

Our Transplant Story: Living Donation

By Brenda & Ron Maeder, PAC Chairs Hudson Valley



I don't know when we really found out Ron was suffering from kidney disease. He had long ago been referred to a nephrologist when blood work showed a higher than normal creatinine level; all that doctor did was say to Ron "your kidneys are very bad". He offered no treatment, diet or explanation, so Ron stopped going.

In May 2008, Ron injured his knee, a little scrape. It hurt more than it should have. We had out of town guests and a wedding so seeing a doctor was pushed off. By the time he went, it was infected. That was the beginning of what would become end stage renal disease.

Ron and

the doctors could not get the infection to go away. He had multiple rounds of antibiotics and surgeries to clean out the infection then finally his knee replacement had to be removed for 3 months and he was put on an IV antibiotic. Almost an entire year went by; finally the knee was put back in, but the damage was done.

During one hospitalization, Ron almost died. They had pumped him full of fluid to do a test and he coded. He was placed in a medically induced coma. They wanted some tests on his kidneys. The test showed a tumor and surgery was performed. The diagnosis was glomerulonephritis. A new nephrologist was called in. What a difference!!!!

She assessed Ron and referred us for transplant workup at a medical center about 50 miles from our home, as no transplant center exists in our area. Ron was seen there and started the process.

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The transplant coordinator asked me if I wanted to be tested. I really did not think I would be a match, but said “sure”. Amazingly, I was a match, just barely, but enough to transplant.

We started the tests, a year later we were not any closer to transplantation than when we started. Calls to the coordinator frustrated me. She would tell me one thing, then another. I believed she was confusing us with others. She would say Ron was on the list, then say he wasn't. It was then I stared looking elsewhere.

It was July 2010. A national magazine had an article about the 100 best hospitals in the United States. NY Presbyterian at Cornell was number 4 for transplants, in the nation! I wanted Ron to go there. He did not want to go, said it was too far for me to drive, 90 miles from our home.

I was looking for anything that would make him change his mind. I found the Northeast Kidney Foundation coffee hour that met in Albany and we attended for the first time in August 2010. From what we heard from other people “if it doesn't feel right go someplace else”, that was the help I needed to get him to switch transplant centers.

Our appointment was for August 20th. They moved quickly, I was impressed. When all our tests were done, we were given a transplant date of November 11th.

Transplant day arrived, we got up at 3 am to be there for the operations at 6 am. Mine went really well, amazingly, they took the kidney from my navel. I have no scar. Ron's was a little more difficult, but with the expertise of Dr. Kapur it happened. I left the hospital in two days, Ron in five days.

Then the “challenges” hit. I had thought we could take the train and a cab to the hospital, but public transportation was banned. I was not to be driving and the whole thing seemed overwhelming. I thought “one day at a time”. The first week we managed three trips to NYC with volunteer drivers. By the second week, I was driving the first 20 miles and meeting someone who would drive the rest of the way. We managed, three months went by and our trips to the “big city” became less frequent. We made it!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

We are now 21 months post transplant. Ron is doing very well, so am I.

If I have any wisdom to share, it is “go where it feels right” and take it “one day at a time”. It made a huge difference to us.

Brenda Maeder, Hudson Valley PAC Chairperson

My name is Brenda Maeder and I am a kidney donor. I donated my left kidney to my husband Ron in November 2010. It was truly an amazing experience.

In my BKT (before kidney transplant) life I worked for the Department of Social Services in Dutchess County. I am the proud grandmother of two grandsons and a granddaughter, gifts from my two sons. I take delight in knowing that my son's are doing what they always wanted. One is a professional fire Chief and the other owns a Dairy Queen where I work 3 hours a day. When not working or doing things with my grandchildren, I like to read and travel. My husband and I have made a goal that we want to see all 50 states. Right now we are at 27 and one territory, Puerto Rico. I love finding out about my ancestors and am planning a trip to Ireland and Scotland in the future.

I am happy to be able to help kidney patients. In my former employment I did a lot of outreach and in semi-retirement felt that side of me was missing. Helping others will make me feel whole again.