

Episode 157: Stacy gave away her kidney

Anthony is a husband and a father. He lives in Canada. His kidneys were failing, and he was in desperate need of a donor. He was even on the local news with his wife and daughter, hoping to find someone who was a match, and willing to give up a kidney.

Female News Reporter

ABC Family is calling on strangers tonight to step up and help save a loved one's life as their health continues to decline. CTV's Kraig Krause has more on the family's journey and the road ahead to find an organ donor.

Kraig

Every step Anthony Lynch takes becomes more difficult by the day. The once vibrant and energetic father and husband has been reduced to a shell of himself as his body deteriorates from kidney failure.

Anthony

I, to be honest, I felt like death. I've never really felt like this in my life. I remember when they said that I would have some kidney problems and there'd be symptoms coming, I never thought they'd be like this.

Kraig

Initially diagnosed with type 1 diabetes in 2018, the 50-year-old says he was told that his kidneys would decline over the coming years, but he remained working and living a normal life until late last year.

Anthony

Since December, things have tailed off really quickly and it's just sort of it's just kind of a living hell at the moment.

Tiffani

His feet had swollen three times in size at least. He had a hard time walking and he was admitted to Surrey Memorial.

Kraig

Since then, the family says he's undergone several procedures and emergency dialysis all in an effort to regain his life and be there for his nine-year-old daughter.

Stephanie

It's really upsetting that he can't come to my competition. Seeing other skaters on my team with their dads is just really upsetting.

Kraig

And as she nears her 10th birthday, she only has one wish.

Stephanie

I really want a donor.

Kraig

Now the race is on to find a kidney donor that could save Anthony's life, but he's not alone. According to the Provincial Health Services Authority, as of December 1st, there were 421 people waiting for a kidney in BC, all waiting for that one person they will match with in order to save their lives.

Anthony

If you're out there and you want to make a difference to a family please do it.

Kraig

Adults in BC may choose to donate a kidney to someone they know, on behalf of someone they know, or can donate anonymously through BC Transplant.

Scott

Almost anyone can donate a kidney, but to donate to a specific recipient, you have to be tested to find out if you're a match – to see if your kidney is likely to work when it's in the other person's body.

My guest today is Stacy. She also lives in Canada, and she wanted to give Anthony one of her kidneys. Even though they had never met.

Scott

You told me that you've thought about donating a kidney for years but, honestly, for most average people, that's just not something you think about, which is actually one of the reasons we're doing this episode. Do you remember what first made you consider doing this?

Stacy

I think, because of my career in healthcare, it's been in the back of my mind, and I signed up for donor at age 16 in case something happens to me.

Scott

Organ donor...

Stacy

Organ donor. And I think, where I live in Vancouver, Canada, that was kind of an automatic, "Do you want to sign up?" It goes automatically on your license. So it's always been in the back of my head, but I never knew about living donors until probably about 10 years ago, and I thought, "Oh, that's interesting. Maybe that's something I could do" because I've never had children. I thought, "Well, that would be a good way to kind of give life without having to birth life." So it's always been in the back of my mind, but never anything serious. I never did any investigating on it or looking into what it takes to do that.

Scott

I think that's the way a lot of people think. It's like, "Man, I really should do that one of these days." You just never get around to it, sort of.

Stacy

No, exactly. Life is busy.

Scott

Yep. Now there were a few factors that went into this. You know the importance of donating blood because of your profession, but I understand you pass out at the sight of your own blood.

Stacy

Yeah, it's not pretty. I think I chopped the tip of my finger off once and it wouldn't stop bleeding. At the time, my husband had to leave and go to work, and I was like, "Please don't leave me. I'm going to pass out. Do I need an ambulance?" And I was fine. I had to lay down. When I went to the doctor to see if I needed stitches, he went to pull the band-aid off, and I said, "Before you do that, if you pull it off and it starts bleeding, I'm going to pass out." And he said, "Okay, let's just leave it. You're going to be okay. "

Scott

Do you faint at the sight of other people's blood?

Stacy

I get woozy. I probably would if there was a lot. I remember, at one time, I wanted to. I thought about getting into nursing because I had nursing friends in my 20s and this is why I go in. I went into paperwork. I'm in the administration part of the hospital, not the nursing part because I'm not good with fluids and blood.

Scott

In your job, if you see blood, something has gone terribly wrong.

Stacy

Correct. Bleeding noses, I can handle. Anything beyond that, I think we need a professional.

Scott

You also described yourself as a slight hypochondriac.

Stacy

Yeah.

Scott

What does that look like?

Stacy

I work at the BC Cancer Centre. Before that, I worked at Vancouver General Hospital as a clerk for 5 years. So my whole career has been in medical. So I think, working at the cancer center, you automatically jump to that worst scenario anytime you get a headache or you get an ache—definitely a hypochondriac. I would go to the doctor. Well, I don't go, I don't harass the doctor, but I will go to the doctor if I think something's seriously wrong with me. So it's hard for me to tolerate, I think, medical procedures as well. I just think, "Oh, what are they going to find?" But here I am. I've worked 27 years at the cancer center, so I've survived it and I cope pretty well now. It took probably about 10 years into my career where I'm like, "Okay, wait a second. I can handle this anxiety and this hypochondria. Don't jump to that conclusion."

Scott

I mean, you work at a place where people show up with the thought in their mind, "Oh, no, what are they going to find?"

Stacy

Yeah. I've met a lot of friends, colleagues, and patients that have become friends throughout my career. So my dad always said, "You're on the right side of the desk. Just live life to the fullest and do what you can and be your part to help."

Scott

Speaking of colleagues and friends, you have a friend/coworker, Letecia, who also plays a part in this story, and you guys have kind of a similar condition - anxiety.

Stacy

We both have anxiety and it's medically related most of the time. She's a young nurse. I overheard her one day just speaking to another colleague about her anxiety and kind of her symptoms, and it exactly mirrored my anxiety completely. So I remember sending her a private email message, just saying, "If you ever need to talk..." and she took that up. We had coffee and we became fast friends. We live in the same area, so we would commute together to work. We would talk and we shared a lot of the same things. I think she helped me and I helped her and we're really good friends now.

Scott

Yeah, it sounds like instant chemistry.

Stacy

For sure, yeah. She's a younger version of me. 100%.

Scott

I want to talk about how you got started down this path, and it was from a post on Facebook. What was that?

Stacy

Yeah, a prior colleague, a nurse that I worked with, I'm going to call it the Lower Mainland, which is considered the Vancouver area. She shared a post of a wife looking for a kidney for her husband. Because it was in the back of my mind, I took the time. I read the post. It was a long post. It was a sad post. They have a young daughter and they also, I think, about 10 years ago, lost a child. I think it was 27 days old. So I just felt for this family and thought "I can't leave this mother and child without trying to see if I could donate to her husband." From that post, I emailed our transplant coordinator that she'd posted, and that started the process.

Scott

I find it so interesting. When you post something like that on Facebook, there might be a hundred people that see it or a thousand people that see it, and just keep scrolling. Like, "Oh, I hope they find somebody." But in your case, you saw it and you immediately personalized it, like, "Can I help this person?" That's an unusual reaction. But you said there was something about a photo of the man with his daughter. What was that picture? And what did that instigate in you?

Stacy

It was Anthony, my recipient, hugging his daughter on the beach, and it's one of their favorite places that they go to. I think it has a special meaning for them - just looking at that picture of him hugging her - and I knew I had to do something. "Oh, it's a young father. He has a child. I've never had children. This is my time." I remember reading people reacting to the post and saying,

"I'll go test, I'll go test." And I thought, "Well, I'm going to throw my name in too because, if I can't help him, maybe I can help somebody else."

Scott

What's the first step that you took?

Stacy

They had a contact number, a case number, and his name. I sent an email to the coordinator at the hospital and just said, "I saw this post. This is the recipient. What do I do? What's my next step?" I had absolutely no idea.

Scott

When you say the hospital, is that the same place where you work?

Stacy

Where I used to work. The hospital and where they're from is Vancouver, Canada, and I'm going to call that the Lower Mainland. In 2017, my husband and I moved to about four hours away from the Lower Mainland, in the interior of Kelowna. All the transplants are done in the Lower Mainland by two hospitals down there. So this was one of the hospitals that I contacted. Right away, they send you a blood test, and they say this is an important blood test. At the same time, the recipient has to go for a blood test, and I believe it's a histocompatibility test. He has to go on the same day. I have to go on the same day. I guess it's for blood typing, and we see if we're a match and if we're compatible. If we are, we go on to the next step.

Scott

And that's more than just saying, "Okay, my blood type is A negative and yours is the same, so we're a match." There's a lot more that goes into it, right?

Stacy

Yeah, I remember her sending me a message later on saying the subtype of my histocompatibility. I don't know the language, but it turned out we were a perfect match. It wasn't just that my blood type would work with his. We were exactly the same.

Scott

Nice. Another sign that you're on the right path.

Stacy

Yeah, exactly.

Scott

So then begins the testing process and there's some paperwork involved.

Stacy

Yeah, the questionnaire was very extensive. I counted there were 18 pages. They want to know absolutely everything about you - complete detail, medical history, past travel, everything in your past vaccinations. I sent that off. At every step, they say, "You've passed this section. Are you sure you want to move on to the next?" They always are making sure you're not being persuaded or paid or just making sure that, yes, you're willing to go on to the next step. So I sent in all my pages and came more blood tests.

Scott

For the blood tests, were you able to do this at your location?

Stacy

I was.

Scott

Okay, good. You didn't have to travel all the time there.

Stacy

No. I think I counted about 15 vials of blood at one point, and you know how much I love blood. I think they gave me a cookie and a drink after, so I was okay. There were a lot of blood tests - and I think a lot of urine tests - to make sure the kidneys are functioning okay as well. That was the first. That was probably about six months of different testing that I continued until I went on to the big round of testing where I did have to go to the Lower Mainland and go to their hospital and complete, I think, about 4 more medical tests along with four more medical appointments with doctors.

Scott

So, for those, were you driving? It's like a 4-5 hour drive?

Stacy

Yeah, that's exactly it. It's a 5-hour drive. It was wintertime so, no, I flew down to the Lower Mainland. They have a reimbursement program in our province and through the Yukon, and it's called LODERP - Living Organ Donor Expense Reimbursement Program. So for the testing phase, they would only supply myself to travel and bring me down for testing and accommodation and then meal reimbursement if I needed anything. I had to go down for 2 full days of testing and appointments, and it was back to back. It was crammed in, it was exhausting, but I got it done. No problem. Never had a lot of those tests before. So my anxiety was under control and it was actually a really good meeting with the surgeon, the social worker, and the nurse. They just explain absolutely everything and make sure that, mind-wise, you're kind of ready to go forward and put your body through what it needs to go through.

Scott

You got to make sure that you're in the right mental space.

Stacy

Absolutely. Yes.

Scott

Then you got some news about Anthony.

Stacy

Yeah, I had my testing in early December. At that point, the surgeon or the transplant physician let me know that he actually wasn't ready for a transplant. His GFR, which is his kidney function test wasn't low enough for him. He wasn't on dialysis. He was functioning okay. His function could go down at any time. It could be months. It could be years. I had to actually really think about, "Okay, I've come this far. If I can't help him, I want to help somebody else because of all the testing I've been through. So if he's not ready, I don't know if I would be ready in a couple of years. Let's just keep going with the process." They let me know there were a lot of people on

the waitlist for all body parts. There were over 500 people on the transplant wait list in Vancouver alone, in our province alone. "Yep, let's just keep going."

Scott

So all the testing was done, and then you had a one-month of - what you told me was - cooling off period. How would you describe that?

Stacy

Here in British Columbia, they give you a one-month cooling off to see if you're really ready. You got to think about it, "Do you really want to go through with this?" I had zero hesitation. I knew I wanted to go through with it. I knew I wanted to help. I knew it was my time. So I actually set a timer on my calendar at home and just thought, "Okay, this is the date." She said, "Email me back on February 14th, Valentine's Day." I knew she started at 8 AM. "Email me when you're ready, if you still want to proceed." So I set that timer. 8 AM came and I sent her a message and I said, "Let's go, let's keep going."

Scott

That's the best news she can get first thing in the morning.

Stacy

Yeah, exactly. I was eager. If I was in Vancouver, I probably would have been in her office saying, "Let's go, let's keep going."

Scott

Obviously, for this, you're going to have to take some time off from work. How do you get compensated for that in some way? How did that work?

Stacy

Yeah, I'm fortunate enough to work for a company— well, because I'm in healthcare, I work for a health authority in British Columbia and they give you 8 weeks. "Don't go into your sick bank. Just a paid leave for your service for donation." So I thought this is just another reason why I need to keep going. How amazing is this opportunity. I get 8 weeks off to help somebody and recover. I knew that, generally, it would be a 6-week time that most people take, but 8 weeks? I could totally do this. So yeah, another sign. Just keep going.

Scott

They're taking away all the excuses that people might come up with.

Stacy

Exactly, yeah. I got an email in March saying we're going to be working on our OR slate in May and June, so expect a date around that time. So I let my work know that we need to prepare for this. I'm going to be off work. I remember in the beginning they told me this is a long process. I know, in the States, it doesn't take this long, but they warned me in the beginning it could be months, and it could take up to a year and a half for this process to keep going. I think, for our transplant program here, there are just not enough surgeons, not enough OR times, and it seemed like it took a long time because I started the process last June and now I'm hearing in March. Okay, now it's going to be May/June, so that's almost a year.

My transplant coordinator sent me an email and said, "Just so you know, your original recipient, Anthony, is ready for transplant. So you could donate to Anthony or you could donate to the

waitlist and both are fantastic options.” And she puts a little smiley face. I remember shrieking at this email thinking, “The whole reason I started this process was for Anthony. That’s without a doubt. He’s the whole reason. Let’s donate to Anthony.” So there it is - full circle, meant to be. I didn’t know all the stuff that happened between my testing in December and what happened in March with that email. But yeah, he’d not been doing well for a few months. So here I am ready to help.

Scott

Did Anthony know that you were doing all of this?

Stacy

Anthony and his wife did not know who I was. They had no idea I was doing all the testing in the background. I found out in March. I went to their Facebook page again in March and saw a news clip that, in February, the family had done a news clip pleading for a kidney for him because, in December, just before Christmas, he crashed and ended up in the hospital with complete kidney failure. He was in the hospital, I think, for Christmas, and started home dialysis. In February, they were pleading for this kidney. Now, here I am in March, going to be able to help him in a couple of months. I was like, “Just hang on.”

Yep. They had no idea who I was. So the coordinator said to me, “Do you want to let them know? Do you have a relationship with them?” And I said, “I have no idea who they are. It’s probably the best part of your job, giving them an operation date. So I’ll let you do the call about when we get our surgery date.”

Scott

That is part of the story that I find absolutely amazing.

Stacy

It was just meant to be.

Scott

I mean, personally, I love giving people good news and this would probably be the best news that Anthony and his wife and their family could get. And you had the opportunity to call them and give them the surgery date. Were you kind of surprised that she gave you that option?

Stacy

Well, I guess because it was such a public plea on the news and through Facebook. Maybe she thought that I had, at some point, messaged them, but I didn’t because I didn’t want to give them that hope if, anywhere along the line, the testing would say, “You know what? We can’t move on with you. You’re not a match. Your test didn’t come back that you were able to do this.” So yeah, I kept it a big secret.

Scott

And you let the nurse make that call because, as you said. You figured it’s one of the best parts of her job, and I agree. That would be an amazing part of that job. I mean, that’s just another sign of selflessness on your part. I mean, just letting her do that and having that great phone call, that must have been an amazing phone call.

Stacy

I did let her know, "Please tell me what they say. Please email me back and let me know what they say." And she said, "Safe to say, they're grateful and excited."

Scott

You were wondering if you would get the chance to meet them ahead of time. How would that have worked or were you able to?

Stacy

Because I'm not close to them, and I don't live close to them, I asked the coordinator, "How does this work? I know who they are. They don't know who I am. I didn't want to cross any boundaries." I know, sometimes, anonymous donors - they knew I was an anonymous donor— I know sometimes there's no communication between them. I was emailing her back and forth. After I found out my surgery date, I started to think, "Whoa, do I get to meet them in the hospital? How does that work?" We were emailing back and forth and I think she - I'm going to call it - ghosted me. I felt like it was for a few hours. It was about 20 minutes and she emailed me back, and she said, "Well, I messaged them. Here's his phone number and here's his email." Oh, another shriek moment. "Oh my gosh, they do want to meet me and know who I am." So I had to think about it for a day. What am I going to say? How do you contact people? So I had to Google what to say, and I remember it just saying, "Make sure to sign whatever message you want to tell them about yourself and sign it, "Your donor." - makes it more personal.

So I sent them a message, just letting them know my age, my lifestyle, and why I was doing this, and signed it, "Your donor." The next day, there it was - a message back. So, for two months, we messaged back and forth every day, just getting to know each other and setting up. Okay, we're going to meet the day prior to the surgery down in Vancouver. This was getting exciting. His wife and I are a lot alike. We have the same sense of humor. We became fast friends. It was amazing. Anthony's the quiet guy in the background, so he just let us do our thing. At this point, it's becoming, "This is going to happen. This is a real thing."

Scott

So you started making trip arrangements.

Stacy

Yeah. The reimbursement program says, "You can have a companion come with you. Plan to stay at the hospital 2-3 days." Check-in, I think, was at five or 6 AM, so I had to go the day before. My husband and I were trying to figure out how are we going to do this. We have two pets at home that we have to call in a pet sitter— or he can come with me? We have a pet sitter. Are we going to get my mom or his mom—? Then, we thought, oh Letecia's pet sat for us before. Then, we started to think about it. She's a nurse. Maybe, because my husband could only get a couple of days off, it would probably be more productive if he stayed home and took the days off when I came back from the hospital. So I thought, "Maybe we should ask Letecia. I mean, this program reimburses for a companion. She's been a really good friend. So we thought, "Let's ask Letecia. So I remember saying to her, "I want to ask you a question at work." I wanted to ask her in person, and she's like, "I can't wait. What are you talking about? Let me know."

So over text, I sent her a message asking her if she wanted to come with me, and I think she was kind of floored that I'd even thought about her. She's my buddy, and I thought, "Oh, perfect. Private nurse. I get my own nurse while I'm doing my thing." And she said she felt honored. So here we go. We're going to plan this trip, and she started to get excited alongside me. I work

with her every day. So we did the countdown. Here we are. We're going to go. May 29th was the day.

Scott

Okay. So you were going to be there from Sunday through– what do they estimate? Like, Thursday?

Stacy

Yeah, they said Wednesday, but we booked a flight Thursday. So we flew down Sunday and we thought we'd come back on Thursday. I knew Anthony was getting admitted on Sunday, so perfect. When we fly in, Letecia and I will grab something to eat, we'll have dinner, and then we'll go up to the hospital and meet this beautiful family.

Scott

So you showed up. You flew to Vancouver. Talk about the cab ride.

Stacy

Oh, this was another reason, another sign. We went to grab a cab and there was a gentleman that needed a special needs cab. So we jumped into the cab. Then he was there waiting. We're like, "Oh no, you take this cab. We'll catch the next one. We were just excited to be in Vancouver." So he jumped in. So we grabbed the next cab and the cab driver was just asking us where we were going and we told him, "By the hospital. We were staying at a hotel right there." We were talking about Letecia being a nurse and how amazing she is and she's so young. Then, Letecia said to the cab driver, "Oh, well, Stacy's amazing. She's donating a kidney tomorrow." And I could see in the rearview mirror. His eyes were huge and he welled up and he said, "My son is a kidney recipient." It was just another sign. I could not believe it.

He was so thankful to me and he didn't know me. He said his son received a kidney at age 17. He understood the waitlist, the pleading, and everything that he had to go through to get his son what he needed to continue. I think his son was in complete kidney failure. So he got his son on the phone while we were in the cab ride, and his son spoke to me, and we just had a conversation, telling each other to take care of each other, and yeah, it was just a very emotional cab ride. We were kind of floored that, here we are, just keep going, another sign.

Scott

The most emotional cab ride ever.

Stacy

Yeah. He gave me a big hug when we got out and wished me good luck. Yeah, it was pretty amazing. What are the chances?

Scott

Confirmation for you. "Yes, I'm in the right place. I'm doing the right thing."

Stacy

Absolutely, yeah. We got off at the hotel. I was wearing my BC transplant shirt given to me by another coworker and somebody approached me in the elevator and told me that her dad is a kidney recipient and wished me luck. We had a short conversation on the elevator on the way up to our floors and we were floored, thinking, "This is getting crazy. Everything's just aligning." I

was completely nervous, but I had no time to be nervous. I was so excited to just help this family.

Scott

Sunday night, you met with the family.

Stacy

Oh, so emotional. I just remember thinking, "Oh, they look just like their pictures." Bowled over by Stephanie. She's nine. She just had her 10th birthday actually just a couple of days ago. Just so many hugs and tears from this family and just super excited to be able to help. And I thought, "Wow, I'm really going through with this. This is amazing." Anthony is just such a big, quiet, amazing man, just so brave and stoic. I think he put on a brave face for his family, even after feeling so not great for months.

Scott

The surgery was on Monday. What happened Monday morning?

Stacy

We checked into pre-admission. Letecia came with me. She was my sherpa. She was carrying all my bags for me. She was such a good nurse. She actually came through the whole process with me right until they took me into the OR. Sitting in a pre-admission bed, really surreal, laying there with my gown on, getting ready to take blood tests, getting a visit from the nurses letting me know what was going to happen. The urologist came by, the surgeon came by, and the anesthesiologist came by. Everybody kind of tells you what to expect, what's going to happen. All I kept thinking was, "Oh I get to have such a nice sleep from my anesthesia. It's going to be a nice rest." Trying to think of all the positives.

The anesthetist says to me I'm nervous. I know I don't talk a lot when I'm nervous. So she was just going over her spiel and then she said, "Do you have any questions?" I looked at her. I had eyelash extensions and I remember hearing that they tape your eyelids shut. I just said, "Do you tape my eyes shut?" "Yeah." And I said, "Can you just be careful of my eyelash extensions?" And Letecia started laughing. She's like, "I can't believe you just asked that." The very stoic anesthesiologist, she just kind of nodded and said, "Yes, we'll see what we can do." That was my only question going into surgery.

Scott

Well, that means they've done a complete job, right? That's the only question you have. It's kind of amusing that you're going there to save someone's life as long as I can keep my extensions.

Stacy

That's the important thing. Yeah, all good.

Scott

Why do they tape your eyes shut during surgery anyway?

Stacy

I think she said something about debris - making sure debris doesn't go in the eyes. I think the eyes, when you're under anesthetic, maybe they don't shut completely. I remember hearing - I have a donation support group on Facebook - somebody saying that they had an eyelash in

their eye And they showed a picture and it was not pretty. So I guess just whatever protection and extra precaution.

Scott

Just so everybody knows, post-surgery, how were your eyelashes?

Stacy

They were perfect. Not one eyelash is out of place.

Scott

That's a good surgeon and a good team of doctors.

Stacy

Absolutely. Yeah, she did her job. I was very happy.

Scott

So what do you remember after surgery when you woke up? What happened?

Stacy

I remember waking up thinking, that was it. I feel fantastic just kind of being in the room, hearing the nurses, and looking at the time. I went in first thing in the morning. I think they said my surgery was going to be about 2-2.5 hours. I was groggy, but I looked at the time and it was 12.30. All I was worried about was that the surgeon said, "Who do we call?" "Call Letecia. Letecia will call my mom and let her know everything's good. Everything went fine." So apparently that happened an hour or two before I kind of woke up. So that was great. Letecia knew that I was in recovery and she was waiting to come see me. In recovery, I remember just laying there watching people come and go, kind of falling asleep in and out, feeling fantastic, and not having any pain.

I didn't get out of recovery, I think, it was 4.30. I didn't know in the background. In the meantime, Letecia was talking with Anthony's wife, thinking, "Why is she still in recovery? I hope everything's okay. Something's got to be wrong. Why is she not up in her room?" I was just down there waiting, watching and ended up in a private room. I guess they were just waiting for my room to be ready. I was actually completely shocked at how fantastic I felt and no anxiety, just pure happiness. I felt like I had a new outlook on life. I was looking out at the trees thinking, "I can't believe I just did this." This is me and my anxiety. We can conquer anything.

Scott

This is amazing. And you didn't need any pain medication or anything like that?

Stacy

They have you hooked up to a pain pump and I didn't need it at all. The nurses were on top of my Tylenol. That's all I needed. I just remember being uncomfortable, kind of turning and rolling, using kind of your upper body strength and your arms to kind of move around a little bit, but no pain, absolutely nothing. They were just on top of everything. A little bit of nausea from the anesthetic and they were on top of that as well. That was only one day of, kind of, the first night with nausea. Then the urologist came in the next morning and they looked at my pain pump machine, and they said, "You haven't touched it." And I said, "No, I don't need it. Everything's fine." So on to recovery.

Scott

Now, for this whole process, you had a few resources or a couple that helped you since you'd never done this before. One, you mentioned the kidney donor group on Facebook. Were you pretty active in that, asking questions and stuff like that?

Stacy

Yeah, I found them in December after all my testing. I don't know why. I think I just punched up Kidney Donor just to see if there was anything and up came this support group, and it's worldwide. I think, now, there are between nine and ten thousand people in this group, all pre and post-process. So just watching that group and seeing the questions asked prior by people going through the process and people answering questions that have been through the process, it was a huge resource for me. I think I'd posted a lot on there. Now, I'm still on it and answering questions. People want to know what's common. Is this normal? Is this not normal? Yeah, this has been a huge resource for me.

Scott

And the other one, you said you had a coworker who had also donated a kidney previously.

Stacy

Yeah, I found out that, at my workplace where I currently am, a young medical therapist also donated a kidney young. She was 31 when she donated. I don't think I was even thinking about it at 31. She was 5 years post-op when I started talking to her. I think I was only about a few months into the process when I found out that she had done it. So she let me know kind of what to expect - the two-day process that I have to go through for testing in the Lower Mainland and the surgeon she had, I think the same surgeon, the same nurse coordinator. It was pretty amazing to have her and just ask her. She checked on me through the whole process too. She's fantastic texting me to see how I'm doing.

Scott

It's great to know somebody like that, for sure.

Stacy

Yeah.

Scott

You met up with Anthony and his family about 6 weeks after the surgery. What was that like?

Stacy

Oh my goodness, my mom lives in the Lower Mainland, so I drove down while I was recovering and spent a couple of days with my mom and I went and had lunch with Anthony, Tiffani, and their daughter Stephanie. Anthony gets emotional when he sees me. I feel bad. I think it's normal for recipients to feel a little guilty. He says he felt guilty, and I'm like, "This is what I wanted to do. This was my decision." I just found out how fantastic he was doing. He had to go for weekly tests - I think it was bi-weekly. It was twice a week for a month, and then it became weekly, and I think he's now monthly for his checkups.

For his bi-weekly tests, he was going to that hospital. At the time, there were other donors waiting for their tests as well, meeting with the physicians, and they had so much faith in my kidney working for him that his numbers were just amazing. The kidney was working fantastic. He didn't need a catheter. Some people need dialysis in addition to receiving a kidney. He didn't

need any of that. That was all done. So he's sailing through. He's just doing better and better all the time. Pretty amazing.

Scott

It's interesting, from a psychological standpoint, that he would experience guilt from being the recipient and you doing this. You're right. I mean, I can kind of understand that. I mean, it's not like no one was persuading you to do this. It's something you wanted to do but, yet, from his standpoint, it's absolutely huge. It meant his life and being able to be alive with his family. It's a huge thing. How can you ever repay someone for doing that? There's no way.

Stacy

Yeah, it's, it was never a second thought. I never had any doubt. I remember going through my testing thinking I'd be really disappointed if something came back and I couldn't do this. And he's just been doing amazing, absolutely amazing. He's a big guy and he's probably almost a foot taller than me. I remember the surgeon saying to me, even before I left the hospital, "We'll be happy if his creatinine was between 150 and 160. I think it had come down from, like, over 400 and between 150 and 160 for his size, and my kidney size would have been great. Now, he's between 130 and 140. So he's just exceeded the expectations of what we all expected.

Scott

So part of the criteria for determining if you were a good match was not measuring how tall you were with each other, obviously.

Stacy

Obviously, they didn't ask that on the questionnaire, so it was all good. Yeah.

Scott

Now there's one other side benefit from this and that has to do with Letecia. What's she doing?

Stacy

Oh, through the whole process, Letecia's just kept saying, even sitting at my bedside pre-surgery, "Wow, this is really amazing - all the testing that you've been through - and it's exciting. Maybe I should look into doing this. Maybe this is something I'm really thinking about." Even post-surgery, being in the hospital - she's such a fantastic nurse - while I was in recovery, she kept saying, "You're not in any pain. I can't believe how you're sailing through this. It's really making me think this is something I want to do as well." And she started to research. Letecia decided she's not going to be a kidney donor, but she's going to donate her liver and she has a donation date of November 13th coming up.

Scott

How does that work? They just cut off part of her liver.

Stacy

Yeah, your liver grows back. I didn't know that. She probably knew that being a nurse. Apparently, they take 20 to 30 percent of your liver, if you're donating to a child and 60 to 70 percent of your liver if you're donating to an adult, and she's donating to an adult. She is just amazing. She's amazing. There are a lot of people in my donor group who are double donors. They've done both. So this is just incredible. I've been through this. Maybe I want another 8 weeks off work. Maybe I'll think about donating a liver. But yeah, it's just incredible. She's so brave because she has the same anxiety as me. I'm so proud of her for just Continuing this

process as well and being inspired by my story and doing it as well. She met the family and Tiffani and Anthony, and she's just inspired by the whole process and doing her thing

Scott

Now, it sounds like you're such a big proponent of this. I mean, that's why you're on here to raise awareness and get people to donate. We're going to have your contact information in the episode notes if people want to contact you. You said that one of your great resources was that person who had donated before whom you could ask all kinds of questions. Well, now you're that resource person. If somebody is interested, they can get in touch with you and ask those same questions.

Stacy

Absolutely.

Scott

What's your advice to anyone considering doing this?

Stacy

One of the good things is testing. They test you. They see how healthy you are, just ensuring that you're healthy enough to do this. A lot of people think that age is a barrier. People in the donor support group are in their 60s and 70s helping, so there is no age. If you're thinking about it at any age, there's no barrier. I think anybody would help a family member being able to do this. So if you think, "Oh, I'm too old, I'm not healthy enough," you know what? It's just an incredible feeling to be able to help somebody, and I have a new family from it. And if I can inspire people and let them know that I kind of sailed through, I'm very lucky, I know a lot of people haven't maybe been as lucky or have some issues, but take care of yourself. It's actually another reason to take care of yourself. It's not my body anymore. Pre-donation, I remember thinking, "I got to eat healthy. It's not my kidney anymore. It's going to somebody else."

Scott

Yeah, you're just the caretaker for a little while.

Stacy

Yeah, exactly.

Scott

What a great story. I love a happy story like this, especially when it has an amazing, happy ending. And you and Anthony are both doing great post-surgery and I hope this inspires more people to do the same thing.

Stacy

Absolutely. Yep. Reach out. I'd answer any questions.

Scott

You wanna see pictures of Anthony and his family, and Stacy, and Letecia? Of course, you do! You can see everything in the episode notes at WhatWasThatLike.com/157

If you liked this episode, you might enjoy my conversation with Mark, which was way back in episode 5. Mark is an attorney here in Florida, and he too decided to give one of his kidneys to someone he had never met. And even though that episode was from several years ago, I still

get messages sometimes from people who hear it for the first time, and they tell me that it inspired them to be a donor. So that's why, when I heard about Stacy, I thought, yeah, we definitely need to talk about this again. That older episode is called "Mark gave his kidney to a stranger", at [WhatWasThatLike.com/05](https://www.WhatWasThatLike.com/05).

I figured this is a good opportunity to let you know about my thought process with choosing particular stories. I have a general policy that I don't usually cover a story that's primarily medical. I get a lot of stories sent to me where the person is basically like, "I had this symptom, and this other symptom, and I went in the hospital, and I was diagnosed with this deadly disease or condition, and I they said I only had about 6 months left to live, but here I am 5 years later still alive."

That type of scenario is something that people send me all the time, and the problem with it is that it's just too common. Now, I want to be careful to say this – I don't want to minimize or downplay what that person went through. I know that experiencing a health issue that could potentially end your life early is a really traumatizing experience. Even life-changing.

But for this podcast I try to stick with stories that are really unusual. When you see a new episode of What Was That Like come up on your podcast app, I want you to feel like, "Ok, here we go, this is going to be something I don't get to hear on other podcasts." At least, that's my goal. I want you to have high expectations for each episode, and then I want to deliver on that. So I hope that makes sense.

Having said that, I do read everything that gets submitted, and I do make exceptions sometimes. There are occasionally stories that are mostly medical that I think are still unusual enough or beneficial or entertaining enough that it makes a good podcast episode. So if you have a story that you think would be a good fit, you can submit it at the website – just go to [WhatWasThatLike.com](https://www.WhatWasThatLike.com) and click on Submit your story.

And here's a recent review, read by an AI voice – if you leave a 5-star review, maybe you'll hear it voiced by AI in a future episode.

Stacy

I recently discovered this podcast and it's the perfect podcast. I enjoy the stories and find myself laughing and crying along with the guests. I love the uplifting nature and delivery of the stories, even when, oftentimes, they are such tragedies. But out of each tragedy, there always seems to be something good, something beautiful. This podcast is a great reminder of just how resilient we are. Thank you for presenting these stories in such a way that leaves us feeling better and wanting to do better.

Scott

Graphics for this episode were created by Bob Bretz. Full episode transcription was created by James Lai.

And now we close out the show, like we do every time, with a Listener Story. This is a 5-10 minute story, sent in by a listener. If you have a short interesting story, record it on your phone and email it to me – Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com.

This week's Listener Story is about a couple who just wanted a short vacation – but one of them had a secret plan.

Stay safe, and I'll see you back here in ONE week with a bonus episode!

(Listener Story)

Hi Scott, my name's Lyndall and I'm sending lots of love from Australia. So going back about 10 years, my partner and I have three kids. We had a one-year-old, 4.5, and 5.5, and everything was great. We just never really got much time away. So when the opportunity arose to have a whole weekend away, we jumped at it. We took the kids up to my parents. It was about a 2.5-hour drive. On the way, the youngest one vomited and we didn't think too much of it. We cleaned her up and kept going. We got to my parents and I let my mum know and she's like, "No, it'll be fine. You go have fun." We gave her an extra car seat and off we went.

So we had a fantastic time. We did a tour of the jail - a nighttime tour - which was really great. We were getting ready to order room service and my mom rang up, and she just wanted to let us know that there had been more vomiting and more diarrhea. The youngest one had the gastro tummy bug. So we were like, "Oh dear." She's like, "No, it's okay." She's handling it really well. "We'll call you if there's any issues. You stay. You have fun. Go for it." They had plenty of help. My dad was there and my sister was there to help out as well. So we're like, "Okay, all right. No worries. We'll keep going."

We ordered room service and I started to feel unwell. I didn't say anything at first and our food came and I started eating it. My partner was a little bit annoyed. He wanted a romantic dinner and I was just trying to put that sick feeling at bay, hoping that I was just hungry, and I wasn't. I'm pretty sure I myself had my head in the toilet the whole weekend. Yeah, that was how I spent most of my Friday night. Unfortunately, we had to cancel. We had a nice tour booked for the next morning - a tunnels tour - and I spent the morning in bed. My partner wandered around the town, made phone calls, generally amused himself, came in and checked on me, and we were getting close to lunchtime and I said to him, "Look, I think I'm starting to feel better. I'll be able to push through. I'll just lay in bed a little bit longer. And I'll be up and moving and we'll continue what we're going to do."

So he decided to go to a pub and have a beer. Whilst he was doing that, he was on the phone with my mum and the kids and having a chat with them and, next thing, he heard a scream and like, "God, there's so much blood." He had to anxiously await somebody to come back to the phone and say that our son, who is a bit too curious for his own good, stuck his finger in the fan just to see what happens. And yeah, the fan got smashed and there was blood everywhere, and my dad and my sister were taking him to their local hospital. My partner hung up from my mum and he quickly rang me and he said, "This is what's happened. Grab the stuff. Let's go."

So I'm in the hotel room just trying to chuck stuff in the bag. It won't go in. So I just gathered it up in my arms and I've got bags and pillows and everything hanging off me, and I was running through the hotel and he met me in the lobby, and grabbed some stuff off me. We must have looked a rare sight from running out of the hotel like that. Jumped in the car and went to the hospital. Met up with my dad and he's like, "Yep, they've got him an X-ray and they're just trying to find out if it's broken before they start stitching it up." Thankfully it wasn't broken. There, he got some stitches and it all seemed to settle down after that.

We went back to my mum and dad's and we had a bit of a discussion. He was handling it really well and the little one was coming better with their gastro. So we decided to push on through.

My mom was like, "No, go. We're going to do this." So off we went again and my partner wanted to go fishing and I'm like, "Oh, I could handle this right now." So we went and sat at the beach for a little bit and it was all good. I was coming better. I was feeling a lot better.

We went out to dinner and there was a Ferris wheel across the park. So we jumped on this Ferris wheel, and we got to the top, and he got down on one knee, and he proposed to me. He said to me later that he would never have pushed through with the weekend if he hadn't had that ultimate plan at the end. So yeah, it was quite an eventful weekend. Six months later, we flew into the States and we got married. So, nice little small wedding and we had our second time away from the kids. Lo and behold, about 5.30 in the morning, the hotel fire alarm went off. We all got pushed outside in our dress and gowns. So we just packed up our stuff and we had a nice family holiday.