

This heart is beating a story of love

AMID the joy at Kostas Gribilas' wedding, there will be tears in memory of a Sydney man he never met. Mr Gribilas is alive today thanks to a heart transplant he received from 20-year-old Doujon Zammit, who died after being bashed during a holiday to Greece last year.



Sydney wedding ... heart transplant recipient Kostas Gribilas and his fiancée Poppy / Pic: Jayne Russell Source: The Daily Telegraph

After recovering enough to travel from Athens to the country of his birth, Australia, Mr Gribilas will walk down the aisle with his wife-to-be Poppy in Sydney two days after Christmas.

It's the wedding ceremony they thought they would never have.

And standing next to him during the ceremony as his best man will be none other than Doujon's father Oliver.

Friendship between an organ donor's family and a recipient is extremely rare. The two

usually never meet.

But as it happened, Mr Gribilas' details became public soon after his operation and he was among the transplant recipients the Zammit family met during a visit to Athens.

Since then, Mr Gribilas has

become firm friends with the relatives of the man who unknowingly saved his life.

"I owe the parents of Doujon not one thank you but 1000," he said.

Doujon was holidaying on the sun-soaked island of

Mykonos when he was attacked in July last year, leaving him on life support in an Athens hospital but effectively already "dead".

His parents made the agonising decision to follow his wishes and donate his organs, in the process leading to a massive rise in donor awareness in Greece and saving numerous lives.

By a twist of fate, Doujon's heart was given to Sydney-born Mr Gribilas, whose partner Poppy was also from Sydney. Before the transplant, the couple were preparing for a large Greek Orthodox church wedding in Athens when Mr Gribilas became gravely ill.

With his health rapidly deteriorating they had a rushed marriage at a registry, but now they can have the ceremony they always wanted.

It will be an emotional moment for Oliver Zammit, who as best man will seal his place in the couple's family.

Greek officials last week announced nightclub bouncer Marios Antonopoulos would face trial for Doujon's murder

on January 13 on the island of Lesbos.

Mr Gribilas, who moved to Greece as a 10-year-old, paid tribute to Doujon on his Facebook page.

"Today I live because Doujon was an organ donor," he wrote.

"R.I.P my guardian angel."

Article from the Daily Telegraph



Organ donor ... Doujon Zammit, 20, bashed to death in Greece. Source: The Daily Telegraph

Implant opens new world

TONI Vourantonis discovered the world through a whole new perspective when she recently became one of Australia's first recipients of the next generation of cochlear implant.

Miss Vourantonis, 23, of Bexley, was fitted with the Nucleus 5, described as the world's thinnest and strongest implant.

The Northcott Disability Services support worker was diagnosed as profoundly deaf when she was one.

When she was 15 months, she was fitted with bilateral hearing aids, but admits she was a stubborn child.

"My poor mother had to rummage through the bins to find my hearing aids as she could hear the aids whistling and chased me around trying to put them on," she said.

When she turned five, Miss Vourantonis attended a hearing support unit and was placed in a mainstream year 3 class.

"Changing schools and integrating was a very traumatic and scary experience for me, because I was introduced to a larger classroom with lots of students and I wasn't used to such a busy environment," she said.

"I was extremely embarrassed using my FM system as kids my age at that time didn't have a clue what it was.

"It took a while before I made new friends in primary school but I had wonderful support from teachers, especially my itinerant teacher, who had made my stay in the new primary school much more comfortable and enjoyable for me."

Miss Vourantonis admits there were some perks.

"There were lots of good memories, especially teachers forgetting to take off their transmitters while going outside of the classroom, so I could hear them talking to other teachers," she said.



Noise works: Toni Vourantonis has the latest generation cochlear implant. Picture: Jane Dyson

"I gossiped to my classmates and we all had a good laugh, then pretended that nothing happened upon the teachers' return."

Miss Vourantonis' hearing deteriorated dramatically during her teens and at 16 she received her first cochlear implant.

"That was a life-changing experience," she said. "The audiologist taught me how to use the cochlear implant and I started to hear my own voice.

"I could hear the tap water running from the front of the house.

"I picked up sounds that I never heard before and I was very grateful for the gift I've been given to hear."

Miss Vourantonis said her life has been turned around.

"I have become more confident and I have more opportunities in work situations and I feel I can tackle anything," she said.

BY MARK BARBELIUK
Article from The Leader



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