

Craig Shields

I remember feeling an odd sense of calm on January 27, 2004, the night before my kidney transplant surgery. I also felt a sense of guilt. I was in a hospital room eating pizza while my sister Rhonda was next door on a liquid diet. However, her resolve was strong and she was committed to seeing me through this. She was great! She volunteered to donate her kidney to me. I can still remember the 3-way call with her and my sister Lynn. "Craig, we just wanted you to know that if our kidneys are a match then you can have ours", she said. I wanted to cry. Greater love has no man than this, that he would lay down his life for a friend. I thought they might offer, but I wasn't willing to ask. I just didn't know how to ask a person for a kidney, not even family.

Years before, I was diagnosed with Sarcoidosis, often called the "Great Imitator". Doctors don't know much about this disease except that it's more common in black women. With some, it just affects one area like their respiratory system. With me, it attacked my eyes and looked like Glaucoma. It attacked my respiratory and lymph-nodes and appeared to be Lymphoma, but all the while it was attacking my kidneys like kidney disease and before I knew, it was too late.

After seeing two different Nephrologists (kidney doctors) I was finally told that I would eventually need a kidney transplant. It shocked and scared me. My doctor laid out all of my options. After getting all the information, I decided to avoid dialysis. So I chose to have a preemptive transplant.

Once the word got out, I saw an outpouring of love. People that I hadn't heard from in a long time called and volunteered to be tested. Even people that I didn't know like my wife's friend and co-worker who I hadn't met tested and was a match. This is where I saw God's blessing. I read an article in the paper about a young man who was waiting for a kidney. Fifteen of his family members were tested and no one matched. I had five matches and three "good" matches which included my sisters and my wife, which is rare. They chose my sister Rhonda because she was the first.

The surgery was a success and I began to improve immediately. Today, my sister and I are doing well and I often think about the sacrifice that she made. We are approaching our fourth anniversary, and like last year, I will take her to dinner and thank her for saving my life.