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Kidney Transplant a Colossal Success

Ask anybody—H.Q. Wrampelmeier is normally so utterly indefatigable that she makes the Energizer Bunny seem much more like a tortoise than a hare.

So it should have been nothing of an eyebrow-raiser when, in a flurry of post-Thanksgiving-Day activity, she bedecked her home for Christmas, swapping cornucopia for mistletoe before most of her neighbors had time to make turkey soup.

Except, that is, for the fact that such an abrupt seasonal segue is not H.Q.'s usual M.O.

The real reason she decorated early for Christmas is because she wanted to ensure the family's traditions did not become a

casualty of her decision to undergo a rather invasive elective surgery Dec. 12th in Fort Worth.

No hanging anything by the chimney, even with care, after one donates a kidney.

H.Q.'s precious organ that same day was installed very successfully in co-worker and friend Buster Bonjour, and no fictional account of their dual surgeries could have conjured up a happier ending. Both are back at work (Buster comfortably ahead of schedule) in the Center for Teaching & Learning this very day, exactly four weeks removed from the auspicious date of their surgeries—12-12-12.

“The second I woke up from surgery, despite the pain from my incision, I could tell things were going to be different,” Buster said. “The chills that were constant for more than a year were gone and I knew right away I’d be better.”

Buster learned about 18 months ago that he’d somehow contracted Berger’s disease, a disorder that occurs when too much protein is deposited in the kidneys. The affliction is chronic, the damage irreversible.

He underwent six monthly rounds of chemotherapy. Fifty weeks of nightly dialysis followed. The regimen was debilitating, the prognosis disheartening. And then one day the solution became as crystal clear as H.Q.’s penchant for action: a living donor could turn the tide.

“So what do we have to do?” H.Q. wondered in her take-charge, let’s-do-it-now way. “Where do we find a donor?” The wrinkled flag of fate was thus unfurled and, in H.Q.’s account, its creases were smoothed at every twist by divine intervention.

And why not? She jokes that the mere pronunciation of her name—Hortencia Wrampelmeier—could easily have discouraged Patsy Lemaster and Buster from granting her so much as an interview five short years ago when she applied to join them in the Center for Teaching & Learning.

She has worked closely with Buster ever since. That their families grew equally close along the way is at least one reason why H.Q.’s husband and kids didn’t stand in her way when she became the first and only person to go online for consideration as a living donor.

Standing squarely in her way, however, were the long odds of a match; she was neither related to Buster nor of the same ethnicity. But H.Q. is nothing if not tenacious, and the first indications were positive. The folks at Baylor All Saints Medical Center one day asked that both she and Buster concurrently submit authenticated blood samples via Federal Express. The Coffee Memorial bloodmobile just happened to be on campus that day, and they handled everything.

“It was a God thing,” H.Q. says. “I never once thought we wouldn’t be a match because I believe AC brought us together for this.”

Of course many more tests were administered. H.Q. spent three days in Dallas being poked, prodded and counseled on all aspects of being a living donor, and still the verdict was a mystery.

Then one day she got a call. To the amazement of most everyone who doesn’t go by the initials H.Q., they were deemed a perfect match. Recipients’ family members seldom hit the nail so squarely on the head.

The operations were scheduled over the Christmas break, so of course the always-hustling H.Q. took care of all her business and made her way with husband Chris to Fort Worth.

“It was a no-brainer for me,” she said. “What’s not to love about Buster? I would do it again in a heartbeat. My only regret is a kidney doesn’t weigh 50 pounds. I really had hoped to lose a little weight on this deal.”

Incredibly, H.Q. was home within a week to convalesce with family and enjoy that Christmas decor. Moreover, Buster escaped Fort Worth in advance of what had been stated as the best-case-scenario for someone in his condition; he should have been there a month, at least.

Since their return, both have expressed their gratitude at the outpouring of support and goodwill that has come their way from the AC family. Buster’s appreciation naturally extends a tad farther.



How do you thank someone who gives you a kidney?” Buster asks but does not lament. “A card? A few bottles of wine? Nothing I have to give will ever equal what she gave me.

“But I know H.Q. really well. While our friendship is kind of hard to explain, and I know this sounds simple, if nothing changes between us and if I regain my health, it will be all the thanks she’ll ever need.”

With no more all-night dialysis sessions on his slate, the single dad can once again turn his full attention to the second-grade son who shares his home and is so large a part of his life.

It should be noted that Buster’s doctor did draw one conclusion during the post-operative evaluations that led to his early dismissal from confined care. He told his patient that he was in fact the unexpected and very fortunate recipient of a rare “hyperactive kidney.” As a consequence he lifted Buster’s entire slate of dietary restrictions.

Go figure. Let’s see the Energizer Bunny top that.