

My Organ Donation Story:

To me, organ donation was the gift of time. Two organ donations gave me the chance to meet and get to know a very special man, my father in law, Ed Shapiro.

Ed was lucky enough to receive two kidney transplants in his lifetime. At the age of 25, he was diagnosed with polycystic kidney disease and 18 years later, in 1988, he received his first kidney transplant from a deceased donor. This donor gave my father in law the gift of life. The kidney lasted for 19 years and during that time, Ed saw his son graduate high school, college and get married. The transplant gave him the ability to travel with his wife and compete in the U.S. Transplant Games where Ed won medals in swimming, long jump and table tennis.

In 2007, Ed's kidney failed and he had to begin dialysis three days a week for four hours a session. Dialysis limited his travel and his active lifestyle. Watching him endure dialysis was devastating to his family and friends. We knew he needed a new kidney, a new donor.

Although they were not an exact match, with the help of new anti-rejection medications, he received his second kidney transplant, from his wife, Tricia on May 19, 2008. This second kidney transplant gave Ed and Tricia a chance to enjoy their lives again. This second kidney gave Ed, the chance to meet his granddaughter. I will never forget the moment he met her; she took his breath away.

I consider myself one of the lucky ones. Lucky, because of two donors, I got to share my life with him. Albeit short, it's more time than my daughter and unborn son (at the time) were given with him.

Years of anti-rejection and immunosuppressive medications can leave a transplant recipient prone to other serious health conditions. Ed was not a stranger to fighting and winning these battles. In April 2011, Ed was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Within a week and half we learned the cancer metastasized to his liver and on April 30 he was brought to the hospital with very high fevers. He came home from the hospital on May 23 and spent the next three weeks visiting friends and family. People came every day to see him; some days as many as 15 people were at the house. He passed away peacefully with such dignity and grace on June 15, 2011.

I will be forever grateful to Dr. David Conti for performing Ed's second kidney transplant. He, along with Grandma T (who donated her kidney) gave us three more years. This added time, meant the chance for Ed to live long enough to meet his granddaughter and spend almost two years with her. My daughter and her Papa had a special bond and I am so very grateful they were both given that opportunity.

Before he passed, Ed shared with Grandma T his only regret; he wouldn't be around to watch his grandkids grow up. To this day, his "Ella Bella" keeps Ed's spirit alive as she continuously talks about him and teaches her little brother about their Papa Ed. Every year over 60 friends and family members participate in the Northeast Kidney Foundation to walk in Ed's memory.

I share his story in the hopes that others will know how important organ donation is. I share this story so that others will know how a successful organ donation can impact an entire family.