

A Friend in Need

Recently, one of our colleagues decided to perform a living donation of a kidney to a dear friend of hers. We wanted to give her the chance to tell her story. Names will be changed to protect patients' privacy: the donor will be named Anne and the recipient, Jennifer.

Your friendship must be incredibly special. How long have you known one another?

I have known her probably about 40 years. We worked together in the advertising department for a grocery chain. We hit it off right away and we've been close friends ever since. Distance divided us over the years; she raised her kids in Colorado and she now lives in New York. In fact, I'm excited because I'll be meeting her kids for the first time.

Though we've lived far apart, our friendship remained close. It's really nice when you find a friend like that. Even if you don't talk for a while, you know when you get in touch it's like you were never apart.

How did you find out about Jennifer's condition?

She called me last December and said to me, "You're not going to believe what's going on." She wasn't feeling great for a while, had a checkup and suddenly was told her kidneys were failing. It was a whirlwind. It wasn't correctable, either- she'd have to go on a donor list. After other donors unfortunately fell through, I offered to test.

I kind of had a feeling. I knew when I was testing that it was going to be me.

Is organ donation something you've ever thought about before?

I have it on my license, but I didn't really think too much about it. I spoke with another woman I know who did a live donation. It's been seven or eight years and she has no regrets; she would do it again in a heartbeat. After talking to her, I thought, "yup, we're doing this."

What was it like to consider this choice?

I never really thought of anything negative on my part. I had a lot of outside people ask me, "Oh, what if one of your kids need one?" But when you go through the process, you learn there are a lot of factors doctors consider. They won't give an older person's kidney to a younger person, for example. It wouldn't be considered a match.

I don't have a history of kidney disease in my family, and for my age I'm in pretty good shape. I'm not too concerned about it.

How did you make the final decision? It sounds like, at the end, it was a very easy choice for you.

Oh, yeah, there was never a second thought. At first my family was concerned, but they are totally supportive of me and my decision.

What was the preparation process like?

There wasn't too much in terms of my own preparation. I've just trying to get into the best shape I can to cut the recovery time down to the shorter end. I'm told four to six weeks, and I'm aiming for four!

What would you say to those on the fence about organ donation?

I would say, do it! I look at it and I've said this to other people who questioned my decision: I hope to God someone would step up for me if I needed it.

The whole testing process is fascinating. They have you working out on the treadmill, they measure your heart recovery, CT scans, and a ton of bloodwork. I even saw images of my kidneys! Your case is presented to a panel of doctors for approval, who assess your evaluations so you can be confident in your decision.

I'm lucky enough to have family living in her area, so we'll be able to spent a lot of time recovering together. I am so happy that I'm able to help her.

We are all very proud of our colleague, coworker, and friend. We wish Anne and Jennifer luck next week and hope they have a swift, speedy recovery!