

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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The Ripon Bulletin

An Extraordinary Gift

It came from out of nowhere. The fragility of life, with its many twists and turns, at times flowing along with unannounced, undemanding companionship, while at other times crashing into the calm waters of our existence in a totally disruptive, petulant manner, forcing the unsuspecting person to take notice of the immediacy of an insistent problem that must be addressed, regardless of the person's pedigree, status, or station in life.

Sometime in the 1990s, as I recall, we became aware of our niece's health being compromised by the onset of diabetes. Abi was in her teenage years, only to discover that she was now medically classified as a brittle diabetic. Over the next several decades she ran the gauntlet of sugar spikes, constant finger pricks, trips to the ER, all the while coming to grips with the reality that this failure of her body to produce the necessary amounts of insulin would most likely end badly for her.

Last November her kidneys reached the end of their usefulness, forcing her to enter into an aggressive program of dialysis treatments. In the meantime, the medical staff said she would need a new kidney and a new pancreas. Her name was entered on the waiting list in hopeful anticipation that parts would be available. It became a wait-and-see game, only this game was deadly serious.

A few weeks ago, our family was notified that a donor was available to give her a kidney. We were excited and relieved. A kidney meant hope, and possibly buying time until a pancreas donor could be had. The surgery was scheduled for April 10. Shortly after this announcement, the surgery was cancelled. Abi valiantly continued showing up for work, only the dialysis treatments and general fatigue of her body's battle left her drained.

Then last Tuesday evening, Abi received a call from the hospital announcing that they had a deceased 20-year-old, the victim of a homicide, and that she needed to come in right away. My brother drove her to the hospital where she was prepped for the surgery the next day. The pancreas and kidney transplant took five hours and was a total success. The medical team that has been working with Abi could hardly contain their joy, even commenting, medically speaking, that Abi had hit the lottery.

As of this writing, Abi is doing wonderfully well. The day following the surgery they had her up and walking around the ward. The kidney is functioning beautifully,

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relieving her of the need for any more dialysis treatments. Add to that, the report from the doctors declares that the pancreas is pumping out insulin, causing the doctors to affirm that Abi is no longer a diabetic!

Over the next few weeks Abi will need to give her body plenty of time to recover from this invasive surgery. The company she works for has been very supportive of her during this ordeal and is holding her job for her until she is well enough to return.

Among the many amazing facets throughout this ordeal is that Abi was actually third on the list for organ transplant. However, because she was needing a double-transplant, she was moved to the top of the list. The medical rationale for this decision is based upon a donor who could provide both needed organs. The body has a much better chance of accepting the new organs if they are from the same donor. A kidney could be donated by a live donor, but a pancreas meant that someone would have to die.

We do not know who the deceased donor is, and probably never will know, but this extraordinary gift has meant that my niece will live. The family of this donor is grieving the loss of their loved one. They were willing to make a decision to allow their child's organs to be used by others. As I understand it, besides the pancreas and kidney received by Abi, the other kidney was donated to another recipient, and still another person received the heart. All precious, life-saving gifts!

Obviously as a family we are overjoyed that Abi is no longer riding the edge of uncertainty regarding her enormous health issues. Many tears of relief and joy have been shed during this past week. Our church folks and friends have been faithfully praying for Abi and our family throughout this ordeal. Prior to the start of our Easter service Sunday morning, I was standing outside the front door of the church just reflecting on how grateful I am knowing Abi is enjoying a level of wellness she hasn't experienced in a very long time. One of the ladies of the church was walking toward the door. Recognizing me, she asked, "How is Abi doing? I've been praying for her every day!" This was only the first of many who were asking about my niece. I must tell you that it touched me deeply, bringing tears of appreciation to my eyes for the faithful prayers of these fellow travelers.

As it was Easter Week, I couldn't miss the similarity of what our family experienced and the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. For Abi to live, it was necessary that someone else die. And that's the meaning of Easter. In order for you and me to live, Jesus needed to die. But the best news is, death could not hold him!

Hallelujah! He is risen!