

## Nurse helps those in need by literally giving of herself

By [Michael Tsai](#)

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Nov 24, 2012



**Susie  
Lee**

In a profession in which the call to give is as constant as an IV drip, it's not unheard of for dedicated health care workers to dig deep within and find nothing left to offer.

Not so for career nurse Susie Lee, who on duty and off has devoted more than mere blood, sweat and tears to better the lives of those around her.

"I tell people not to be afraid to give to other people if it will help to improve their life," says Lee, a native of Buffalo, N.Y.

Caring for people is second nature to Lee, who says she inherited the trait from her father, a medic during the storming of Normandy in World War II.

"Once, when I was about 10, I had an accident at home and had a bad cut," Lee recalls. "My father took me into the bathroom and taped it up. It always stayed with me how calm he was."

Lee also got a lesson in the uncertainty of life two years later when her father asphyxiated on fumes and died while trying to clean paint off a stairwell at home.

The family survived the tragedy, and Lee went on to attend D'Youville College, earning a bachelor's degree in nursing in 1977.

An aunt and uncle lived in Hawaii and had invited Lee to join them after graduation. And so, with \$280 and three suitcases, Lee took the first airplane ride of her life all the way to the Aloha State.

Over the last 35 years, Lee has honed her nursing skills in pediatrics, recovery room and home health care. She now holds dual assignments as a wound-care specialist and employee health nurse for Hawaii Health Systems Corp. She also serves as an after-hours call nurse for St. Francis Home Health Care Services.

Lee is married to HHSC Oahu CEO Vincent Lee and has two daughters, Melissa and Nicole, from a previous marriage.

Last year Lee learned that her husband's cousin Larry was starting dialysis. She also learned that she and Larry were the same blood type. Gears turned.

"I decided to get tested to see if I was a match," Lee says. "I figured I probably wasn't, but it would make me feel better and it would let Larry know that someone cared."

As it turned out, Lee was a match. And in June 2011 she donated one of her kidneys to Larry.

To anyone who knew Lee well, the decision wasn't a total surprise. Years earlier she had undergone hours-long procedures to donate lifesaving white blood cells to a young Filipino boy and an older Japanese lady.

Six months after the transplant, Larry died of unrelated causes. Lee says she doesn't regret her decision.

"You can't make decisions out of fear of the what-ifs," Lee says. "Being a living donor is something that is doable, something that can you can do to improve another person's life."