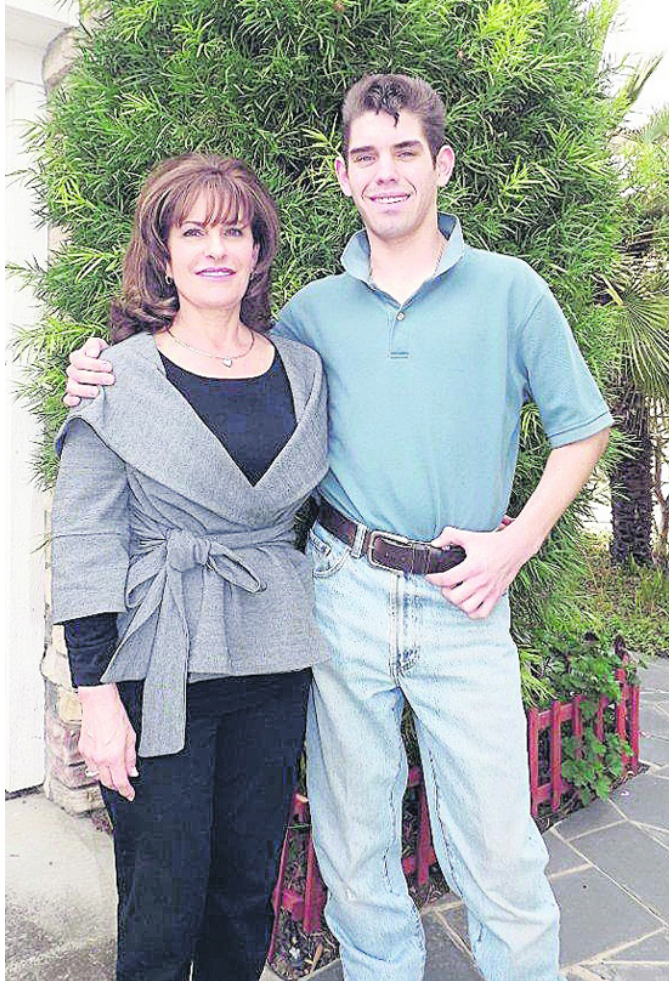


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Saving Grace: A Mother's Enduring Gift of Love

Cathy Dausman



Cynthia Grace with son Wayne Photo Cathy Dausman

This is a Valentine's story about lasting love. No chocolates, flowers or jewelry is involved; unless you count the medical tags Wayne Grace wears tucked inside his shirt.

Grace is a kidney transplant recipient - a success story, despite steep odds, and his mother was his donor. Grace has long lived with Cynthia Grace's kidney working in his body, filtering quarts of waste products and extra water from his bloodstream. Looking fit and healthy, Wayne Grace will celebrate his 20th birthday in March. He was nine months old at transplant time.

It's almost as if Grace has two birthdays. He was a sick baby when he first drew breath in 1992; his mother says the first few months were a blur of hospital time, first in the neonatal ward at Oakland Children's Hospital, and then at San Francisco's California Pacific Medical Center. Wayne underwent daily dialysis while doctors tried to prepare his body for surgery. Eventually, they ran out of time. While both Wayne's parents were a donor match, doctors selected Cynthia because her smaller body and kidney size made the transplant somewhat easier. And "easier" was a relative term, because adult to child kidney donation was just beginning. Had Wayne been born a few years earlier, he likely wouldn't have survived.

The family was referred to Dr. Oscar Salvatierra, who in December, 1992, removed both of Wayne's damaged kidneys and replaced them with one of Cynthia's. "I didn't give it [the donation] a second thought," she said, adding only "I wish I had a third [kidney to donate]." Despite her son's post-surgery setbacks, Cynthia says the donation was "an incredible experience." "Kids catch on [to their condition] pretty quick," she says, and "the [transplant] providers are lovely."

Relaxing at his mother's home, Wayne is at ease with his condition, although he notes that the longest he's gone without hospitalization is two years. Ironically, his last trip to the ER was the result of a skateboarding accident. He's

takes three anti-rejection drugs twice daily; post-op meds are standard procedure for transplant patients.

He won't bring up his transplant unless someone notices the scars on his abdomen and asks about it, but he is adamant about getting people to volunteer as organ donors. And Wayne is clearly exasperated with the large portion of teenage recipients whose transplant fails when they become non-compliant by failing to take their medicine, or follow doctor's orders. He proudly shows off the pink "donor" sticker on his California identification card. Because he was transplanted at such a young age, Wayne may outlive his donor kidney and need a second transplant. But Salvatierra, still active as Advising Dean at Stanford University School of Medicine, expects Wayne's transplant to last "a considerable while." One former transplant is now 35. Salvatierra says he is "truly thrilled at how well Wayne has done" and proud of mother and son's work as volunteers for the California Transplant Donor Network.

Today, Wayne talks about his future as a rancher or a pilot, and hones his Elvis Presley impersonation. In motherly fashion, Cynthia says that her surgery for Wayne was "a gift of life for me!" After years working in the corporate world, Cynthia changed her career path to pursue a Doctorate in clinical psychology. She wants to offer professional support to patients diagnosed with chronic or life-threatening illnesses. The Graces also hope to attend the Transplant Games of America in Grand Rapids, Michigan this July where Wayne could compete as a sprinter. "Your life changes [post-transplant]," Cynthia says. Obviously, it also keeps moving full speed ahead.

Kidney Transplant 101

Compiled by Cathy Dausman

The kidneys are bean-shaped blood- filtering organs, each the size of a fist, located near the middle of the back, below the rib cage, on either side of the spine.

Each contains about one million nephrons, or microscopic filtering "baskets" that transfer wastes from the blood to the collecting tubules of the urinary system.

Most people are born with two kidneys; however transplant recipients and those with renal agenesis (one

kidney) or renal dysplasia (one faulty kidney) lead normal, healthy lives and often only discover that they have one kidney or one working kidney when they have an X-ray, sonogram, or surgery for some unrelated condition.

Some people have a kidney removed due to cancer or other diseases or injuries.

The operation to remove a kidney is called a nephrectomy; medical kidney specialists are nephrologists. (source: National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse)

People whose kidneys are declining in function are said to be in renal failure. Those who cannot, or do not receive a transplant may undergo kidney dialysis, where a machine cleanses the blood and removes impurities on a regular basis.

Transplant organs may come from living or non-living donors. To insure a good match, a potential donor must share the recipient's blood type, and match a number of blood and tissue proteins, called antigens. Kidney transplant professionals currently define at least six specific antigens in each donor and recipient (source: American Association of Kidney Patients).

On January 20, 2012, the Organ Procurement and Transplant Network National patient waiting list showed 59,372 patients waiting for a kidney donor.

Tony Borders, Communications Specialist for the California Transplant Donor Network (CTDN) says the 8.5 million registered donors in state represent only 30% of eligible donors. Registration is offered at Department of Motor Vehicle offices when applying for or renewing a driver's license or receiving a state ID card. Registration is available online, at www.donatelifecalifornia.org or www.donevidacalifornia.org CTDN (www.ctdn.org) also staffs a 24 hour donor referral hotline at 800.55.DONOR.

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