

Transplant Trends

Liver, Kidney and Pancreas Transplantation

'Oh, But You Got To Have Friends' *Friends Don't let Friends go in Need – of a Healthy Kidney*



Gloria, left, and her donor, Anne-Marie, signal a vote of confidence, pre-surgery.

Gloria Lillmars and Anne-Marie Nelson

Being deprived of strong coffee was about as much as Anne-Marie Nelson was complaining about just before surgery early in the morning of Dec. 3, 2003, at Mayo Clinic Hospital in Phoenix.

She was on a mission. Although healthy and fit, Anne-Marie insisted on undergoing major surgery she didn't require – all in her determination to donate a kidney to her long-time friend, Gloria Lillmars, Cave Creek, Ariz. Gloria, being prepped for

surgery just one bed away, marveled at the generosity of her friend and vowed to “follow all the rules” to take care of her precious gift.

Gloria had been diagnosed with renal cell cancer in 1994, requiring removal of one kidney. She functioned well until 1997, when the cancer returned in her remaining kidney. She was low on options at that point. Hemodialysis – and later peritoneal dialysis – was then necessary to

continued on page 2

John Duncan and Ken Bykerk “The third time is always the charm,” or so goes the adage. For John Duncan, Tucson, Ariz., that was his fervent hope as he prepared for his third kidney transplant in his brief 37 years on the planet.

He almost decided against it.

“My option would have been to be on dialysis for the rest of my life,” explains John. “But I was very reluctant to go through a third kidney transplant.” That all changed on Wednesday, Feb. 25, 2004, when Mayo Clinic transplant surgeons implanted a new kidney into John and pronounced the surgery a success.

Until then, it had been a rough road for John, punctuated with surprises, false hopes and depression.

It wasn't until he turned 18 in 1985 and was tested to be a bone marrow donor for his older brother, Matt – who was battling leukemia – that John found out he only had one kidney. His one kidney was small –

continued on page 3

Inside

2004 Transplant Reunion	4-5
John Casey	6
Where Are They Now?	6-7
U.S. Transplant Games Planned for Minneapolis	7

“ (continued from page 1)



Celebrating life: Gloria, left, and Anne-Marie, post-surgery

sustain her, a routine Gloria bravely endured for more than six years. The prospect of a kidney transplant was then broached and Gloria agreed it was an option she would consider.

It was over a card game one night in 2003 that Anne-Marie, Scottsdale, Ariz., reminded Gloria that they shared the same blood type. She also told her, with conviction, that she was willing to be her donor if it came to that. After all, the two had been friends since 1971, as neighbors in an apartment complex. That friendship had thrived over the years and Gloria knew that Anne-Marie was sincere in her offer of a kidney.

But when the time came, Gloria confesses that accepting her friend's

noble gesture – and calling her to see if the offer still stood – was one of the hardest things she had ever done.

“How many times in your life do you have the chance to have a potentially life-altering impact like this?”

– Anne-Marie Nelson

“I was just so worried about her health and well being,” Gloria admits.

For Anne-Marie, it was a non-negotiable matter. She went through the myriad of Mayo Clinic tests and was pronounced fit to be Gloria's

kidney donor. Asks Anne-Marie, “How many times in your life do you have the chance to have a potentially life-altering impact like this?”

Just before the two friends were rolled into surgery, the nurses in pre-op opened the curtain that separated Gloria and Anne-Marie. The two were then able to join hands and express their confidence with a victory salute.

Because Anne-Marie's kidney was removed laparoscopically, she was able to

leave the hospital in two days.

Gloria went home within five days and both are now doing very well.

A former health-care technician in an elementary school in California, Gloria is savvy about health issues and now says her quality of life is better and that she is free of renal cell cancer. She is very positive about her long-time prognosis.

Anne-Marie feels healthy and fit and continues in her demanding job as Assistant Vice President of Alumni Relations at Thunderbird, the Garvin School of International Management. As for her immediate future, she laments that she can't donate another kidney, (“I have no more to give away”) but vows to promote the cause of organ donation.

‘Friends’ John and Ken (continued from page 1)

and barely functioning. That discovery explained why he had always been “small and sickly” as a child, recalls John.

But John wanted to help save his brother's life and was approved to donate bone marrow. Matt is healthy today. But three years later, in 1988,

relax and talk about the meaning of life. Their relationship is the kind where the two can almost finish each other's sentences, given that they have known each other since the first day of freshman science class in high school.

On this night, John touched on the idea that he would be seeking a non-

Both Ken and John took their places in the surgery suite at Mayo Clinic Hospital on Feb. 25. Ken, who had laparoscopic kidney removal, was discharged just two days later. John, a sales manager for a water company, spent only four days in the hospital. He and wife, Erin stayed at the Arizona Transplant House while John had follow-up appointments.

Ken continues to gain strength as well. Still, he ponders, “I don't get it. All the Mayo doctors and nurses were thanking me for being John's donor. But for me, it wasn't altruism or an act of courage. Donating a kidney was selfish on my part.”

Selfish? Yes, Ken insists that's what he meant. “I've known John for a long time,” he explains. “I have a connection with him that has lasted for two-thirds of my life. The thought of him dying? No, I'm not ready for that. I'm not done with him yet. I can't let him go.”

“I've known John for a long time...I have a connection with him that has lasted for two-thirds of my life. The thought of him dying? No, I'm not ready for that. I'm not done with him yet. I can't let him go.” – Ken Bykerk

John's single kidney failed. This time it was his sister, Martha, who stepped up to be a family life-saver. Martha became John's living donor. Her healthy kidney functioned well for him for nine years, but John's world again crashed when that kidney began to fail. It was discovered much later that his regular consumption of grapefruit juice made his anti-rejection drugs toxic to his kidney. Dialysis became a way of life for John.

Then came another transplant in 1998, this time from a non-living donor. That kidney failed four years later. Again, dialysis defined him.

This time John came to Mayo Clinic in Scottsdale, where he again was advised to consider a kidney transplant via living donation. He was encouraged when told about the advantages of living donation in terms of the positive outcomes and not being on a waiting list. But living donation does pose the awkward situation of having to rely on family or friends to step up and agree to undergo surgery.

Then one night John and his close friend, Ken Bykerk, Glendale, Ariz., met at a pub to

related kidney donor. Ken, who writes Japanese-style poetry as well as runs a dry cleaning business, says it was a no-brainer. He told himself, “I'm going to be John's donor. The only other person I would let step in my way would be John's wife, Erin. But no one else better even think about it.” Ken was right. He passed all the rigorous tests and qualified to be his friend's donor.

John Duncan

Ken Bykerk



2004 Transplant Reunion Party

It was all about sunshine, reuniting with patients, caregivers, friends and family and a good time. It was the Gift of Life Transplant Reunion in November 2003. Following are only a few of the images that were captured on film at the Arizona Transplant House that day.



Kidney and pancreas patients enjoy the balmy November weather.



Kidney recipient Charles Johnson and wife chat with Raymond Heilman, M.D.



L-R: Tom Davie, Dr. Hugo Vargas, Tom Byrne and Susan Vargas



Dr. and Mrs. Gene Gary Gruver, Tucson. Dr. Gruver is a kidney recipient.



Liver patients were well represented at the Transplant Reunion event in November at the Transplant House.



Mayo's youngest liver transplant patient Alana Bonillas, 18, right, and Ron Jones, who, at age 72, was the oldest liver transplant patient.

Where are They Now?

John Casey – Embracing Life Post-Transplant

Remember liver transplant patient John Casey (featured in the Fall-Winter 2003 edition of *Transplant Trends*)?



John, center, and family in November 2003

John was very ill with primary sclerosing cholangitis and came close to not receiving a liver in time in September 2003. How is he doing now? This recent photo, right, speaks volumes. Compare that with the photo of John, above, at the Transplant Reunion in November 2003. He felt good then, post-surgery, but insists he now feels “great.” John is embracing what he calls a “normal” life now – working, enjoying Arizona’s outdoors and riding his mountain bike.

In a special letter he wrote to the Mayo transplant team, John said:



John Casey in April 2004

Finding the words to thank everyone who helped me and prayed for me has been very difficult...There is no way to give proper thanks...I must show my gratitude by attempting to be a man you would all be proud to know. Thank you from the bottom of my heart...you are all a part of me, for your gift is my life.

– John Casey

Liver Transplant, Sept. 26, 2003

Bernard and Anita De la Torre

Bernard De la Torre and his wife, Anita, Ahwatukee, Ariz., represented patients number three to undergo a living donor liver transplant at Mayo Clinic Hospital on Aug. 14, 2001.

“It wasn’t all that bad. And it felt so good to be able to give life to my husband.”

– Anita De la Torre

Now, reports Anita, she and her husband are doing very well, and life, post-transplant, is good. Bernard, who suffered from cirrhosis and became very ill in 1998, said that one medical center told him a transplant was not an option – that it was for the “rich and famous.” He was 65 at the time. Bernard admits he felt defeated. “Livers are very scarce. I pretty much resigned myself to die.”

But when Bernard heard that Mayo Clinic in Scottsdale was doing living donor liver transplantation, he placed a call. The journey then

began, and Anita stepped right up to be tested to be her husband’s donor. “And here I was, three days away from turning 56, when I would have been over the age where I could donate!” Anita recalls. “I had to get right in there to be tested before my birthday.” She delivered a non-negotiable “no” as a response to their kids who also offered to be tested as their dad’s donor. “No,” insists Anita. “I didn’t want them to be put at risk. That was my job.” (She did allow their kids to be caregivers to both of them following the surgery.)

After passing the rigorous medical and psychological exams, Anita was pronounced fit to be her husband’s donor. The surgery was successful and Bernard now continues to work part-time as an aircraft inspector.

About Anita’s gift of part of her liver, Bernard says, “It’s so noble of her. It’s hard to put into words.” As for Anita, she’s proud. “It wasn’t all that bad. And it felt so good to be able to give life to my husband.”

50th Anniversary of Organ Transplantation To be Celebrated at U.S. Transplant Games

The 2004 U.S. Transplant Games, sponsored by the National Kidney Foundation (NKF), will be held from July 27 to Aug. 1 at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. This event attracts transplant athletes from all 50 states who compete for gold, silver and bronze medals in 13 different sports.

The five-day event also features programs and workshops for families of living and non-living organ donors and transplant medical professionals.

The 50th anniversary of transplantation (dating back to when the first successful kidney transplant between identical twins took place in 1954) will be celebrated at the Transplant Games.

For information about how to register or other events, log on the www.kidney.org or call the Kidney Foundation at (800) 622-9010.

Outcome Statistics: Kidney Transplantation	
Total Transplants 6/99 - 3/31/04	229
Living Donor Transplants	159
Current 1-year graft survival rate	90.50%*
Current 1-year patient survival rate	96.40%*
Current 30-day patient survival rate	99.00%*
Current 30-day graft survival rate	94.90%*
Median length of hospitalization	5 days
*www.ustransplant.org	

Outcome Statistics: Liver Transplantation	
Total Transplants 6/99 - 3/31/04	194
Living Donor Transplants	31
Current 1-year graft survival rate	88.24%*
Current 1-year patient survival rate	90.24%*
Current 30-day patient survival rate	98.78%*
Median length of hospitalization	7 days
*www.ustransplant.org	

Attention Physicians – 24-Hour Physician Referral Line: 1-800-344-6296 or 1-800-446-2279



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