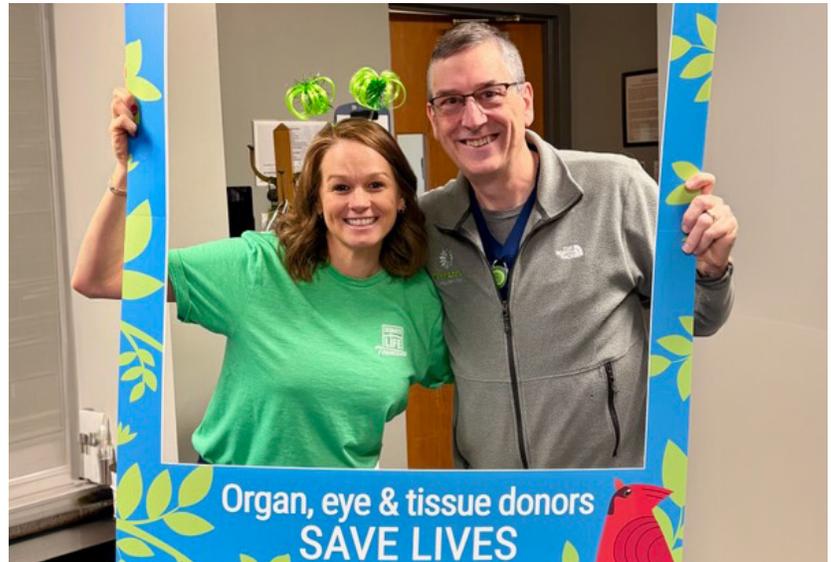


FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE GIFT: JIM'S STORY

For nearly 15 years, Jim has lived with chronic eye disease. At 39 years old, during a training in Middle Tennessee, his vision suddenly changed. "All of a sudden, my vision got digitized, it was scary," he recalled. Within days, he learned his eye pressure was dangerously high. Over the years, Jim underwent 11 eye surgeries, including cataract procedures and the placement of three drainage devices in each eye. Doctor visits became routine, sometimes monthly, sometimes multiple times in a week, often requiring a two-hour drive to see a specialist. Eventually, the strain led to corneal failure — his vision grew cloudy and blurry, light became painful, and daily tasks became exhausting. "I was barely seeing out of my left eye," he said. "That last month was pretty horrible."

When his physician recommended a cornea transplant, Jim agreed, knowing it would likely not be his last. Three days before surgery, he received the call that a donor cornea had been identified — a moment that carried deep meaning because of the work he does every day.

Jim serves as a Family Care Coordinator with Tennessee Donor Services, where he walks alongside families at the time of their loved one's death, offering the opportunity for organ and tissue donation. He understands the sacred



balance of what he calls "dual advocacy" — caring fully for grieving families while representing the unseen recipients whose lives hang in the balance. When he learned a donor had been found, his first response was compassion: "Please keep the family of my donor in your thoughts. They're walking through one of the hardest weeks of their lives."

Cornea transplant surgery is performed while the patient is awake. During the procedure, Jim experienced an unexpected emotional realization. "There was this point in surgery where I became aware that another person is now part of me." He later learned his donor was a 50-year-old woman from Kansas. Having walked with nearly a hundred families in donation conversations, he understands the weight of that decision. "Pain doesn't have to be wasted," Jim said. "Donation

becomes one of those ways meaning is found in the most horrific moments."

Today, just a few months post-transplant, Jim is no longer living with the constant pain that once defined his days. "I haven't been in eye pain since the transplant, where I'd had it for years. While my vision's not 100% yet, it's not cloudy anymore. It's life changing." His experience has also deepened how he approaches families in his professional role, knowing firsthand the profound gift they are being asked to consider.

"It's absolutely life-changing," he said. "Because of the selfless act of another person, I can work. I can see clearly. I'm not in pain. That matters." For Jim, donation is no longer only the work he does. It is the gift he carries every single day.