Active and healthy since a very young age, Aleta Kellam embodies the vision of your typical high-energy California girl. She rarely misses a beach day with her dog, enjoys shopping, carries a pretty heavy class load in college and is constantly on the go with her boyfriend. This is, after all, her second shot at life and at age 56, she is living and loving more than ever before.

The path to her second life started over 13 years ago when she contracted the SARS virus from a colleague who was visiting from overseas. In just a short week, Aleta was in grave condition, unsure if she was going to live or die. But she fought hard, and while she beat the virus that very nearly cost her life, it left her in congestive heart failure, a condition that continues to get progressively worse over time and has no cure.

For several years after her diagnosis, her cardiologist managed her heart failure condition with medications and for 10 years, she lived her life normally. But after 10 years, problems started to evolve, and over the next year, she helplessly declined. When she was finally admitted to USC Medical Center in Los Angeles, they explained her only hope was a heart transplant but the wait for a suitable donor heart for her blood type could be longer than her heart could hold out. Her situation was dire.

Aleta was not ready to quit. She spent the little energy she had left to research options online and found out about a revolutionary heart pump that can be used to bridge a person to heart transplant or sustain them long-term. Her doctors agreed that this was her only hope, and she was implanted shortly thereafter with the HeartMate II® Left Ventricular Assist Device (LVAD). The HeartMate II is a small, implantable heart pump that assists the heart in pumping oxygen-rich blood throughout the body. Aleta’s energy came back quickly, and she made a rapid recovery following surgery. Since then, Aleta is living her life anew again.

Aleta has been most amazed by the many blessings that have come into her life since the HeartMate II. Whether running on the beach with her dog or spending time with her boyfriend, Aleta has been given the time to appreciate the small gifts in life. With more years in life, and more life in her years, Aleta and HeartMate II are creating a new path together.