

BC3 student graduates 23 days after life-saving liver donation to mom

“It was extremely important for me to have her know I received this degree,” daughter says

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(Grove City, PA) A Grove City woman who 23 days earlier had donated a portion of her liver to save her mother’s life graduated with an associate of applied science degree from Butler County Community College on Wednesday night.

Mother Teresa Oakes, 53, also Grove City, was thrilled that her 27-year-old daughter became the first of her three children to receive a college degree.

“I am really, really proud,” Teresa said of her daughter, Erika, who studied at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage and at BC3’s main campus in Butler Township.



Erika Oakes is shown at BC3’s annual commencement exercises on Wednesday, May 17, 23 days after she donated part of her liver to save the life of her mother, Teresa. Erika and her family live in Grove City.

Teresa was diagnosed with diabetes seven years ago. She said she began to feel weak in August.

“I noticed I slept more,” she said. “I was not up to par, not doing what I normally do. My activities slacked off, and I didn’t care whether I did anything or not.”

Tests administered by her primary care physician revealed her liver enzyme numbers were “way off.” Teresa needed to see a specialist. That’s when she learned she had hereditary non-alcoholic cirrhosis – the same condition that affects son, Brandon 33, and daughter, Tara, 25.

“My liver was shot,” Teresa said. “It was failing. If I did not get a transplant, I would eventually die.”

The grandmother of two “did not know whether I would ever see them grow up.”

She needed a transplant from a living donor. Brandon and Tara were not candidates because of their health conditions.

That left her eldest daughter, the single mother of a 14-month-old son.

“She was a near-perfect match,” Teresa said. “Erika was very adamant that she wanted to do this. I did not want to use her because of her little boy Corbin. I was afraid something might happen and he would be motherless.”

Erika is a 2008 graduate of Grove City Area Senior High School who works full-time as a supervisor at a Grove City College cafe.

“My mother did not have an option that I was going to be tested,” Erika said. “We knew she would need a transplant. My son deserved to know his grandmother. She is extremely loved and I wanted him to have the same experience I did with my grandmother.”

Erika’s grandmother, Shirley, passed away in 2011.

“She was a very prominent figure in my life,” Erika said. “It did not matter what we did, she supported us. I get a lot of my attitude from her, being strong-headed and willing to help people.”

Teresa agrees that her daughter is giving and headstrong.

“She’s a worker. She put herself through school. She is so loving with Corbin. He goes everywhere with her except to school and to work. What Corbin needs, Corbin gets, even if she has to suffer.”

Corbin needed a grandmother.

“She wanted me around to be able to enjoy her son,” Teresa said. “I had no choice.”

They decided at Christmas that Erika would donate a portion of her liver to save her mother’s life.

On April 24, at the Thomas E. Starzl Transplantation Institute in Pittsburgh, surgeons removed the entire right lobe of Erika’s liver and placed it within her mother.

Both women cried when they saw each other after the operation.

“There are no words to describe it,” Teresa said. “No words to describe it. It is a life-saving memory.”

Erika, who was taking her final two courses at BC3 in April, was hospitalized for a week.

While her mother was recuperating on Wednesday night, Erika Oakes was among the 240 BC3 graduating students to attend BC3’s 49th commencement exercises.

“It was extremely important for me to have her know I received this degree,” Erika said. “I honestly don’t know what I would do without her.”