

Patient Testimonial

“Kidney Carrie”



I am Carrie Flanagan – otherwise known as “Kidney Carrie.” I am 39 years old and have had diabetes since the age of nine. When diagnosed, doctors tell you all the side effects that may happen as a result of diabetes. You know – loss of vision, heart disease, neuropathy and... oh yes, kidney disease and failure.

In 2011, I went to my nephrologist and was informed that my kidneys were functioning at 70 percent. By 2013, I was down to 40 percent. At that point, my nephrologist recommended that I have gastric bypass surgery to help prolong the life of my kidneys. At the time, I weighed approximately 280 pounds. The extra weight was putting a strain on my kidneys. I started my weight loss journey in June of 2013, and my bypass surgery was in November that same year. However, my kidneys took a hit after surgery and I was down to 30 percent function. But because of the surgery, I was able to lose 80 pounds and stay stable at 30 percent for a while.



Carrie and her kidney donor, Keith.

Two years later, in February 2015, my wife Tami and I were getting ready to go on our third cruise. Around this time, my nephrologist had informed me that my kidney function had dropped to 13 percent. He suggested it was time to have a fistula put in and that I should start thinking about dialysis. He also suggested I reconsider going on the cruise. But after rechecking my blood work, I was informed that I was at 20 percent, which meant I did not have to start dialysis right away.

Since I have always been the person who never lets things stop me from doing what I want to do, we went on the cruise a few weeks later. We’ve cruised with this particular group of people for the past two years. We were all listeners of an internet-based talk show, *The Derek and Romaine Show* – also known as “DNR 2.0.” Since 2013, *DNR 2.0* has been doing a cruise for listeners. This is where I met Keith Schindler, my kidney donor.

While on the cruise, I told my friends that this would be my last cruise for a while. I explained that I was going to have to start dialysis soon. One night on the cruise, I was talking to Keith. “If I am a blood match, I will give you one of my kidneys,” he said. The thought of having someone who I had met only two years ago offer to give me a kidney without even thinking about it just filled my heart with love and brought me to tears.

After the cruise, I went to Geisinger Medical Center (GMC) to get on the transplant list for a kidney. I chose GMC because my father had a kidney transplant there 13 years prior. I was impressed with the level of care and compassion they offered him.

In June 2015, I was officially on the transplant list. I was going to wait for a deceased donor, until I found out that my blood type was O. My wait time for getting a kidney went from one to three years to six to eight years because of my blood type. At only 37 years old, I didn't want to be tied to a dialysis machine that long. So, I thought seeking a live donor would be the better option.

I turned to Facebook and posted the following message. *"If anyone is wanting, willing and able to donate a kidney and is blood type O, please get in contact with me and I will give you the number to call GMC."* Even my good friend Romaine, who happens to be one of the hosts of *DNR 2.0*, posted a message on Facebook to help me find a kidney.



Carrie and Keith prepare for surgery.

I had 13 people call about donating. Twelve were listeners of the talk show. The transplant center collected all of the information from the people who called. They had two top choices, which included a woman who was closer to my age and Keith. Due to a variety of factors, GMC had to reject the first choice. So, I called Keith to find out if he was still interested. "Oh yes," he said. "What do I have to do?"

He immediately contacted the transplant center, got a blood type test and found out he was blood type O. As it turns out, Keith was actually a better antigen match than the first choice. In April 2016, Keith flew to Pennsylvania from California to finish his testing. On May 19, we got the call that the transplant was a "go." On June 3, 2016, Keith gave me the gift of life. Everything went smoothly, and while I was supposed to be in the hospital for five days, I got out after three. My blood work instantly improved. I had so much energy and had color back in my face.

I am thankful every day that we went on that cruise four years ago. Keith and I are both doing great and we even got to see each other again on a cruise in February of 2017. We now call each other "kidney twins." Keith is my hero. I wish more people in the world would be as thoughtful and selfless as Keith.

I now take my time and tell my story to everyone who will listen. I have devoted my life to becoming an advocate for organ donation. If my story can help and touch one person and help him or her decide to become an organ donor, then I think it is worth the time it takes for me to reach out to him or her.

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This material was prepared by Quality Insights Renal Network 4 under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). The contents do not necessarily reflect CMS policy. Publication number: ESRD4-121117