

Ordinary People

BY TIFFANY GRIZZLE

Extraordinary Measures

Imagine this. You walk up to a friend of a friend who's having what appears to be a casual conversation. As you get nearer, you realize this person is talking about the fact that they have a degenerative, genetic kidney disease and recently discovered they were going to need a transplant.

What would you do?

This is what Brian O'Donnell did. He asked what blood type his friend John was. He was Type A, same as Brian. Brian said in that instant he knew he might be a match for John. He had to find out if he could be a donor for John, and if he was, he knew he had to help. "I've never had an experience like that before, where I just knew instantly what I needed to do," Brian said.

After their initial conversation, John admitted he wasn't overly optimistic. There had been several other candidates who, for various reasons, had already been weeded out and deemed not a viable match. Every other week or so, John would run into Brian and every other week or so, Brian had good news. "One week, he told me he had spoken with my contact on the transplant team; the next time I saw him, he'd been through a preliminary test and on and on until, one week, Brian was going in for the last round of testing to be considered a match."

Of course, this kind of decision is not one made alone. Brian had to talk to his wife about this, especially since the transplant surgery would leave him unable to work for several weeks while he recovered, and this meant that they would have to close the doors to their local business, O'EM Saab (www.oemsaab.com), for about a month. As Brian put it, they don't own a small business, they own a "micro business" manned by just his wife and himself, but closing up shop for a few weeks wasn't really a factor in their decision. Brian's wife had not even met John or his family until the testing process had begun. Brian said that once his wife met John, his wife and their two year old, she was just as convinced as her husband that, if Brian was a match, this was absolutely something he needed to do.

In November, the news both John and Brian had been waiting for arrived – Brian, who had 100% function in both kidneys was a perfect match for John, who was down to 12% kidney function. Things moved very quickly. Brian and his wife decided that around the holidays, when business is slower anyway, was as good a time as any to close



shop for a month. On December 17th, 2010, the kidney transplant was performed at Presbyterian/St. Luke's and now, just over a month post-op, both Brian and John are doing great. "I had the surgery on Friday and the weekend was a bit uncomfortable, but I felt so much better by Monday and by Wednesday I was up and about," Brian said. "I was amazed at the attention I received; my side of the transplant team was absolutely top notch and I was just so impressed."

Of course, closing the doors to the auto shop did put quite a financial strain on

Brian and his wife, but he admitted that he was hesitant to ask for any help. He didn't have to. The community rallied and threw a fundraiser last month, raising enough money to help dig Brian and his wife out of the hole they were in financially and when I spoke to Brian the second week of January, he was back at work on light duty and feeling fantastic. "I was just completely overwhelmed at the outpouring of generosity and there's absolutely no way I could ever thank the people of Parker enough. The strength of community spirit here is phenomenal."

Aside from a tonsillectomy at the age of 5, this was Brian's only surgery and he sheepishly admitted that he had never even donated blood before because he was a bit squeamish when it came to needles. "This experience has definitely changed my outlook on things and I would encourage anyone who has the opportunity to help to do it," Brian urged. "I never realized how many people are affected with kidney disease and I can still live a perfectly normal life with one kidney."

Most of us aren't as humble or as nonchalant about acts of heroism as Brian O'Donnell is; then again, most of us haven't acted as selfless and heroic as Brian O'Donnell has acted. Perhaps we can follow in his example and help, in whatever way we are able; whether we find ourselves able to be an organ donor someday, we make an appointment to be a blood donor next week or we just find a way to reach out to the community in some way. Those on the receiving end of acts of heroism don't measure the magnitude of the gesture, but the magnitude of its impact; and any selfless act is truly heroic.