

KATIE BULLINGTON AND MARSHA SHARBAUGH:

LIVING-DONOR KIDNEY TRANSPLANT AT UPMC

Four days after Katie was born, she was adopted by Marsha and her husband, Pat. The family lived a happy life in Patton, Pa., with Katie eventually moving to Bedford, Pa. to start her own family.

Years later, Marsha was diagnosed with diabetes and hypertension, which led to end stage renal disease. With her kidney health declining, she began dialysis three times a week. One day at her local dialysis center, her coordinator shared with her an option that would change her life.

“My coordinator mentioned to me that I could be a good candidate for a transplant, which I had never considered,” Marsha says. “Katie immediately offered to start the testing process to become my living donor.”

“Watching my mom go through dialysis was the worst thing in the entire world,” Katie says. “I would not wish that upon anyone. She was just surviving. She would sit through dialysis for most of the day and would still show up to my son’s baseball games.”

The Path to Living-Donor Kidney Transplant at UPMC

When deciding on a transplant program, UPMC was Marsha and Katie’s top choice.

“Not only was UPMC the closest transplant center to us, but I have received care at UPMC previously,” Marsha says. “It was a no brainer.”

They also decided to travel to UPMC for care after being referred by a friend’s daughter who donated a kidney to her father.

“Our sons go to school together, so we know the family pretty well. I felt comfortable asking her about the transplant process,” Katie says. “We weren’t nervous at all about our decision to move forward with a transplant at UPMC.”



A Perfect Match

Katie and Marsha traveled two hours to UPMC for their living-donor kidney transplant evaluations. A few weeks later, right before Christmas, Katie received the phone call she had been waiting for.

“My transplant coordinator called me and just said ‘You’re going to give your mom a kidney,’” Katie says. “It was such a surreal experience and the best gift. We joked about how crazy it would be if I could be the one to donate my kidney to her, but we were still surprised and excited to find out I was a candidate.”

A few weeks later, Katie and Marsha traveled back to UPMC for the transplant on January 27, 2023. Marsha’s best friend, Cathy, who is a nurse, traveled with them and served as Marsha’s care partner.

“I was so lucky to have Cathy as my care partner, she made a world of a difference,” Marsha says. “Having someone who is willing to advocate for you when you might not be able to advocate for yourself is super important.”

Marsha’s new kidney started to work right away. After the surgery, Katie and Marsha stayed as active as possible by going on walks around the hospital.

“There was not a single person at UPMC that was less than five stars, everyone from the nurses down to the environmental services and food service staff,” Katie says. “Every single one of them was so attentive.”

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Life After Living Donation

In March 2024, Katie and Marsha traveled to Walt Disney World with their family.

“The whole time she was on dialysis, I would say ‘You have to get better because I’m not going to take Lily to Disney World to meet all the princesses without you,’” Katie says. “She’s finally able to travel and do all these things that she was not able to while on dialysis. There’s no fear anymore.”

Now, the mother-daughter pair sees each other often, as they live only an hour away from each other. When it comes to living donation, the pair says to “just do it.”

“I tell anyone who will listen that it is not scary to become a living donor,” Katie says.



IT’S EXCITING TO SEE MY MOM START LIVING AGAIN.

— Katie Bullington

Benefits of Living Donation

More than 90,000 Americans are on the waiting list for a kidney transplant. By finding a living-kidney donor, you can receive a transplant sooner and avoid transplant waitlist times of four to six years. Most kidney donors return to a full and active life within months following living-donor kidney surgery.

Compared to deceased-donor transplants, recipients of living-donor kidneys have better outcomes because surgeons transplant the kidney immediately after removing it from the donor. This improves the transplanted organs short and long-term function. A kidney from a deceased-donor may need to be stored for many hours before it can be transplanted, and it may take a few days to function properly.

“It’s exciting to see my mom start living again,” Katie says. “She could have adopted anyone, and she chose me. It’s incredible that all these years later I could help her, and now we are physically connected.”

“If the roles were reversed, I would have done it in a minute,” Marsha says. “I can’t thank Katie enough.”

Katie and Marsha’s treatment and results may not be representative of other cases.

Why Choose UPMC?

People with kidney disease or kidney failure have hope at UPMC. At UPMC, we provide transplant options to all patients who will benefit. Since 1988, our surgeons have performed more than **4,600 deceased-kidney transplants** and more than **1,800 living-donor kidney transplants**. Our skilled team of kidney transplant surgeons take on some of the most complex cases.

UPMC is home to one of the oldest and largest transplant programs in the country. We take pride in keeping the lines of communication open with patients, families, and referring physicians regarding status procedures, treatments, and follow-up care. Although transplantation is a complex, serious procedure, we maintain a personal, patient-focused approach that takes into consideration the stress and concerns many individuals experience.

Our Locations

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For more information about living-donorkidney transplant, please visit UPMC.com/LivingDonorKidney.