

My gift to my best friend and how this changed my world

Hi, my name is Louise McDonald and I would like to share my experience as a live donor.

In 2001 I moved to Australia. Well, I actually went there on a holiday and kind of extended my stay. Wow, what a 14 year rollercoaster this was!

After being in Sydney for around 1 year, I decided to transition into a new career as a Personal Trainer. After a few weeks of being qualified I met my soon to be BEST friend in the world, Peter Gilmore. He wanted me to work with him towards defending his title at the 2003 World Championships 100m Sprint.

Not long after we began our training for this event, he became extremely ill and was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. This was a massive shock to us as he was ridiculously fit and well up to this point and this news was hard for him, and those close him to digest.

After what seemed like an eternity of hospital admissions, chemotherapy and one blunder/ailment after another, he then went on to experience a cardiac arrest and renal failure. This left him with no option but to have dialysis to replace his kidney function. I can't begin to tell you how terribly upsetting this was for everyone involved and I know that if you're reading this, that you have probably also been affected by this at some level. My heart goes out to you x

After almost 12 months of dialysis, Peter is told by the Nephrologist (an incredible Doctor in Sydney), that Peter needed a kidney transplant. Of course, this would normally be a difficult topic to discuss with friends, but Peter and I had become so close throughout his ordeal that it seemed natural for me to want to investigate if I could be considered to be a donor for him.

So the tests began - against his will at first, as he didn't want to 'chop me up!' Goodness that helped my nerves didn't it! But by the time I had arrived for my ultrasound to view the size of my juicy kidneys, I was sure that this was meant to be. We were a perfect match on ALL levels! Now let me tell you that I am 5' 5" and Peter is 6'2"! The Nephrologist could NOT believe that my kidneys were 12cms and pretty much the size of male organs... very strange considering I'm like a little fairy! So, yes... this was indeed my purpose in Peter's life.

Then, 9th December 2013 and today is THE day.

Off we went to St Vincent's Private Hospital in Sydney for this operation and I was absolutely TERRIFIED! Peter and I drove there together with my beautiful sister Laura - who flew out from my home town Newcastle to look after me - and Peter's lovely girlfriend Joey. There were mixed emotions of laughter and tears.

Hours passed and then we were both out of surgery feeling dandy, and Peter felt like doing flipping cartwheels up and down the corridor! His eyesight improved significantly and he was already feeling champion. Personally, I think this had something to do with the sedation too, but hey, whatever made that guy smile works for me. ☺

I'm feeling terrific and there's SO much love and peace around me.. I did it.. I saved my best friend and words can't articulate how I feel about this.

There was some pain, but it was manageable and the staff at the hospital were incredible and attended to my aftercare and comfort from start to finish. I have the most amazing support network around me and even though I was very tired. I'm now totally fine and laughing my head off with Laura about how the whole thing happened.

I feel at this stage it's important for me to point out that everyone will have his or her own experience with this type of decision. My operation is complete and has been as success thanks to my fantastic Surgeon who was just wonderful throughout.

This is where my healing really began, as even though I had quite a bit of emotional questions to deal with from the hospital team before the transplant, I can now say that with hind sight I probably didn't properly prepare for the feeling of loss and gain that I endured afterwards. I started to feel a sense of sadness for the loss of my kidney, which at the time made no sense to me and I thought I was depressed. I now believe that my body was indeed feeling the space created. But the great news is that yes, this DOES pass. Once I got my head around it I felt so good again. Better even than before the transplant. And every time I look at my little tummy now, I smile knowing what it all meant for us.

My kidney function has been superb right through from post op to now and although I'm very healthy anyway, it hasn't changed too much from the perspective of my lifestyle. I just pay a bit more attention to my protein intake and staying well hydrated, being the exercise freak that I am!

One of the most challenging aspects of my recovery was the rest that I needed to take, as it's not like me to sit still for more than 5 minutes. You can usually find me playing with weights at the gym or running around like a lunatic with boundless energy! To be told that I couldn't exercise for 3 months was like telling me not to blink, but I managed just fine by integrating other hobbies and lifestyle changes that were equally as fulfilling.

Would I do it again and did I make the right decision? 100% YES!

Peter will disagree reading this, as I know that he feels bad for the journey we had together to achieve this, but you know, I feel that he gave ME life!

What this has given me is a new sense of why I'm here and what I was, I believe put here to do...

For anyone both suffering with kidney problems and waiting for a transplant or even for those close to another affected by this, there is hope and there is much support available.

Stay positive and keep smiling, always.

Louise xx

