

A Family Affair

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By Robert Ziegler

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Kidney failure has been a whirlwind experience. I knew I was someday going to need dialysis and even had an access put in three months before needing treatment. I had never been to a dialysis unit, so I didn't know what to expect. After receiving treatment for two months, I realized I would be able to manage the requirements of dialysis. I didn't take much time to consider the impact this would have on my family. After all, I was sitting in the chair for almost four hours three times a week. But, I came to learn that it impacted my family more than I was aware.



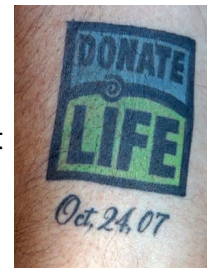
I know an illness can either bring a family together or tear it apart. My illness was making me see that my family cared about me and was willing to do anything to improve my quality of life. After I was able to comprehend that my family was willing to give me a kidney, I just had to be willing to accept it. My daughter, Jennifer, had a hard time seeing me rely on dialysis to live. My 7 year old granddaughter, Destiny, was my constant strength and would sit by my chair at dialysis and wasn't fazed by it. She thought this was just a normal way of grandpa staying healthy.

I understood the extent of my family's concern after my first transplant clinic visit. My doctor had signed me up to be a candidate for a transplant. I received a letter in the mail from UCLA about the clinic. The letter was very specific, telling me they would be taking a LOT of blood, that I might get called for a transplant as soon as my labs cleared, and I got an okay from the transplant doctor. The letter also stated to bring any concerned family members. I called to confirm my appointment and my family readily agreed to go.

I had no idea what to expect because I was still trying to understand the impact of being on dialysis. Transplant was such a new concept to me. At the clinic, they told us it could be a seven year wait for a deceased donor transplant and living donation was an option. They spoke about the pros and cons of donation and provided a phone number if someone wanted to donate a kidney. I still get choked up when I say this, but all three of my children made the call. My wife, Cindy, didn't think she would be a match because we are not blood relatives, so she didn't call. She always claims she was going to call! We've been happily married for 31 years and she's still the love of my life.

The transplant doctor called a meeting for my whole family and told us that since I was AB positive, I was easy to match and they were all possible donors. So who would donate? The doctor helped us make a decision. My daughter was not the top choice because she might still have more children, so he suggested my oldest son, Robert, be tested and my other son, Michael, be the second choice.

Robert went through a lot of testing, including a psychological test to make sure that he was sure about his decision to donate. Six months later, on October 24, 2007, I received the most incredible gift from my son. He was out of the hospital within 24 hours; I was in for a week. Today, my son and I are doing great and to memorialize my one-year anniversary, I had a tattoo put on my arm to remind me of the special gift I received. I thank my family and especially my son for all of their love, encouragement, and support. I'm the luckiest man alive. Dealing with my kidney disease has indeed been a family affair.



About the Author

Robert Ziegler is a Los Angeles native who worked for Courtaulds Aerospace in Glendale, CA, for 17 years. He has three children and one granddaughter (Destiny) who consistently beats him at the game 'Sorry.' Robert enjoys volunteering for the Renal Support Network on a regular basis. For 31 years he has been married to his wonderful wife Cindy. They currently live in Glendale, CA.

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