

## PRINT-Mom finds new life through living organ donor

April is [National Donate Life Month](#), and few people understand the value of that kind of gift more than April Post of Normal, Illinois. The busy single mom is living her best life because of someone else's sacrifice.

Post has been through it before. In high school, she was diagnosed with kidney failure after a routine physical showed significant loss of her kidney function due to a complication from a birth defect.

Post's dad was her living donor then. She was 13 and thrived for almost two decades. Fast forward and another routine exam over her lunch hour revealed Post, now 45, needed to go on dialysis - again. She was devastated. At the time, her daughter Sophia was only 5 years old.

After trying to work, Post was exhausted and had to go on disability. She depleted her savings while waiting months for her first disability check. What helped her through nearly five years of dialysis? Post says it was her daughter, Sophia, who is now 11, and her church family at College Park Church in Normal.

"They helped me with my daughter, helped me financially every once in a while if I needed help, just prayed with me, yeah."

Until her transplant at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria, Illinois many of Post's days were filled with fear, anxiety and worry. Nights were spent hooked up to an at-home dialysis machine. The ordeal convinced April to follow through on a suggestion from a friend. That friend, Terri Thede, had been part of a six-person living donation chain in 2017 and suggested Post make a video to share on social media. It was a powerful video that had convinced Thede to become a living donor.

Thede shared the video on social media and friend Kelly Stogner, an executive assistant at Heartland Community College in Normal, came across it while scrolling. The video touched Stogner.

"I could see myself in her and I could see her as a mom, making the best of a situation that she had no control over and just wanting to live the best life she could for herself and her daughter. And I thought, 'If I could help, why wouldn't I?'"

Stogner then learned her boss, Heartland President Keith Cornille had been a living donor for a colleague in Wisconsin. Two others at the college also donated their kidneys. All were doing great, so after testing and learning she was a match, Stogner decided to go through with the donation.

The testing included blood work, scans and a psychological evaluation. A few friends who knew prayed for her along the way. Was Stogner worried about what might happen in the future while living with only one kidney?

"I don't do a lot of 'what ifs' like some people say, 'What if you need it later? What if somebody in your family needs it later?' I trust that God will take care of that when the time comes, and it might not ever happen, so I can make a difference now with somebody who needs it, so why wouldn't I?"

## **A Match Made in Heaven**

When Stogner learned in September 2019 that she was a match, she and Thede decided the best way to share the good news was after a Sunday church service. Stogner says it made sense to do a big reveal.

Her church had been with her along the journey, and some people had tested and weren't approved to be a donor, so it was very much an answer to the prayer for the entire congregation. For them to experience that as well I think was exciting for them."

Living donors incur no cost from the testing, surgery or follow-up appointments because it's covered by the recipient's insurance. Stogner did have to pay for iron infusions when she learned she was anemic, and now feels better for it.

The transplant team was really the dream team, she says. Everyone made her feel like a VIP.

"I was treated, I feel, like a princess in the hospital. Everyone was very kind and came to check on me to make sure everything was going very well. I had a great experience."

As for the surgery, Stogner called it, "one of the easiest things I've ever done."

"I was hiking within two weeks. I had flown on a vacation two weeks after and hiked in Arizona. It didn't stop me from doing what I wanted to do and what I normally would do."

Six months after her surgery at OSF Saint Francis Medical Center, Post joined Stogner for a hike and never felt better. In fact, Post recalls almost immediately feeling like a new person after receiving her donated kidney.

"I had so much energy, and I was so hungry. When I was on dialysis, I had no appetite. I could hardly eat anything. (After surgery) I was so hungry and so energized. It was awesome."

During those nearly five years waiting for a kidney, Post decided it was time to make the most of the life she had. Despite some limitations, she rallied to return to Illinois State University for a bachelor's degree in Health Information Management. After a brief pause for her transplant and recovery in December of 2019, Post's professors let her complete projects later. Last May, she graduated among the top in her class.

Post says she no longer had the kind of brain fog that plagued her during dialysis.

"Because I had a clear head, I made the Dean's List. (laughs) And, I had never done that because now I could actually think and I actually had energy to do it."

A full recovery took a couple of months. During that time, Post found her new normal and slowly allowed herself to feel hopeful about the future. Now she enjoys walks and being fully present when she's with daughter Sophia. She also purchased her first house. Post now works as a contract tracer for the McLean County Public Health Department and feels blessed every day.

"I mean I don't know what I would do if I passed away (and left) my daughter. I know people can be on dialysis for a long time but they do not have a quality of life. They don't," Post said, dabbing tears.

More than 100,000 men, women and children in the United States are waiting for life-saving organ transplants. Each day, 20 people die because the organ they need is not donated in time.

Learn more about organ and tissue donation and sign up as a donor at [www.organdonor.gov](http://www.organdonor.gov).

Learn how you might become a living donor by calling the OSF Saint Francis Living Donation line at (309) 624-5433.

### **More organ donation fast facts**

- In Illinois, **4,027** people are on a waiting list for an organ and **3,383** are waiting for a kidney.
- In Michigan, **2,633** people are on a waiting list for an organ and **2,145** are waiting for a kidney.
- The transplant program at OSF Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria is considered the largest in downstate Illinois.
- Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the transplant team performed **56** kidney surgeries, **27%** of which were from living donors.
- The kidney transplant program at OSF Saint Francis Medical Center has performed almost **1,500** transplants since the program started in 1985.
- The heart transplant program was re-established in the fall of 2019 and offers both heart transplants and ventricular assist device (VAD) implants that help pump blood from the lower chambers of your heart to the rest of your body.
- To date, the program has performed **two** heart transplants and **14** VAD implants.
- The very first heart transplant performed at OSF Saint Francis in 1987 is still doing very well with her first heart. She is now nearly **90** years old!