Chapter 13

SPOUSE: A HUSBAND’S VIEW OF TRANSPLANTATION

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May 15, 1993 marked the 20th anniversary of my wife Josephine's kidney transplant. I have never been asked to put down my thoughts or emotions about it, but I will attempt to do so as best I can.

It seems like yesterday that Jo and I were sitting in our backyard just 30 days after she received her new kidney. Ten months of dialysis had ended, and now, as if someone had merely thrown a switch, it was over and a new life was beginning. Fears of complications were always on my mind. Rejection was a word that wasn’t in my vocabulary.

Not all that clear about transplantation—or dialysis for that matter—I always worried that something would go wrong. At that time, lack of understanding about kidney disease was my biggest problem to cope with.

Weeks and months that followed proved to be a little more tolerable in terms of worrying about the unknown. I found myself relating this experience with life’s ups and downs. Sometimes it helped, sometimes it didn’t. At times I would become a bit depressed, looking for answers as to why this problem was on my shoulders. However, being a stable-minded individual (I think), I merely would turn my emotions around by realizing that I was not the patient. Or I would compare my situation with others. Believe me, you always will be able to find someone with bigger problems.

The key was not to let this new experience rule my life. “What will be, will be.” “Don’t worry until it’s time to worry.” These clichés, corny as they may sound, have helped me keep my head about matters.

The loss of a kidney patient, even if not known personally, was, and still is, somewhat depressing. Knowing the patient, of course, is more devastating and takes more time to get over. I know I speak for most spouses in these situations. We go through the hurt and silent periods that kidney patients experience.

I could not write this article without mentioning the great help and support of the KT/DA. When Jo and I first learned of this organization, I
was all for joining. Jo was nervous about it and didn’t make any bones about it. She did not want to be around kidney patients. I certainly understood her feelings, and I’m sure many patients feel the same way. But here’s where I will take some credit. It was my nagging—now that’s a switch!—that got us to join the KT/DA (I might add, with the help of our good friend and patient, George Arena, who assisted us with getting involved).

The KT/DA members have supported me in so many ways. Ironically, some of the sickest patients have been inspirations to me. Incredible as it may sound, it’s true.

Over fourteen years, we have had some memorable times with our fellow members. These times have helped me cope and always look ahead, as I’m sure they have for my wife.

And one other most important fact to mention is the birth of our son, Stephen (now eighteen). Not quite two years after my wife’s transplant, our only child was born. What more can I say?

Fortunately, what I’ve worried about has not come to pass. However, I must thank God for all the wonderful things that have come our way. I can best sum up my feelings by quoting another good friend and kidney patient for over 25 years, Rick Faber, who wrote in the RenalGram several years ago, “...some type of activity is necessary to prevent dialysis from becoming the focus of your life. If you spend 15 hours a week on dialysis, you have 153 other hours during the week when you’re not. Make the best of these.”

Whether it’s dialysis, a transplant, or any other problem that you may encounter through life, these are certainly fruitful words to live by. Enjoy life to its fullest.