

## **The Story of Jacqueline's Gift**

In 1998, Karen and Steve Leaffer experienced firsthand the devastating impact when those entrusted with women's health lack the information needed to diagnose and treat heart disease in women. A lack of research and understanding resulted in a child's hope, Jacqueline's hope, never realized.

As an expectant mother of twins, Karen developed a rare heart condition called peripartum cardiomyopathy, whose symptoms can be mistaken for typical symptoms of pregnancy, and if untreated can lead to congestive heart failure and death. At the end of her pregnancy, congestive heart failure put Karen in the hospital for an emergency Cesarean section. Karen and one of her twins survived. Jacqueline did not. She died in her mother's arms 11 days later, as her mother sang her lullabies and promised she would never be forgotten.

The Leaffer family took action by making women's health a priority, turning their personal tragedy into a gift of hope for other mothers and daughters. Their significant contribution to the Center for Women's Health Research, made in honor of their daughter Jacqueline Marie, was intended to cause systemic and ongoing change in understudied areas of women's health. They gave all of the resources they had set aside to build Jacqueline's life: her college fund, her wedding fund, her safety net, based on a belief that the Center would help shape the future of women's health care. This gift, which came to be known as Jacqueline's Gift, became their daughter's gift to future generations of women.

Jacqueline's Gift, of \$300,000, was originally made to provide the start-up capital needed to launch the Center. Due to a generous match by the Center's community-led advisory board, the Center has enjoyed a successful launch, without expending any part of Jacqueline's Gift. Therefore, Jacqueline's Gift has been re-designated to ensure the continued stability, growth and innovation of the Center.

Jacqueline's parents, Karen and Steve, subsequently augmented Jacqueline's Gift to the Center with Jacqueline's Wish, a \$25,000 endowment that funds an award to recognize early career researchers at the University of Colorado School of Medicine for their research in women's heart disease. This endowment was given so that Jacqueline's legacy includes inspiring a future generation of scientists to devote their careers to this important area of research.

In honor of what would have been Jacqueline's 13th birthday, and her transition to womanhood, the Jacqueline Leaffer Foundation has pledged another gift of \$250,000 to the Center. This gift will be used to fund research in the area of cardiomyopathy as it presents in women, with the hope of preventing the premature deaths of women and their girls from this deadly disease in the future.

Knowledge without action or accountability does little to benefit mothers and daughters like Karen and Jacqueline. Information must be applied to make a difference. Contributions-both financial and scientific-accelerate the Center's research, training and educational outreach work, as well as build operational capacity. As the Center closes the knowledge gap in women's health research, women-and the girls who follow-will be able to make better informed healthcare decisions and lead longer, healthier, more productive lives.