

Transplant launches new journey



[Peter Jackson](#)

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I could speak of that fateful day, almost eight years ago, in the emergency department of St. Clare's hospital with Dr. Ramen showing me Peter's chest X-rays and stating he had either advance-stage lung cancer or quite possibly an auto-immune disease that at the time seemed impossible to pronounce or remember - Wegener's granulomatosis.

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As it turned out, his disease was the latter. After the disease had reared its ugly head, it damaged Peter's kidneys before settling into remission. Thus began another journey.

In his previous columns, Peter explained the nuts and bolts of kidney disease as well as the success of his recent transplant. Being both the spouse of and a donor to a person in renal failure, I aim to offer some insights of my own.

Initially, when transplant was imminent for Peter, we were scheduled to attend what we affectionately referred to as "Kidney School" at the Waterford Dialysis Site in St. John's.

The amount of information presented was initially overwhelming, but the confidence that our transplant co-ordinator, Lois Tipton, instilled in us both, eased our concerns.

We also met with a nurse who explained the two types of dialysis possible, if necessary, prior to transplant; a nutritionist who thoroughly explained a renal diet to us; and a social worker who provided us with information on services available for both emotional and financial needs.

We graduated and began our lifestyle change that enabled us to continue to the next phase.

For me, the decision to donate to my husband was easy. If we learned anything from his initial illness, it was the ability to sort through what is and isn't important to us in this life.

For me, making decisions was no longer an emotional, gut-wrenching stumbling block. Without wanting to sound flippant, I was emotionally liberated. Reason came into play and it strengthened me immensely.

Mother's help

I would also be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the courage, strength and faith that was passed on to me by my mother, Elizabeth Ryan, and by both our families. Thus began the litany of tests.

The initial tissue matching was done two years ago, and when Peter's kidney function deteriorated to the stage where transplant or dialysis was inevitable, I contacted Lois Tipton and she started the ball rolling.

With each test, I waited anxiously for the results. I felt like a contestant in some sort of game show waiting to advance to the next level.

Tests involved various types of blood work, X-ray, EKG, 24-hour urine tests, Pap smear, mammogram and colonoscopy (due to family history of breast and colon cancers), ultrasounds and CT scans.

The efficiency and professionalism of staff at the renal clinic, the Newfoundland Drive Family Practice and the various labs strengthened my conviction. Despite knowing I could possibly be rejected as a donor, I remained focused and jokingly said that regardless of the outcome, I would have had one of the best physical checkups of a lifetime.

However, I don't want to trivialize the process. There were fears. As the final stages approached, my focus on work somewhat deteriorated. I found myself opting out of activities that I would normally be a part of - my headspace just wasn't there.

And then the call came. All things were a go for March 3 in Halifax.

What happened next is hard to sort out - what I thought was my newfound sense of reason took a break and my emotions took over once again.

I thought of my students, Victoria and David, who each had a parent who underwent transplant surgery and how glad I was they had entered my life.

I thought of colleagues who were with me every step of the way and offered nothing but support.

I thought of friends old and new and I thought of Peter, and all seemed right with the world. I was both relieved and anxious at the same time. After more than 20 years together, Peter and I were about to start yet another journey.

I remembered our first year of marriage in London, Ont., where Peter was pursuing a master's degree and I was working as a music teacher. We survived that first year, a new computer and living away from family and friends - we could handle anything. Little did I know that writing a column was part of the bargain.

As for our Halifax experience, there are many to thank: Vicky, Nancy, Brett and Karen in Halifax; Heather, for the surprise visit at the Lodge; the transplant team, our

new friends from Point Pleasant Lodge, the support staff from Newfoundland and Halifax and, more importantly, our families, friends and colleagues.

The care and companionship Mary Ennis offered my mother during our absence will forever be in my heart. My sister Jeanette will never know the level of support she gave to not only us, but to others at the lodge in Halifax.

To fellow donor Theresa from Grand Falls, who gave a kidney to her brother Mike a week after our surgeries: we'll see you and Dave on the golf course.

A big thanks to all those who telephoned, or sent flowers, cards and well wishes.

And now that we're home recuperating, I'd like to say thank you to The Telegram for allowing us to share our story.

To new beginnings.

Sheila Ryan is married to The Telegram's editorial page editor, Peter Jackson. She can be reached by e-mail through pjackson@thetelegram.com. Peter Jackson's column returns April 13.

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