

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Residents share survival stories ahead of Donate Life Service of Remembrance

The similarities between Toowoomba mother Justine Bruggemann and Inglewood farmer Roy Petzke are not immediately obvious.

However, both individuals share a similar story of survival and sacrifice.

In 2000, Mr Petzke was the recipient of a heart transplant, and 15 years later Mrs Bruggeman received a liver transplant.

They now share a common ground that only organ and tissue recipients can understand.

Both Mr Petzke and Mrs Bruggeman will share their unique but similar stories at an upcoming Donate Life Service of Remembrance on Thursday 2 June.

The annual event is a chance to reflect upon the act of organ and tissue donation and how this gift affects those who receive these donations. The service is also a chance to acknowledge the previous year's organ and/or tissue donors and their families.

Mr Petzke has been attending the annual service for many years, but this year he looks forward to sharing his story and publically saying "thank you".

"I was told I had little to no chance of survival without a transplant and I was given less than a month to live," Mr Petzke said.

Faced with such short-time frames, remarkably Mr Petzke got the call-up within two weeks. He was then flown to Prince Charles Hospital via Goondiwindi Hospital to receive his new heart.

"I remember looking out over the countryside and telling myself to take it all in," he said. "I wasn't sure that I would see that sight again."

For Mr Petzke, his heart transplant was more than just lifesaving, it was life altering.

"Because my heart so enlarged, my lungs didn't have enough room to expand. But once the pressure on my airways went away after the transplant, I was breathing better than ever."

With his new found breath, Mr Petzke took up sports with gusto and went onto compete at the National and World Transplant Games collecting 20 medals across badminton, squash and tennis. It also means he has been able to return to work on the farm and with the local Inglewood rural fire service.

"None of this would have been possible without my new heart," he said. "It's taught me not to take anything for granted."

It's a sentiment he shares with fellow recipient Mrs Bruggeman and her family.

For 17 years, Mrs Bruggeman had lived with the autoimmune condition, primary biliary cirrhosis, commonly known as PBC.

Mrs Bruggeman's nursing workmates were none the wiser that she was dealing with daily fatigue, nausea, arthritis and the commonly referred to 'fuzzy head' - all caused by a failing liver.

With her condition worsening, Mrs Bruggeman was placed on the list for a liver transplant. It was an agonising 18 month wait until she received her phone call with news that a matching donor liver was available.

"It's only when I look back now, do I realise how unwell I was," she said. "Not a lot of people knew, but now I get people telling me how healthy I look.

"I'm in a good place now and by speaking at the Service of Remembrance, it's one way that I can say thank you."

Many Donate Life Services of Remembrance are held across the nation each year, with the Toowoomba event coordinated by Toowoomba Hospital's clinical nurse consultant for organ and tissue donation, Liz Hill.

She said the annual service was not only a chance to reflect and be thankful, but also a chance for local organ/tissue recipients and donor families to catch up each year.

"Anyone who has a connection to organ and/or tissue donation is more than welcome to attend," Ms Hill said. "That includes people who have received a life-saving transplant or people whose family members have donated their tissues and/or organs."

The Donate Life Service of Remembrance will be held at St Vincent's Hospital Chapel, Scott Street, Toowoomba, on Thursday 2 June from 6.30pm. The short service will be followed by a light supper in the hospital cafeteria.

Alongside Mrs Bruggeman and Mr Petzke, Toowoomba resident Shelley Myatt, who lost her husband and daughter in a tragic car crash in 2012, will also speak at the service. Ms Myatt's husband was an organ donor and his donation went onto help the lives of five individuals.

For more information about the service contact Liz Hill on 4616 5139 during business hours.

**Caption:** Toowoomba Hospital's clinical nurse consultant for organ and tissue donation Liz Hill with this year's Donate Life Service of Remembrance guest speakers Roy Petzke and Justine Bruggeman.

## **Ends**

**MEDIA:** Contact Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service Media Team 4699 8547, 0438 702 328 or [DDHHS\\_media@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:DDHHS_media@health.qld.gov.au)