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page 29

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page 132

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page 138

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October 2007 Health.com

{ 5 MINUTES WITH ... }

A heart-transplant survivor

Defying all the odds, Amy Silverstein is still alive 19 years later.

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO GET A NEW HEART? For Amy Silverstein, 44, author of the memoir *Sick Girl* (Grove Press; \$24), life is sweet but hard. Silverstein needed a transplant because of a life-threatening congenital defect and a virus. Now she's alive but hardly normal. She's nauseous all the time from taking meds, and has braved more than 65 heart biopsies, a "torture that no person should have to endure, not even once," she says. Despite all that, she passed the bar to become a lawyer, got married, adopted a son—and has outlived her life expectancy by nine years. She talked with *Health* about what it's like to live one day at a time.

Health: Are you feeling good or bad today?

Silverstein: Every day is a challenge. Just before we got on the phone I took my morning medicines, so I'll feel very sick in about 45 minutes. These meds are very hard on the body. They make you nauseous, and kind of flulike tired. But I don't let it stop me. My heart is actually very strong—on a stress test I do better than the average woman my age—but it beats very fast and sometimes arrhythmically, which is terribly frightening. It just has no idea what the hell to do.

What keeps you going?

Taking my son to his soccer games, doing the shopping. I also run four miles a day. Exercise makes me feel like I'm OK. And my trainer works me crazy hard. The way I think about it is

that if I can run four miles, I can get through the day. Every workout is an exercise in fear control. Something's kept me alive all these years, I tell myself. Maybe it's the exercise.

Do you talk about the future with your husband or your son?

Scott and I don't talk farther than six months. And we don't tell our son any more than he needs to know. But Scott doesn't see me as a sick girl—only as a beautiful, active, successful, whole person, no matter how I try and tell him otherwise. In his mind, I'm going to live forever, and there's magic in that. Love is extremely powerful.

Are you afraid of dying?

I'm not afraid; I'm saddened. I know it's all over—I'm sure of it. That makes me live each day



“Could I be home-free? I'm afraid to go there. But my doc says it's possible.”

even more. I'm going to drink this in. It's when I go in for my annual exam that I get very scared. Or when people talk about the future, like, “When the kids graduate from college, we'll sell the house.” Sell the house? I'm probably not going to be here to sell the house.

Parents of a dying 13-year-old girl decided to donate their daughter's heart—and you got it. Should everyone be an organ donor?

I don't know why they wouldn't, really. You have a chance to save a life by doing nothing. As much as I feel my life wasn't saved,

my life *was* saved. I just lost the life I would've had.

Why are you still alive?

I have an amazing match with that girl's heart. They did a test on me last year that matches about 10 characteristics between the donated organ and the body it goes into. I matched 9 of 10—unheard of for hearts. When I was transplanted, they could only match blood type. That explains why I've never rejected my heart, because almost everyone rejects at the beginning. Could I be home-free? I'm afraid to go there. But my doctor would say that it's possible. Nobody knows. —Susannah Felts