

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 now 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 lost 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 given over her lunch hour revealed Post, now 50 years old, 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 until her first disability check. What helped her through nearly five years of dialysis? Post says it was her daughter Sophia, who is now 16, 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."

Finding hope through community and faith

Many days filled with fear, anxiety and worry and nights spent hooked up to an at-home dialysis machine convinced April to follow through on a suggestion from friend Terri Thede. Thede had been part of a six-person living donation chain in 2017 and suggested her friend make a video to share on social media. For Thede, a powerful video on social media convinced her to become a living donor for a total stranger.

Thede forwarded a video Post made to friend Kelly Stogner, who at the time was an executive assistant at Heartland Community College in Normal. The video touched her.

"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?"

Then Stogner learned her then-boss, college president Keith Cornille had been a living donor for a colleague in Wisconsin and two others at the college also donated their kidneys. All were doing great, so Stogner decided to go through testing to see if she could be a match.

Stogner told a few close friends and family and asked for their prayers as she moved through the testing, including blood work, scans and a psychological evaluation. Wasn't she 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 she was a match for Post in October 2019, she and Thede decided the best way to share the good news – 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. So 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.

The transplant team was really the dream team she says. Everyone made her feel like a V.I.P.

"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 HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria, Illinois, Post joined Stogner for a hike and never felt better. In fact, she 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."

Life after kidney transplant: A fresh start

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 degree in Health IT. After a brief pause for her transplant and recovery in December 2019, Post's professors let her complete projects later and graduated near the top in her class.

Post says she immediately felt relief from 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. Since her transplant, Post walks regularly, bought a house and now works as a case manager for troubled teens in Bloomington, Illinois. She feels blessed.

"I mean, I don't know what I would do if I passed away with 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 lifesaving organ transplants. Each day, between 13 to 17 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.

Consider becoming a living donor by calling the living donation line at OSF Saint Francis at (309) 624-5433.

Organ donation fast facts

- **In Illinois**, approximately 4,000 to 5,000 people are currently waiting for a life-saving organ transplant. The majority of these patients need a kidney, and about 300 Illinoisans die each year while waiting.
- **In Michigan**, more than 3,000 residents are currently waiting for transplants.
- **Urgency:** Every eight minutes, another person is added nationally to the list.
- **Lives saved:** One organ donor can save up to eight lives.
- **Impact:** A single donor can save and heal more than 75 lives through tissue donation.
- **Deaths:** 13 people die each day waiting for a transplant.
- **The transplant program at OSF Saint Francis Medical Center** in Peoria is considered the largest in downstate Illinois.
- **The kidney transplant program** at OSF Saint Francis Medical Center has performed more than 1,600 transplants since the program started in 1985.
- **The pancreas program** started in 2002 and has performed 69 pancreas transplants to date.
- **The heart transplant program** was reestablished 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** 38 heart transplants and 60 VAD implants.
- **How to register:** In Illinois, register via the [Illinois Secretary of State website](http://www.IllinoisSecretaryofState.org), LifeGoesOn.com, or at DMV offices. In Michigan, registration is confidential, available to anyone regardless of age or health and adds a heart sticker to your ID.