

# How Transplant Changed My Life Forever



**By Adrian Ropp,**  
DPC Patient Ambassador

It was Christmas and I was home to visit my parents for the holidays. It was the first time I had traveled there in a year without my dialysis equipment or a schedule to visit a clinic. A brave police officer named Albert had recently lost his life, but he had registered as an organ donor. Because of this, I was celebrating a Christmas I had not expected. It happened (and believe me, it is a story that would take this whole article) that my savior's family - his wife Lori and their three children, lived in my parents' hometown. We had made plans to meet for the first time during my trip and my wife, Jennifer, and I pulled into her driveway with some amount of nervousness and excitement.

The nervousness was not warranted. Lori could not have been kinder, and we talked for hours. At one point, Lori asked a very important question. Sitting across from us in her cozy living room, she inquired, "How has your life changed since the transplant?"

The standard things applied here. I no longer had a kitchen full of dialysis supplies delivered every month and I didn't have to carry a heavy suitcase with the machine. I was gaining weight again, my health problems were receding and I wasn't on a fluid restriction. (Truth be told, it took me months to feel comfortable gulping water again.) My blood pressure dropped into the normal range, I didn't have swelling in my legs, and my energy was improving. I had a wonderful physical change.

What is less obvious is the ways it change my soul. I often tell people I

am not the same human being I was before my second chance. For one thing, I appreciate everything more. I knew I only had a few weeks left and I had been saying goodbye to people, mourning the experiences I wouldn't have with my family, and trying to figure out how to talk to my Jennifer about some really serious plans that needed to be made. The gratitude is abundant and takes so many forms. I think often of the nurses at my dialysis clinic and how they kept me positive when the chips were down. (I still visit them every so often, they are family now.) Trees and flowers have bright colors and every smell and taste in the world is something amazing and wonderful.

I also had a chance to reassess my priorities. I didn't spend nearly enough time making memories with my wife and far too much time living to work. With this new lease on life, I've swapped that. Time is the currency we all have to spend, and I want to spend mine on memories, not things. We talk often about experiences we want to have and places we would love to see. I think it helped our relationship and rekindled some of the love we had for each other. After all, I didn't go through the tough times alone. I always had a partner ready to pick up the pieces.

I think often about people on dialysis and their need for heroes. I remember sitting in the chair in clinic and staring at the exit door, imagining some team on the other side of that door was working diligently to find my match. I want to be the advocate they're hoping for. I know that only 1 in 3 people who need a transplant receive one, and I made a vow that in my lifetime that number is going to improve. I find groups like Dialysis Patient Citizens and volunteer. I share my story. I even

created a Facebook group where I share raw and important details of my journey. I believe that personalizing this story will make more people want to donate.

What is a life worth? Everyone is precious and deserving of the experiences of this world. For me, I have created stories for Disney, Pixar, Star Wars, and Marvel, and drawn characters such as Bullwinkle, Casper, and Underdog. My life saving gift means I have another chance to spread joy and kindness to the world with my art. I am more driven than ever to do so and if it wasn't for people like Albert and Lori, my artistic contributions to the world would have been cut short.

I'm still learning a lot about myself, but I'm so excited to do so now. I'm more confident in making life choices because I know what I value. The other stuff is just noise. I've made some difficult choices to not associate with people who don't value me. And, importantly, I've learned that I get to set my worth. I don't need to rely on others to determine that.

Organ donation and supporting measures to increase dialysis patient care are amazing and heroic gifts that can, and do, change lives. Everyone has a story. Everyone is a son or daughter, husband, wife, or best friend to someone. My wish is that every kidney patient gets a chance to value those connections as they should.