

'She can't be serious'

But Corinne Newell wasn't joking when she gave a kidney to a near-stranger

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Sit back and watch Tom MacPherson and Corinne Newell trade barbs and laugh like teenagers and you'd think they're siblings.

They're not.

They're not even married to each other, but they do share a connection that will forever link them. Mr. MacPherson has one of Ms Newell's kidneys.

"Kidney-in-law" is what Denise, Tom's wife, calls Ms Newell.

Despite the situation that brought the three of them together, when they sat down with The Sun-Tribune last week, there was a lot of laughter, along with a few tears.

"If you've got to live through it, you've got to joke about it or you don't get over it," Mr. MacPherson, 49, said.

The MacPhersons and Ms Newell, 50, were casual acquaintances. They met eight years ago when Ms Newell coached their daughter Taylor's softball team. Mr. MacPherson helped out as well as a base coach and with skills development practices.

When they'd see each other away from the game, they'd catch up. Ms Newell had a second child, a boy she named Gage. Mr. MacPherson's health was up and down.

... the then 16-year-old bluntly, but with a laugh, asked if her former softball coach had a kidney to spare.

Mr. MacPherson, the former president of the Stouffville Skating Club, was diagnosed with diabetes 26 years ago, which has created a whole host of medical issues for him, including being blind for six months.

Ms Newell stopped in at Ann's Fabric's three years ago, where Taylor was working. Among the swapped stories, was that her father's health was on the decline.

He needed a kidney.

With nothing to lose, the then 16-year-old bluntly, but with a laugh, asked if her former softball coach had a kidney to spare.

She did.

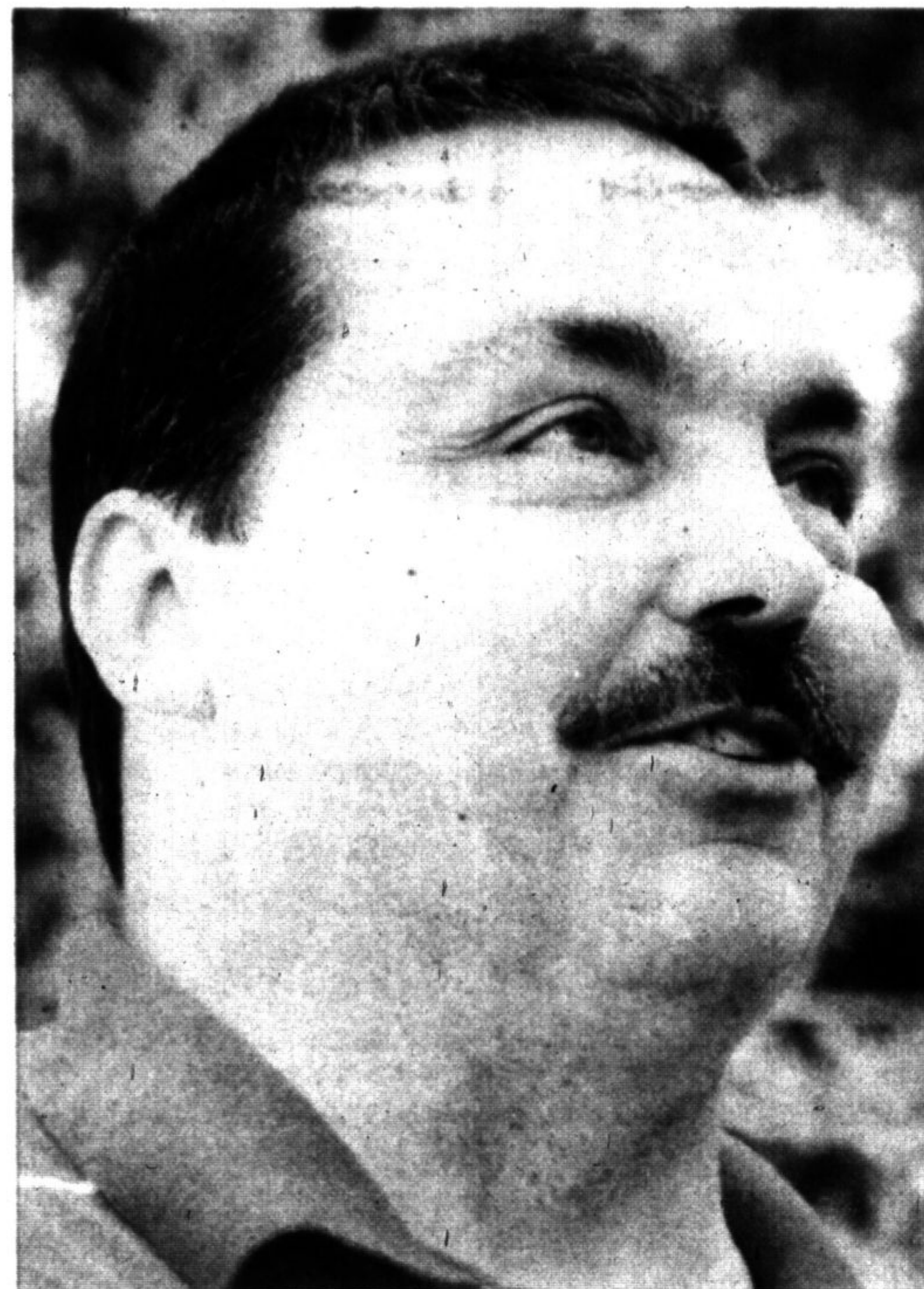
What the MacPhersons did not know was that Ms Newell was already in the midst of researching bone marrow donations for no other reason than to become an anonymous donor.

But when she realized someone right in her community could use her help, she delved into finding out all she could about live kidney donations.

"Jeepers, this can be done and I can help. I'll at least help," was Ms Newell's thought back then.

When she called the MacPhersons to tell them she would like to undergo testing to see if she was compatible, they didn't believe her.

"Just thought she's being crazy," Mrs. MacPherson said. "She



STAFF PHOTOS/MIKE BARRETT

A chance meeting in a Main Street, Stouffville fabric store between Corinne Newell and Tom MacPherson's daughter led to Ms Newell donating one of her kidneys to Mr. MacPherson – who now needs a pancreas.



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can't be serious."

She was.

Ms Newell persisted and the paperwork was filed and appointments and testing got underway. That was January 2011.

Throughout the process, Ms Newell kept what was happening mostly to herself. She used vacation days for medical appointments as well as the surgery.

"I wasn't swayed. ... I put it down to it's nobody's business. ... It may or may not work out," she said.

Of all the friends, family and community members who eventually did learn of what Ms Newell was planning on doing, only one person questioned her.

After two years of tests and setbacks, mostly related to the rapidly declining health of Mr. MacPherson, the transplant took place Feb. 20 of this year.

For the first time in three years, Mr. MacPherson went to his in-laws' cottage in Apsley earlier this summer.

In June, he visited, again for the first time, his daughter Taylor's apartment in Kingston. She attends Queen's University.

But in order to do this, he had to walk up to the fourth floor.

Mr. MacPherson also gets to drink Diet Coke again. It was something that was forbidden during dialysis.

"I've done the right thing. I've given the gift of life to the right family, not one person," Ms Newell said.

When Ms Newell decided to become a living donor, she had no expectation other than to help a man in need.

"They're just amazing people. I got lucky," she admitted.

"I had no reward. In the end, just go about living and be the family you want to be and Tom can go back to being the father (he wants) and can be," she said.

Mr. MacPherson is feeling much better, he's lost about half of the 90 pounds he put on while undergoing dialysis.

"I put 90 pounds on as well because I felt sorry for him. I didn't want him to feel alone," Ms Newell said laughing.

Mr. MacPherson was employed in safety sales but hasn't been able to work for eight years. Mrs. MacPherson stopped working two years ago.

There is still one more thing he needs – a new pancreas. With that, he would become a non-diabetic. He starts the process in September.

There are 21 people in Ontario waiting for a pancreas, according to the Trillium Gift of Life Network website.

Transplants have become rather routine for the MacPherson family.

Mr. MacPherson is one of six siblings. Five have diabetes. Three siblings have received kidneys, two have undergone pancreas transplants, while one sibling donated a kidney.

GIFTS OF LIFE GIVEN HERE

There are currently 1,042 Ontarians awaiting a kidney, according to the Gift of Life website. So far this year, there have been 127 kidney living donor transplants performed. Go to giftoflife.on.ca/en/ for more information.

Canadian Blood Services, in 2009, created the Living Donor Paired Exchange Registry, which matches people who wish to donate a kidney but have no one specific to give it to, with people in need.

Approximately 200 transplants have taken place in almost four years, according to www.organsandtissues.ca