

By: Tina Baiter

Over the last two years, Jack Parry has truly learned what it means to be thankful for both having a supportive family willing to give anything to help each other through tough times and for each day of life.

Parry was diagnosed with kidney disease 10 years ago when blood tests showed his kidneys were only functioning at about 50 percent capacity. He knew a day might come when he would need to either start dialysis or have a kidney transplant, and in April 2007, that day came. Tests revealed his kidneys were functioning at just above 10 percent.

"It's a degenerative process, and they don't really worry about it until it gets down to about 10 percent capacity," Parry said. "I was trying to avoid going on dialysis, so I proactively sought a kidney transplant." Parry contacted his three sons, who along with his wife, all traveled to the University of Minnesota to see if they could provide a donor kidney. Two of his sons were compatible.

"We had family discussions about it," Parry said. "Once they learned you can live on one kidney without any complications, a normal life, they were more than happy to do it."

Parry's youngest son, Kyle Parry, was found to be the best match, and in July 2007 he went to the University of Minnesota for a physical to make sure he was capable of donating a kidney. During the visit, Parry's wife, Joyce Parry, mentioned to the nephrologist that doctors in Texarkana had been watching cysts on Jack's kidneys. The nephrologist decided to send Parry back to Texarkana to make sure the cysts were not cancerous before doing the transplant.

MRI results showed there was no cancer, and Parry returned to the University of Minnesota in October of 2007 to start the transplant process. The nephrologist decided it would be best to remove both of Parry's kidneys and six weeks later do the transplant. Three days after the surgery, doctors notified Parry's family that his kidneys had cancer and they would be unable to do the transplant.

"I wasn't upset about it," Parry said as he recalled learning about the diagnosis. "I probably said, where do we go from here? What's next?"

In December of 2007, Parry checked in at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, where he spent the next 80 days going through several medical trials, including not being able to eat for over two weeks, coming down with pneumonia and learning the doctors in Minnesota had left over one-third of a kidney inside of him. He would later learn the kidney was still infected with cancer.

His wife, Joyce, was by his side throughout the entire hospital stay acting as a patient advocate. His sons and a daughter-in-law were also there throughout periods of the hospital stay.

"Anybody who is ill needs an advocate to be there," Joyce said, as she shared stories about reading surgical reports, calling nurses when it was obvious help was needed, and even at one point realizing the medication Jack was being given was not supposed to be given to someone in his condition.

"She was a great advocate," Parry added. "This story is not just about me. It's also about family and caregivers."

Shortly before New Year's Eve 2007, while laying in a bed in the Intensive Care Unit in critical condition, Parry had what some might consider a near death experience. The experience made him realize he was still here for a reason and miracles do happen.

Parry dreamed a nurse came in and wrote "TOD (Time of Death) 7:39" on the white board. Then he saw them bring a gurney cart to take him to the morgue. Parry began to pray the same words over and over, "Lord all I need is a miracle."

"I was ready to die, but God let me know he wasn't," Parry said. "This has given me a new purpose in life. I talk to kidney patients and cancer patients. I talk to people about spiritual things and testify."

Twenty-seven days later, Parry was released from the hospital, but a second surgery to remove the remaining third of his kidney was scheduled for February 5. During the surgery, doctors punctured part of his intestines, and Parry was given an ileostomy. Nine days after the surgery, his surgical wound became infected, and for the next six months, Joyce would have to change and pack the wound three times a day.

"I thought my last name was Murphy for a while," Parry joked, referencing Murphy's Law. "I don't worry about surgeries anymore. The biggest gift I received is the gift that passes all understanding. The Lord is in control and he has blessed me with miracle after miracle."

On February 19, 2008, Parry was released from M.D. Anderson with hopes that receiving a kidney transplant would be possible by February 2010. In August of this year Parry was told by a hospital in Little Rock that he would have to wait at least three more years for the transplant because of the 27 blood transfusions he had over the course of his hospital stays. In October, a second hospital gave the same prognosis.

The blood transfusions created high levels of panel reactive antibodies in Parry's system that would cause his body to reject a new organ after transplant. Additionally, the transfusions may have changed Parry's blood chemistry enough that his son, Kyle, may no longer be a donor match. That is an issue the Parry family will address in time, but they are not worried.

"I had no idea what I was capable of dealing with spiritually, emotionally, physically," Parry said. "You are capable of facing anything, and with God's help, you can handle anything."

Parry and his wife say their life is back to a "new normal." Parry goes to dialysis for four hours every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Because he has no kidneys, he has to watch the amount of liquid he intakes. Parry now enjoys ice cubes instead of ice water, and at restaurants he often adds lemon and sugar to his cup of ice. Travel plans have to be made at least 30 days in advance in order to schedule Parry's dialysis, but none of the changes have affected Parry's gratitude.

Parry says there are four things he is thankful for, the love and mercy of the Lord, the love of his family, the miracles of medicine, and for everyday that he lives.

To learn more about Jack and Joyce Parry's journey and to follow Jack's progress visit www.caringbridge.org/visit/jackparry.

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Story Note: If you remove the highlighted paragraph, the story is at 1,003 words. With the paragraph it is at 1,093 words. There may be something else you would prefer to cut. I just couldn't figure out what to remove.

Photo Note: I don't know what photographs were given to the person who picked them up, but if they included a photo with their new granddaughter, Finley, a neat part of the story I couldn't include b/c of space would be good for the cut-line.

Jack learned he would be a grandpa for the first time while in the hospital at M.D. Anderson. His son and daughter-in-law sent them a beautiful blue and pink bouquet to announce the news. "It gave me another reason to continue to fight," Parry said with a smile as he described learning the news.