

Ohio face transplant patient meets donor's family

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(AP) -- The nation's first face transplant patient has said a donor saved her from a life of eating and breathing through a tube, but until this weekend she knew her only as a woman who died in 2008.

Two years after Anna Kasper's face was merged with the remnants of Connie Culp's, Kasper's family decided to reveal she was the donor, so that others can know the generous woman they loved.

"She'd give her time. She'd give her money. She gave a lot of things she didn't have to other people," Kasper's husband, Ron Kasper, told The Plain Dealer newspaper in Cleveland. "When they asked about the donation, we knew it was what she would want to do."

The Kaspers and Culp met for the first time this weekend.

Culp, 47, has been thanking her donor since the surgery, but she had never been able to name her. She told The Plain Dealer that the get-together went well after some initially awkward moments.

"They're just really nice people," Culp said. "It's awesome, how much we have in common."

Kasper's 23-year-old daughter, Becky Kasper, says she can see part of her mother in Culp, though their bone structures are different.

"I can definitely see the resemblance in the nose," she told The Plain

Dealer. "I know she's smiling down on this, that she's very happy."

Culp's husband shot her in the face in 2004. The blast destroyed her nose, shattered her cheeks and shut off most of her vision. Her features were so gnarled that children ran away from her and called her a monster.

After Kasper died of a heart attack in 2008, a donor specialist approached Kasper's family about donating her face.

Her family had already agreed to give away her heart, her kidney, her liver and her eyes.

"My mom would say, 'Hell if I can't use it and somebody else can, they can have it,'" Becky Kasper recalled.

Kasper's family decided to donate her face within minutes. She was an organ donor and she was a match. She wanted to be cremated, so there were no worries over an open casket.

"But the overriding factor was we knew it was what Anna would've wanted," Ron Kasper said.

Kasper lived in Lakewood, Ohio, with her family. She cared for nursing home patients, delivered pizza and cleaned offices.

After meeting with Culp this weekend, Ron Kasper told The Plain Dealer that the two women share much more than a face.

"Connie's like Anna in a lot of ways," he said, "as far as her personality and how much she enjoys life and how she smiles and is still able to have such a great attitude after everything she's been through and she takes everything in stride."

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