heat. Neither of them recognized the signs, and definitely didn’t think about heart health. With no sign of improvement three weeks after the trip, Marilyn visited her doctor. Tests revealed she had an enlarged heart and an irregular heartbeat. A procedure at the Heart Institute corrected the problem. At the Institute they taught her how to recognize the signs that might tell her something is happening. Marilyn is an avid gardener, hiker and kayaker. When Natalie thinks about the strong men in her life, she will tell you that Marilyn, now 83, is the strongest of them all.

WHEN THE HEART INSTITUTE FOUNDATION CALLS

Natalie had been involved in a number of charitable causes over the years in Ottawa but had been in Toronto for nearly two years and realized she missed volunteering. One day she received a request to consider co-chairing the Heart Institute Foundation’s women’s golf tournament, the Jeanne Fuller Red Dress Charity Classic. The timing was perfect. Natalie was moved by the passion of the entire team involved with the tournament and found herself excitedly saying “Yes – I’m in!”

Natalie has always been a champion of women’s causes and passions and believes women can change the world, one conversation, one step at a time. Once she joined the committee, she had the opportunity to be part of a team of “accomplished, polished and driven women.” For Natalie, the committee was a shining bright light. Everyone was positive, willing to do the work it took to make the event a huge fundraising success. Surrounded by the highly engaged volunteers and the dedicated staff at the Foundation, she felt she was “home.”

JUMPING IN TO 2020

Three years after Natalie joined the Red Dress committee and inside the vortex of the pandemic, everyone knew they had to do something different for 2020. Together they assembled ideas, insights and goals to dive into their first ever virtual event, JUMP IN™: a challenge of 30 minutes of activity each day for 30 days, set to take place during the month of September.

Natalie’s goal, and what clearly became a passion for the entire committee, was to gain a national awareness of the research into women’s heart health at the Institute and the overall objectives of the Canadian Women’s Heart Health Centre. At the same time, they wanted to foster a sisterhood that would (in a fun and engaging way) support each other with wellness goals, encouraging each other to be active, one of the keys to preventing heart disease. JUMP IN™ is about positive action and prevention.
**JUMP IN™ was an amazing success.** Over 2,025 participants, 1.8 million minutes of activity and over $152,000 raised for the Heart Institute and the Canadian Women’s Heart Health Centre.

Natalie has also been able to take what she has learned through her Heart Institute volunteer work and transferred it to her career. As VP Marketing and Branding for the Nautical Lands Group and Wellings Properties, she has a front row seat to see the importance of wellness as we age. She feels it has given her increased clarity and shares it with the members in their 55+ Wellings Communities, as well as with her colleagues at head office. Corporately, Wellings focuses on independence and the role fitness and wellness play in keeping that independence. Again, the synergy for Natalie between JUMP IN™, her core values and those of the Wellings was a match made in heaven for all concerned.

**THE NEXT BIG JUMP**

When reflecting on the success of JUMP IN™, Natalie likes to say it created a movement. One which will continue to evolve as participants stay connected, gently wrapping arms around each other with words of encouragement. What began as 30 days for many will turn into months, then years, hopefully a lifetime of healthy living. JUMP IN™ has a personality and life force of its own and it will

---

**Did you miss our webinar on Legacy Giving?**

If you have questions about estate planning and charitable giving you can still enjoy the conversation hosted by Lianne Laing. This informal and interactive webcast with estate attorney Heather Austin Skaret, Selva Trebert-Sharman and special guests, Paul and Marilyn Koch can be accessed through the Heart Institute Foundations website. We’ll be answering questions and talking about an estate plan that reflects the future you envision, supports your loved ones and the causes close to your heart.

**Watch the conversation from the comfort of your own home, no masks required.**

foundation.ottawaheart.ca

**Would you like to know more?**
Contact Selva Trebert-Sharman
613.696.7251, strebert@ottawaheart.ca

Lianne Laing, Executive Director
Heart Institute Foundation

Heather Austin-Skaret, Co-Managing Partner
Mann Lawyers LLP

Selva Trebert-Sharman
Manager, Planned Giving
Heart Institute Foundation
Thank you to our committed team of volunteers for creating this amazing event.

Natalie Tommy (Chair)  Korey Kealey
Mary Browne  Julia Kelly
Avis Brownlee  Jill McAninch-King
Louise Dixon  Marion Martell
Jennifer Geleta  Paulina Mirsky
Julie Findlay  Cathy Pantieras
Krista Kealey

Thank you to the Foundation Special Events Team, Lindsay, Jessica and Katya for your enthusiasm and support!

“Collectively, we knew this had to be more than just an event to raise funds, it had to be a movement women and men would engage in, and benefit from. The success of the event was measured by the numbers of participants we garnered across Canada, the conversations shared between them on social media about women’s heart health and the funds raised.”

Natalie Tommy

For Natalie, JUMP IN™ was about a leap of faith. She credits the success to her entire planning team, the hardworking staff at the Foundation and the participants who shared their daily posts on social media. She is grateful to the corporate sponsors who came on board to match donations and provide prizing, and to the activity partners who offered new and challenging options every day.

If you Jumped In this past September, you are on a journey to improve your own heart health, and in Natalie Tommy’s heart, she couldn’t ask for anything more.
Our fundraising special events went VIRTUAL this year, and participants joined us from all over the world.

Check out what’s been going on in support of the University of Ottawa Heart Institute.

While the community remained vigilant and safe this summer, gamers from across North America came together to make a difference for the future of heart health.

Our **first ever E-Sports tournament raised over $5,500**. THANK YOU to all gamers, viewers, donors, influencers and the Ontario E-Sports league for making this exciting new initiative a success!

Stay tuned for our next E-Sports tournament.

---

**JUMP IN™ FOR WOMEN’S HEART HEALTH**

- Studio 1 Pilates
- JCC
- Pure Yoga
- The Workshop Dance Studio
- BUSHTUKAH
- Brendan Gillanders
- Fitness Lab
- Yogatown
- Beyond Yoga
- Dr. Jennifer Reed
- Mathis Gasparella-Lehalle
- Reform
- Melissa Lamb
- WhiteHairWisdom
- Greco Westboro
- The Wright Fit
- Elite Performance Academy
- Balance Plate Nutrition
- Herbal One Kanata
- Carleton Golf & Yacht Club
- Corona School of Gymnastics
- Wheelhouse
- Patricia Boal
- Graham Richardson
- Continuum Fitness
- Lisa Longball Vlooswyk
- Tommy Europe
- Hilltember
- Erica Wark
- Jana Webb
- Kassandra Reinhardt
- Temple Athletic
- Amber Stratton
- Cary Mullen
- Sara Dhooma
- Tara Berry
- Paige Nock
- Anne-Marie Madden
- Katie Wadden
- Keri Bowzaylo
- Jenine LaFayette
- Virginie Murdison
- Rene Unser
- Taylor Sudermann
- Nicole Kertcher
- Marianne Hogan
- Kaylee Hopkins
- Jason Hines Duncliffe
- Lindsay Mustard
- Hannah Hamsa
- JUMP 106.9
- BOOM 99.7
- Giovanni’s Ristorante
- CIBC Wood Gundy
- Gallant MacDonald
- Urbandale Corporation
- Wellings of Stittsville
- BLD Homes
- Emond Harnden
- Laurin Group
- Marcus & Millichap
- Donnelly Ford
- Bayshore
- Salomon

---

**Your heart is **stronger**. Our hearts are grateful**.

Our community, supported by the generosity of corporations that have matched donations, and the tireless efforts of our participants, activity partners and influencers, created a movement.

Over **2,000 participants**.

Over **1.8 million minutes of action**.

Over **$152,760 raised** for women’s heart health.

Thank you for JUMPING IN for the women you love.

---

**Ottawa Race Weekend** went virtual this year!

**1,184 kilometers**

**106 participants**

**$26,000 raised**

Thank you for joining us from all over the globe. We can’t wait to cheer you on from the sidelines next year!
While the safety of our community is a priority – we must say: **WE MISS YOU!** We miss your energy and we miss connecting with you – our wonderful donors and supporters. We’d like to say a special thank you to those who came together before the pandemic and thank you to the event organizers who hosted a new “edition” of your events.

**HEART MONTH 2021**

We look forward to celebrating Heart Month with you. We have lots of family fun planned – no matter what age! Be sure to check our website [www.februaryisheartmonth.ca](http://www.februaryisheartmonth.ca) and sign up for our mailing list for all the news and announcements.

**NEW THIS YEAR!**

Stay Tuned and get excited!
Join us for our first ever city-wide scavenger hunt throughout February. The hunt will be filled with tasks, clues and tons of fun for the whole family! You won’t want to miss it.

If you have any questions about fundraising activities or if you are thinking about ways you can support the Heart Institute do not hesitate to reach out to the events team directly at specialevents@ottawaheart.ca - we are always excited to talk to you!

You can also find some amazing tools on our website to help with your fundraiser or virtual event planning.
Word Search

WORDS:

- ANGIOPLASTY
- PARTICIPANT
- CEREMONY
- PORTER
- CHOLESTEROL
- POSITIVE
- COMPASSION
- STATINS
- CONVERSATION
- STENOSIS
- FAMILY
- SURGEON
- FLOWERS
- SWOLLEN
- GHANA
- TEMPORARY
- GREGARIOUS
- ULTRASOUND
- HEARTBEAT
- WATER
- INNOVATION
- WEDDING
- INTERNATIONAL
- WOMEN
- LEGENDARY
- YOGA
- OLYMPICS