



MEDIA RELEASE

July 27, 2009

St. Mary's Finest Donate the Gift of Life By Deputy First Class Cindy Allen, Public Information Officer

Three of St. Mary's County's finest practice what they preach and believe a gift from the heart is the gift of love and life, the perfect "Trifecta". "Trifecta" is a term used to describe a successful phenomenon, which occurs in threes. Captain Richard Gray of the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office, Corrections Division, Sergeant Michael Butler and Deputy First Class Timothy White of the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office Patrol Division, each share something very special in common. In addition to working for the Sheriff's Office protecting and serving the citizens of St. Mary's County, Maryland, within the past year, each of these gentlemen selflessly donated a kidney to their parent. The officers and their parents, Phyllis Gray, Captain Gray's mother, Ralph Butler, Sgt Butler's father and Jean Wing, Dfc. White's mother, wanted to share their experiences to educate others as to the benefits of organ donation. On June 22, 2009, I had the privilege of interviewing these six (6) incredible individuals as they recounted their similar experiences.

Jean Wing, 67, of Waldorf, Maryland, was diagnosed in 1993 with chronic kidney disease and was told she would one day need to go on kidney dialysis or have a kidney transplant. Jean recalls hearing the news and remembers her son's immediate response. "There was no hesitation in Tim's voice. He said to me, 'Mom, you are not going to go on dialysis. When the time comes, I am going to give you one of my kidneys.'"

Chronic kidney disease progresses slowly, and as the years passed, Jean found herself becoming more and more fatigued. At the beginning of 2008, Jean's doctors told her the time was drawing near and she would soon need dialysis. Tim never waived in his commitment to donate a kidney to his mother, and the two began the testing process to see if he would be a match. The good news was delivered; Tim was an excellent donor candidate for his mother. "I really hesitated to take his kidney", Jean said. "I cried many tears over it. I was afraid for him." Jean said her son's resolve gave her confidence and strengthened her faith. On May 14, 2008 at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore, doctors successfully transplanted Tim White's kidney into his mother. Nearly fourteen months later, Jean's body is showing no signs of rejecting the kidney.

Phyllis Gray, 61, of Hollywood, Maryland, tells a similar story about her experience and her son Richard. Phyllis was diagnosed in 1994 with polycystic kidney disease, a genetic disorder characterized by the growth of cysts in the kidneys. She was aware polycystic kidney disease ran in her family and decided to have herself tested. "It is so important for people to know their family's medical history. A simple sonogram is all it takes to check for the cysts," Phyllis explains. Richard chimes in, "Medical advances have come such a long way in diagnosing and treating kidney diseases."

Over the years, Richard watched his mother grow increasingly lethargic. “Your energy level is decreased and you get tired very easily,” Phyllis explains. “However, you really don’t realize just how tired you were until after you have a kidney transplant.” Phyllis and Richard Gray began the testing process at the Washington Hospital Center in December of 2008. “There was never any question in my mind. I didn’t want her going on dialysis,” Richard said.

“You hate for your son to have to go through something like this for you,” Phyllis said. Richard immediately responded, “I was honored to be able to do it. She gave me life and took care of me. That was the least I could do.” Richard’s kidney was a compatible match for his mother, and the transplant was performed on April 8, 2009. It has been three months since Phyllis’ transplant and both she and Richard are doing well. Phyllis is required to return to the hospital monthly for follow-up appointments during the first year after the transplant but her prognosis is favorable. Phyllis smiles at her son. “I feel like I got my life back.”

The odyssey for Ralph Butler, 67, of Leonardtown, Maryland, began in 2003 when he was told by doctors his kidneys were not functioning properly. Ralph explains, “My kidneys were not filtering my blood the way they should.” Ralph experienced the same chronic fatigue Jean and Phyllis spoke of. “I would go to bed tired and wake up tired.” Two years later Ralph had to begin kidney dialysis. Mike watched his father leave three days a week for dialysis but he said he really never had an understanding of what his father was enduring during those treatments. “I was ignorant about kidney disease and what goes on at a dialysis clinic.” Ralph received dialysis treatment for four and a half years. Mike explains, “Prior to being diagnosed with kidney disease and beginning dialysis, my father was an active man. It got to the point where he would come home from dialysis and his energy level still wasn’t there. Kidney dialysis ruled every aspect of my father’s life and he wasn’t able to do any of the activities he loved so much. More importantly, I did not want dialysis to break his spirit.”

Mike Butler worked on Tim White’s patrol squad, and knew Tim had donated a kidney to his mother the year prior. Mike decided he wanted to know more about kidney disease and kidney transplants so he began his research with the help of his squadmate, Tim. “Tim gave me a lot of material to read and I went home and read the information.” Mike said once he finished reading the information, he began to realize exactly what his father was enduring and how much a kidney transplant would help his father. Mike stated, “It was a no brainer. I was like, oh my god, I need to do this. I knew I wanted to donate a kidney to my father so I called my father right away and said, ‘Lets go Pop. We are going to go and get tested.’”

The Butlers also chose the Washington Hospital Center, and were treated by the same doctor as the Grays. Mike was a compatible match for his father but Ralph Butler expressed concern and explains, “I wasn’t worried about me. I was worried about Mike because he had his whole life ahead of him and I was already sixty-five years old.” Mike, too, never wavered from his decision, and on March 11, 2009, Mike’s kidney was transplanted into his father.

Mike laughs, “You want to know the ironic part? I was laying in my hospital bed after the surgery, still somewhat groggy, and the doctor walked in and said to me, ‘Your dad was just down to visit you.’ I was like, what? Can you believe it? Pop was up and out of bed before me!” Ralph Butler’s life has changed dramatically since his kidney transplant. He is once again able to enjoy going to watch softball games, one of his favorite leisurely passions. Mike beams, “Yeah, I used to know where Pop was all the time. Now when I call him, I never know where I will find him. The family is thinking about placing a GPS device on him just so we can keep track of his whereabouts. He is even talking about purchasing a motorcycle again to go riding with my brothers and I. Unbelievable, huh?”

The one thing all three families are passionate about and wanted to express is the importance of organ donation. According to the United Network for Sharing Organs, as of July 22, 2009, there were 102,599 persons on organ donor waiting lists. Organ donations can be made through several means including donation after brain or cardiac death, and living organ

donations. People of all ages, young and old, regardless of race and gender, are potential organ donors. It is the condition of the organ which is most important. Potential donors are evaluated for the suitability of the organ and compatibility to the potential recipient on an individual basis. As for the types of organs which may be donated for transplant? Kidneys, heart, lungs, liver, pancreas and intestines may be transplanted.

According to transplantliving.org, "Living organ donation dates back to 1954, when a kidney from one twin was successfully transplanted into his identical brother. Today the number of living organ donors is more than 6,000 per year, one in four donors is not biologically related to the recipient." The most common organ donated through a living transplant donation is the kidney. "African Americans are four times as likely to develop kidney failure, which requires dialysis or a kidney transplant."

The benefits of living donations include the recipient avoiding a long wait on a transplant list, and the kidney received may be healthier and tend to function immediately. Additional benefits include, when possible, flexibility in scheduling the surgery to assure both the donor and recipient are in the best possible health. Lastly, testing can be conducted on multiple family members or potential donors to enhance compatibility between the donor and recipient, and decrease the chances of the organ being rejected. Living organ donation is considered major surgery and does pose potential risks to the donor and recipient; however, medical advances and laparoscopic surgery have made the transplant procedure and recovery time less demanding. In addition, transplant hospitals require psychological pre-surgery individual counseling for both the donor and recipient. The hospitals want to ensure both patients have a full understanding of the risks involved, understand the potential for organ rejection and are committed to the procedure for the right moral and ethical reasons.

Numerous websites are available for further information on organ donation, which include:

OrganDonor.Gov, which provides access to U.S. Government information on organ and tissue donation and transplantation. www.organdonor.gov

United Network for Organ Sharing, a non-profit organization, which was established by congress in 1984 and administers the nation's only Organ Procurement Transplantation Network (OPTN) www.unos.org

Transplant Living, a private united network for organ sharing. www.transplantliving.org

Information may also be obtained through the nation's major hospitals which specialize in organ transplantation.

As I look around the table at these three families beaming with pride, I am touched by the bond shared between parent and child. I also admire the connection they share among their families. The perfect trifecta. When asked if they had any final thoughts, Mike Bulter spoke up first. "The care and confidentiality you have with your doctor, coordinator and nurse is unreal." Phyllis Gray: "Organ donation; it's a wonderful gift." Richard Gray: "With technology, two days in the hospital and a little discomfort is well worth it." "Yeah, but don't expect to go back to work right away. You will be off work for a three week minimum", Tim adds. And finally, Ralph Butler: "I tell all of my friends, put your name on the list."

References:

OrganDonor.Gov (2009). Retrieved July 22, 2009, from <http://www.organdonor.gov>

United Network for Organ Sharing (2009). Retrieved July 22, 2009, from <http://www.unos.org/>

Transplant Living (2009). Retrieved July 22, 2009, from <http://www.transplantliving.org>

U.S. Renal Data System (2005). National Institute of Health, National Kidney Disease Education Program. Retrieved July 22, 2009, from http://www.nkdep.nih.gov/news/campaign/african_americans.htm



Deputy First Class Timothy White, Jean Wing, Captain Richard Gray, Phyllis Gray, Sergeant Michael Butler, and Ralph Butler