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Kidney transplant a Christmas miracle for local family

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The holiday season is a time for stories of hope, faith, selfless giving and miracles. This story has all four.

In May of this year The Kincardine News featured a story about Kincardine resident Julie Farrell and her hope of finding a donor for a much needed kidney transplant. At the time Farrell had been waiting over 14 months on the transplant list and had the heartbreak of several relatives, including her husband Chris, being ruled out as potential live organ donors.

Farrell had turned to the internet and the social media website Facebook in the hope of educating others about the importance of organ donation, especially the prospect of live organ donation. Her Facebook page was titled simply "I Need a Kidney."

At the time several of Farrell's friends contacted the transplant coordinator at London's University Hospital in the hope of possibly being a donor for Farrell. Unfortunately none made it past the preliminary screening phases.

Unknown to Farrell, however, was another familiar face, just an acquaintance, had seen the newspaper article about her plight. The woman, who wishes to maintain her anonymity, said she knew of Farrell's health problems and was concerned to see that her situation was deteriorating. She cut the transplant coordinator's contact information out of the paper and stuck it on the fridge.

"I just kept looking at it," she explained. "I'm a mother and it was hard to know there was a boy who was losing his mother. One day I finally decided I was going to do something."

She called the number and left a message.

Three weeks passed and the woman received no reply. She thought that perhaps one of Farrell's friends had proved to be a match. Just before giving up, she decided to call one more time.

When she spoke to the transplant coordinator it was explained her number had been copied down incorrectly and they had been unable to reach her when attempting to return her phone call.

The two women began with a phone interview. They discussed what would be involved, the potential risks and a battery of health-related questions. It's critical that a live organ donor be in good health and engages in a healthy lifestyle, not only for the condition of the donated organ, but also for the donor's sake once surgery occurs.

The next steps involved an extensive medical questionnaire and a barrage of blood tests.

Each step of the way the woman successfully passed the screening. All the while, Farrell had no idea what was occurring. That was about to change.

The woman had wished to



remain anonymous throughout the entire process. This was an unusual request. While anonymity is generally a condition imposed by the transplant team with deceased organ donation, in cases of live organ donation the parties involved almost always know each other.

In this situation, the woman felt that helping Farrell was simply the right thing to do and did not want any recognition for her actions. Unfortunately the transplant team did not agree with her wishes. They determined that she must make her identity known to Farrell if she was to proceed.

At the end of August Farrell received a phone call that would change her life.

"She called me and asked if she could come over, we needed to talk. I thought my son had done something," Farrell laughed when recalling the day.

Over the next few months testing continued, each stage ruling out whether the transplant would jeopardize the donor's health while at the same time determining if the procedure would work for Farrell.

"Through this process I became aware of what an amazing pro-

gram this is. I had my own team, Julie had hers, plus there was the transplant coordinator, and a social worker. They made it very clear that even up to the day of surgery it was always my choice. They never wanted me to feel compelled to do it. I could stop at any time," the woman recounted. "It was also very emotional. Every step I had to repeat the conversation about why I wanted to do it, explain my motivation. But through the whole process I never doubted that I would be Julie's donor."

Finally in November Farrell received her miracle.

The two women waited in the same pre-op room. The donor was taken first. Farrell described how the woman had tears in her eyes and smiled as she was wheeled out the door. She too began to cry and said simply, "Thank you."

Six weeks after that day the two women sat at Farrell's dining table to recount the journey they had taken together. Based on their demeanour it was obvious that through the experience the one-time acquaintances have bonded and are now close friends.

Regardless of their



Kincardine's Julie Farrell, right, sits with her husband Chris and son Dawson beside the dialysis equipment that sat in her master bedroom in May 2012 prior to her kidney transplant in November. Farrell had been having haemodialysis five times per week until receiving a donor kidney from a match who saw her search for a kidney donor in a newspaper article in *The Kincardine News*. (TRACEY HINCHBERGER/KINCARDINE NEWS FREELANCE)

friendship, there's one thing they made clear.

"It's Julie's kidney now," the woman stated. "The transplant team made it very clear that once the organ is transplanted you no longer have a say. I can't say anything if I saw her living an unhealthy lifestyle."

So the donor focuses on her own lifestyle. The transplant team emphasized that she should exercise regularly, abstain from smoking and eat protein with moderation.

"It's nothing that someone shouldn't be doing already," the woman explained.

Then Farrell described how the

transplant has changed her life.

"Well, I'll have to take 34 pills every day for the rest of my life. But I'm no longer on dialysis; I don't have to plan our lives around hooking up to that machine. I'm still tired and recovering from the surgery, but I haven't felt this healthy in years."

Finally the two women had these two messages for others.

First, "If you haven't signed your donor card, put yourself in someone else's shoes," Farrell's donor said. "What if you had someone in your family who needed something?"

The other message? "You have to have faith."

Remembering owner of Jean's Family Restaurant

Dear Editor,

Saturday July 27 marked a year since the passing of Jean Needham who was the hands on owner of Jean's Family Restaurant.

She died so quick. Lola and I had breakfast at the restaurant, had a nice chat with her and five days later she was gone in her 70th year.

Jean Needham was a life long restaurant waitress in Kincardine - the absolute very best. For many years she waited at The Sunset Restaurant next to The Bank of Montreal.

Prior to that she worked for awhile at The Sunset and Sutton Park Restaurants and for The Lummus Company's mess hall.

In 1995 she bought the restaurant business in the building next to Sutton Park. Jean's has been full for breakfast and lunch every day since because Jean with her vast experience as a waitress over the years knew exactly what kind of food and service would appeal

to common folk like me.

I defy anyone to show me where you can get a better breakfast in Grey & Bruce.

Jean was such a hard worker. She operated the restaurant seven days a week and never took a day off until the last couple of years when she might take the odd day off.

She was tough on the outside but soft on the inside. Jean taught so many girls the art of how to be a good waitress over the years. Once taught they stayed taught by the best.

She took lots of waitresses and short order cooks under her wing over the years and helped them along in their life trials and tribulations.

Over the years I have loved running in to old friends and special acquaintances at Jean's. Sometimes after paying our bill it takes me a half hour getting out the door because I chat with so many people on the way out.

At Jean's funeral I could not help notice her three cooks

huddled together. You could see how much they were grieving over the loss of their boss and you just knew they were wondering what would become of their jobs with Jean gone.

At the wake after the funeral I happened to say to my old friend Harold Maurer, who along with his wife Lynda were Jean's all time best customers - "O.K Howie what in the world are we going to do for breakfast now that Jean is gone?" Harold said "we will see, something may be in the works." I found out ten days later - Harold and Lynda bought Jean's! Beautiful! It reopened on Aug. 8, 2012 and has been going strong ever since - same name - same staff - same great Canadian food - same great friendly atmosphere.

For stepping up and saving Jean's and the twelve jobs in the business I think the Kincardine Chamber of Commerce should award Harold with maybe 'Citizen of The

Year' or 'Business Of The Year.'

Harold Maurer is a great Kincardinite and the municipality should recognize him one of these times for all his decades of service for community projects, and for his years of volunteering in Kincardine sports and recreation.

Jean is gone but you can still feel her presence. Her picture is up on the wall behind the cash register and she sort of follows you while you are there. Her granddaughter Kerri, a summer student waitress, is a "chip off the old block" her grandmother trained her well. Jean is living through Kerri.

Sandra told me awhile back that she thinks her Mom is still around out on her parents house at the corner of Highways 21 and 6 - the alarm clocks and smoke alarms keep going off all the time for no apparent reason.

Thanks Jean! Thanks Harold!

R. Keith Davidson,
Kemble Shore and Kincardine