

## Gaining a chance to become a mother

A transplant gave a new life to a B.C. woman whose kidneys had failed

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*by Ken Donohue*

My two sons don't know it yet, but theirs is a very special mother. Ten years ago my wife had a kidney transplant. She was fortunate because she only spent 14 months on dialysis before I was able to give her one of my kidneys. Many people languish for years on dialysis before getting a transplant.



The story began a year earlier when a doctor came into her hospital room and told her she needed a kidney transplant. When I called her that morning at the hospital to ask how she was doing, there was a pause on other end of the phone, and then she started crying.

There had always been a glimmer of hope that with dialysis her kidneys would start working again, but now this

was our reality. She was 26, and had much of her life ahead of her. She wanted to travel and have a career — things many of us take for granted. But more than anything, she wanted to be a mother. Without a transplant, all of this would be just a dream.

Carrie's transplant on March 31, 1999, was a rebirth of sorts. She returned to university and is now an elementary school teacher. She has seen much of the world -- climbing a Costa Rican volcano, haggling with carpet merchants in Iran and snorkeling on the Great Barrier Reef.

And four years ago she became a mother when our son, Jack, was born. I remember when she first got to hold him in the operating room. It was a poignant moment because, almost to the day seven years earlier she lay dying in the intensive care unit of that same hospital, with doctors unsure why her kidneys had failed.

Carrie has an innate and natural way with children. It's wonderful to see her interact with Jack — the way she reads to him and teaches him new words. And the art projects they

do together, and the way she sings to him and comforts him when he needs it. She is a great mother and teacher to Jack.

Life wasn't complete with just one child; she longed for another. But the transplanted kidney weighed on our minds. The first pregnancy was perfect in almost every way, and we wondered if we would be tempting fate by trying for another. Any pregnancy can put a strain on a woman's kidneys, but having just one kidney requires extra attention. Some suggested against it. But a mother's instinct runs deep, and so we began looking forward to the birth of another son.

During the pregnancy Carrie grew tired and started feeling unwell, more so than one would expect during pregnancy. Tests revealed that her kidney function was deteriorating and her hemoglobin, or blood level, was alarmingly low.

Her doctor decided to deliver the baby six weeks early. After spending the first two weeks of his life in the hospital, Max is now eight months old and doing well. And thanks to a blood transfusion after the delivery, Carrie has regained her health, and her kidney is functioning, as it should.

My wife's story isn't unique. There are dozens of women just like her, who, through the marvels organ transplantation have had the opportunity to become mothers. But there are countless more who can't share in that same dream because they are fighting for their survival.

Each morning, I wake up and see the benefits of organ donation next to me. And in the rooms across from ours are two little boys who are here today because of organ donation. When I think of Jack and Max, and other children born to mothers who have had a transplant, I see the benefits of organ donation multiplying, as each child starts to find their place in this world. It's an incredible legacy that begins with an organ transplant.

I heard someone recently say they would never want to be an organ donor. It still surprises and astounds me when I hear those words. When I think of all the things Carrie has accomplished over the past 10 years, and when I think of the thousands of British Columbians whose lives have been enriched through transplantation, I can't help but marvel at the wonder of organ donation.

Just 16 per cent of British Columbians have registered on the Organ Donor Registry, yet 85 per cent say they support organ donation. We all lead busy lives, but take a moment to consider organ donation and register at [www.transplant.bc.ca](http://www.transplant.bc.ca).

Happy Mother's Day.

*Ken Donohue is the director of communications with BC Transplant, and the husband of a great mother.*