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# Hilton Head council honors the quiet mettle of Lois Richardson

**L**ois Richardson was honored by the mayor this week for literally giving herself up for others.

When she was a young woman, Lois donated one of her kidneys to save the life of her youngest child.

"She serves as an example to all of us

of how safe and rewarding a living organ donation can be," reads part of the commendation by Hilton Head Island Mayor Drew Laughlin, made during National Donate Life Month.

For Lois, the organ donation was one more challenge in a pioneering life. It

was appropriate for the Town Council to recognize the mettle of a woman, now almost 95, who has been a quiet but steady pillar on which modern Hilton Head stands.

Norris and Lois Richardson moved to the island in 1956, building a flamingo

pink home on a \$1,500 oceanfront lot. Norris gave up a good job and idyllic small-town life to uproot his wife and children. Mary Katherine had just graduated from junior high school.

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## METTLE

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James N. "JR" Richardson Jr. was 11, and little Collins was 4. "Norris had a vision," Lois says.

He paid \$50,000 for a lot near Coligny Circle and built a little supermarket. Some days his only customers were the wild hogs that tore up the flowers. Norris even went to work for homebuilder Bobby Woods, digging septic tanks, while Lois ran the store.

Lois became the first employee of an interesting young man with big plans to develop the island. She did bookkeeping and typing for Charles E. Fraser and the fledgling Sea Pines development.

First Baptist Church formed in the Richardson home, with Sunday school upstairs and preaching in the open ground floor.

Lois has hosted a Tuesday morning Bible study in her home for 45 years.

Norris relentlessly plugged away at his vision. Slowly, his work paid off as the community grew. He built a laundromat, a pharmacy, a barber shop and other stores around the supermarket. It grew into Coligny Plaza, with more than 60 shops and restaurants.

Mary Katherine married a local boy, Billy Toomer. JR Richardson, whom his mother calls Jimmy, also got his first job with Charles Fraser. He used that influence to develop Windmill Harbour near the island and Westbury Park in Bluffton.



Submitted photo

**Hilton Head Island Mayor Drew Laughlin presents a commendation to Lois Richardson at the Town Council meeting Tuesday.**

Collins was 14 when he became ill. It was a decade before the island had a hospital. It took a number of trips to other cities to get the diagnosis that Collins needed a new kidney to survive.

Collins and his mother traveled to Richmond, Va., for their simultaneous surgeries at the Medical College of Virginia. Collins was there a long time, and everyone loved him, including a visiting doctor from South Africa. In a few months, Christiaan Barnard would conduct the world's first human-to-human heart transplant.

Lois clings to precious memories of the things they did together when Collins got home. They went to California, where Collins was thrilled to walk through an arch in a giant redwood tree. He got to own a moped. And he made a public profession of his faith.

But later, Collins' body re-

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jected his mother's kidney. He was fortunate to get a second transplant, but Collins died in January 1969. He was 17.

This week, Lois looked back on it with the satisfaction that her donation extended her son's life.

Still, she said that losing Collins was harder even than losing her husband. And with that she tells a story of faith. She tells of walking on the beach shaking her fist at heaven and thinking she should walk out into the surf and keep on going.

In a little red book she calls "Love Letter to My Children," Lois writes:

"The year 1969 was a very difficult year for me. Norris was in the hospital about two months that summer. Jimmy had to go to Vietnam. It was very difficult for me to take care of the business and grieve over my losses.

"That is when I really learned that God is sufficient for all my needs. As I walked on the beach one day feeling very sorry for myself and asking God 'WHY?' he answered me and let me know in a special way that as long as I am searching for answers, it draws me closer to him.

"From that time on, I began to heal."

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