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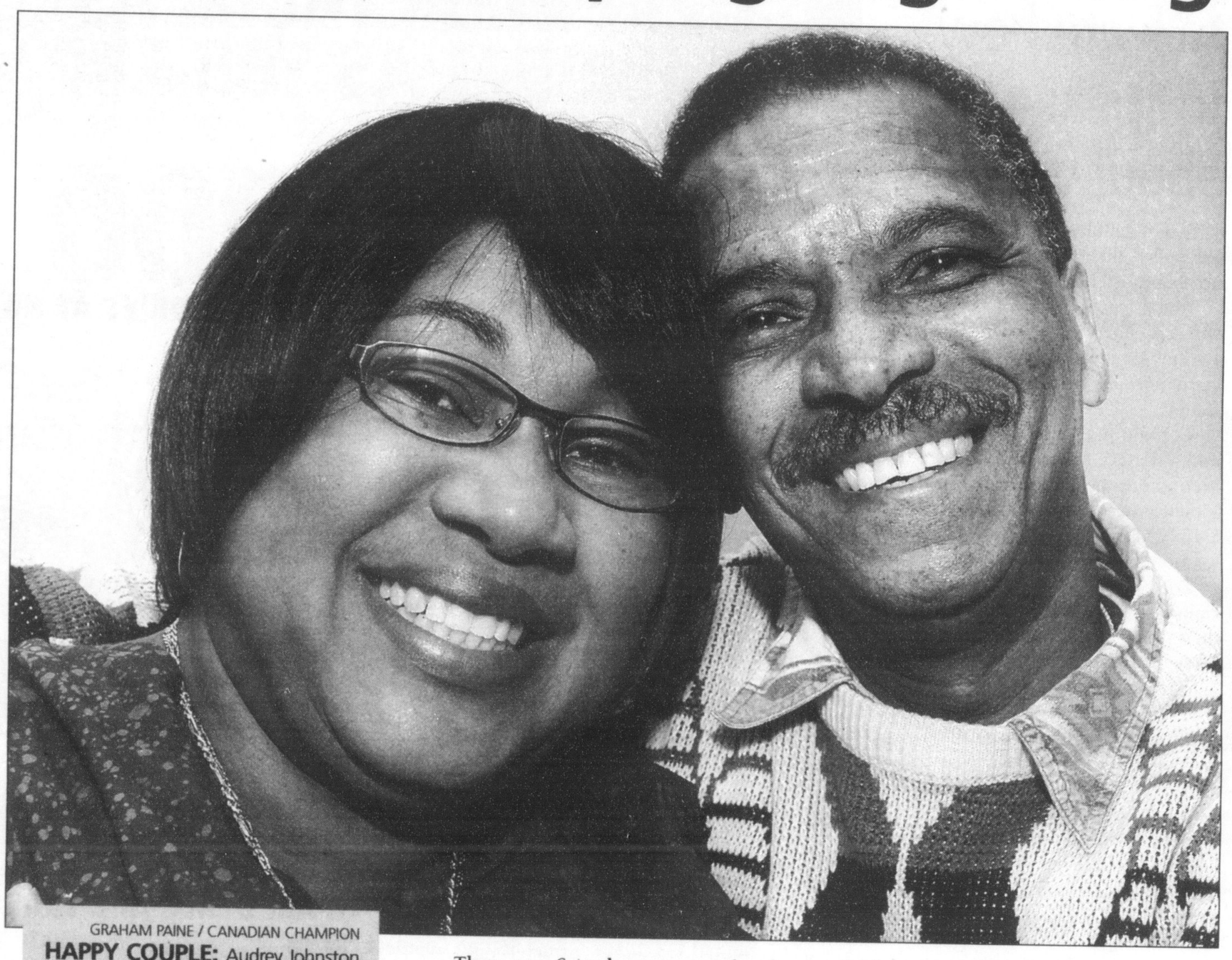
COMMUNITY

Year after transplant, couple going strong

Anniversary marked with Caribbean trip

By Stephanie Thiessen
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF



GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION
HAPPY COUPLE: Audrey Johnston is doing just fine these days after husband Audley donated one of his kidneys to her a year ago.

Last month, Audley and Audrey Johnston went on vacation in honour of a very special anniversary.

Though the couple's very much in love, it wasn't their 34-year marriage that was being celebrated. No, their trip to St. Kitts/Nevis in the Caribbean was to commemorate a life-sustaining operation that Audrey underwent a year ago when Audley gave her one of his kidneys.

"Nothing was more important than celebrating that anniversary," said Audley, 58.

In January of last year, The Champion printed an article just weeks before the Johnstons were to undergo the transplant. They were optimistic, and had every reason to be. The operation was a success, and though both suffered some complications, they've now resumed their lives.

With March being declared Kidney Health Month by The Kidney Foundation of Canada, the Johnstons see this as an ideal time to pick up their story where it was left off and help increase public awareness.

"(The transplant) freed me up from dialysis and allows me a greater variety of foods," explained 58-year-old Audrey. "My energy has increased and I lead a more normal life."

She said words can't describe her gratitude for her husband's sacrifice. After all, kidney transplants are known to be tougher on the donor than the recipient.

"I can't thank him enough. He's the best in every way possible."

But Audley's the first to admit his sacrifice was for himself as well.

With the couple's children grown up and out of the house, he wanted to enjoy his latter years with the love of his life and do the things they'd never gotten around to before, he said.

When his wife's kidneys failed, none of that was possible.

She had to go to the hospital three times a week for four-and-a-half hours for dialysis and he had to sit back and watch her suffer.

"Dialysis was hard on her. She passed out a lot," Audley said.

According to The Kidney Foundation of Canada, kidney disease can strike anyone at any age. If kidney failure isn't treated, death is certain.

When kidneys fail, wastes and fluids accumulate in the body and dialysis treatments — or a kidney transplant — are needed to clean the blood.

Kidney disease usually progresses silently, often destroying most of the kidney function before displaying any symptoms.

That's why it's important for people at risk of developing the disease to be evaluated regularly, and early detection is important. Those at risk include people with diabetes — like Audrey — high blood pressure and blood vessel diseases.

When no symptoms appear, a blood or urine test can pinpoint kidney problems.

Audrey said she first knew something was wrong when she passed out during an awards dinner. Her doctor told her she had very high blood sugar levels and prescribed pills, which she took for three years.

Then, one Saturday morning, her husband asked what was wrong with her. She looked in the mirror and saw her face was swollen, as were her legs. After a trip to the hospital, Johnston was told both of her kidneys were diseased, possibly because of the pills she'd been taking, she said.

If she'd known the symptoms, she would've sought treatment sooner, she said.

"I knew nothing about anything," she said.

She encourages others to know the symptoms. Besides puffiness of the eyes, hands and feet, they include high blood pressure; bloody, cloudy or tea-coloured urine; excessive foaming of the urine; frequent urination at night; less urine or difficulty passing the urine; fatigue; loss of appetite or weight and persistent generalized itching.

Life will never be as carefree as it once was for the Johnstons. Audrey has to have periodic blood tests as well as watch her diet strictly and she takes anti-rejection drugs that have some side effects.

She said she also lives with the constant fear her body could suddenly reject the kidney, and has to remain alert for symptoms.

"I worry every day," she said.

But overall, life is good. Very good. She's able to once again live normally and do the things she enjoys.

Something Audley feels strongly about is the importance of donating one's organs. The Kidney Foundation of Canada reported that more than half the Canadians on the waiting list for a transplant are waiting for a kidney.

"If I'm in a car accident, they're (organs) no good to me anymore. If I can give someone a chance at life, why not do it? One of the reasons we're here is to help others. It's a great thing for anyone to consider doing."

For more information on kidney disease or organ donation, visit www.kidney.ca.

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Cogeco Cable Channel 14 Programming Schedule – *Tuesday, March 14- Monday, March 20, 2006*

Tuesday, March 14		Wednesday, March 15		Thursday, March 16		Friday, March 17		Saturday, March 18		Sunday, March 19		Monday, March 20	
5:00pm	**Plugged In! EXTRA**	1:00pm	Halton Hills Council Mar 7 2006	12:00pm	Swap Talk (Replay)	1:00pm	Halton Region Council Mar 1 2006	4:00pm	TVC Sports: TBA	10:30am	TVC Sports: TBA	1:00pm	Halton Region Council Mar 1 2006
6:00pm – 8:00pm	Plugged In! EXTRA	4:00pm – 6:00pm	Plugged In! EXTRA	1:00pm	Milton Council Feb 27 2006	3:00pm – 5:00pm	Plugged In! EXTRA	7:30pm – Midnight	Plugged In! EXTRA	6:00pm	Halton Region Council Mar 1 2006	3:00pm – 8:00pm	Plugged In! EXTRA
8:00pm	Auto Experts (Live)	6:00pm	The Bottom Line	3:00pm – 6:00pm	Plugged In! EXTRA	**5:00pm**	**Plugged In! EXTRA**			8:00pm – Midnight	Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00pm	Sports ZONE Live
9:00pm	Halton Hills Council Mar 7 2006	6:30pm – 8:00pm	Plugged In! EXTRA	6:00pm	Living Healthy	**7:00pm**	**Georgetown Hockey Heritage Awards**					9:00pm – Midnight	Plugged In! EXTRA
		8:00pm	**Swap Talk (Live)**	7:00pm	The Bottom Line	9:30pm – Midnight	Plugged In! EXTRA						
		9:00pm	Milton Council Feb 27 2006	7:30pm – 9:00pm	Plugged In! EXTRA								
		11:00pm – Midnight	Plugged In! EXTRA	9:00pm	Halton Region Council Mar 1 2006								
				11:00pm – Midnight	Plugged In! EXTRA								