

## Kidney Donation: Take a Break, Get in Shape, Save a Life

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MBA Board of Directors



In May 2007, as a healthy father of three children, I walked into Good Samaritan Hospital. Several hours later, I had successfully donated one of

my kidneys to a dear friend who otherwise faced certain death. As a result of the donation, my friend was able to continue his life as the father of three children, a loving husband, and a generous and active member of the community.

Many of us donate our time, skills, and resources to worthy causes. We find ways to support worthwhile institutions, families, and individuals. We strive to serve our clients and the public interest in an effective, skillful, and dignified manner to help solve problems, achieve results, advance professionalism, and promote mutual respect.

I am proud to be part of the Portland legal community, to serve on the MBA Board of Directors, and to practice family law at Gevurtz Menashe. I write this to encourage others to consider this generous and human act.

In donating or receiving a kidney, the human body cares not about gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, economic status, nationality, or political leanings. There is no bias. Being “a match,” donating, and receiving is about the biological merging of one human to another. The club is a human club.

My kids were 16, 14, and 12 years old at the time. I involved them early in the donation process. It was essential for them to understand the significance of this gift, the risks involved, and for them to have a voice. I am proud that my children supported my desire to donate a kidney.

They each made memorable contributions in their own way - my younger son asked the transplant coordinator if, while removing my kidney, the surgeon could also remove my mobile device from me (it was a Blackberry at the time). My daughter mused about writing a book for children with a parent who either donates or receives a kidney. My older son looked at me one day while I was driving him to school and said, “Dad, if you ever need a kidney, I’ve got your back.”

I went through extensive medical testing to determine if I was a match and to ensure I was healthy enough to undergo this serious surgery. I got in shape, lost weight, and made certain that my cases were covered in my absence (as an aside, if you ever want to guarantee getting a set-over on a case, tell the judge that you are donating a kidney). I also connected with and regularly saw a naturopath, an acupuncturist, and a mental health professional. I engaged in deeper learning from a scientific and spiritual perspective. I completed an estate plan with great intention and thought.

The surgery was successful. My “former” kidney transitioned perfectly and immediately into my friend’s body. I was told that the surgery and recovery were more complicated for the donor than the donee. I was fortunate - I was home from the hospital in a few days and was off pain killers two days later. I was walking, eating, and sleeping comfortably almost immediately. I was re-engaged at work in less than two weeks and slowly resumed other normal activities.

As attorneys, we are well aware of the potential intended and unintended consequences of our words and actions. That was true, too, with my story. Shortly after our surgery, the Lake Oswego Community Newspaper had a front page story about a woman who needed a kidney. It was

apparent that she would not move up the waiting list fast enough. A neighbor and fellow churchgoer showed her the piece in the Oregonian about a guy in Portland who donated a kidney to a friend and fellow synagogue member. They spoke with their church leaders and a plea was made to the congregation. A fellow congregant stepped up and that woman’s life was saved.

Acts of goodwill can uplift individuals and a community. Following the surgery, people were generous in offering help to me, my kids, and my friend’s family - driving the kids, bringing meals, etc. Several charities benefitted, as people made contributions in our honor. I tell my story to groups and to high school students and hope that it makes a lasting impact on those groups and increases the likelihood that others will consider donating.

Unfortunately, lives are sometimes lost and stories do not always end happily. The mother of one of my colleagues needed a kidney, he was not a match, no other donors were identified, and she lost her life waiting for a donor. In my case, my friend lived for seven and a half years after our surgery before succumbing to cancer.

So, I now have one kidney. What did I give up? Advil and whitewater kayaking. I see a nephrologist twice a year to be sure my insides are functioning properly and there are no warning signs.

I write this to encourage people to consider joining this club. I am available and willing to connect with anyone who is interested in exploring kidney donation. Close to 100,000 people nationwide and 663 people in Oregon are waiting for a kidney. If you are interested in learning more, please visit the Donate Life Northwest website for more information: [www.donatelifenw.org](http://www.donatelifenw.org).

Following the surgery, our rabbi wrote a piece in the synagogue bulletin, which often comes to mind as I move through the blessings and challenges of my life. His message was that while my donation added days to my friend’s life, it would add life to my days. It has.

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