

Ashley:

Thank you all so much for having me today. My name is Ashley Ludlow. And I'm going to be telling you a little bit about my transplant story. So, thank you so much for joining today. I think it's sort of interesting everyone's transplant story. So, I'm really honored to be able to share mine today and how I decided to be a kidney donor. A few things that we need to discuss first, this activity disclaimer. I have no financial ties to anything here. I'm doing this of my own free will. So, we will get started. So, hear disclosure as well. I have no financial relationships. And then a little bit about me, so I am a registered dietician. I'm also an ACE certified health coach, licensed dietician nutritionist in Tennessee. I'm also I have a master's degree in gerontology.

So, I'm a gerontologist. I'm also a board-certified specialist in geriatric nutrition. I'm a fellow of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. So, I love everything about health and nutrition, exercise and aging. I donated my kidney in December of 2013, and actually did it as a chain. And we'll talk a little bit about what that is where eight people received a kidney on the same day. So, that is what I decided to do. And I'm very proud to say that since I did that in 2013, two fellow dieticians that I know, also donated their kidney, one to a little boy at her church, and another started a chain like I did as well. And she actually is the transplant dietician at Methodist University Hospital here in Memphis, Tennessee. So, I really think that that's helpful for a lot of the people that are considering being a donor since she herself is a donor and can share her experience with them.

So, this is a picture of my husband, Tony and I, on the day of transplant. And this is the first time I shared it with anyone except for a few close friends that I was going to have my kidney transplant. So, here we are a Mardi and my gown, had my contacts out and my glasses on and we were just waiting for them to come get me and take me to surgery. So, a little bit about why I decided to donate, and what influenced me to do so? Well, as a registered dietician, we work a lot with kidney patients, people that are on dialysis, and dialysis is just so tough. And the diet is tough. And I would see people that are just worn out, and I could just see how it impacted their lives. And I know

that there are so many people that are waiting for a kidney. And currently, I think when I donated it was maybe 90,000 people, and currently, it's 114,000 people are waiting for a kidney.

So, those numbers are just staggering. And so, seeing it first-hand, I knew that if I could help someone not have to go through that, that I would want to do that. I realized, after researching that the risk to me was extremely low, it's actually less risk than many other surgeries, it would not cost me a thing at all. And I felt like that it would add to my life, this feeling of being able to give to someone else. And I actually did it as a non-directed donor and did it anonymously. So, I actually have zero idea who received my kidney. The only thing I think I know is that it's a male and my kidney went to Florida, but I have no idea. The persons never tried to reach out, which I'm absolutely fine with. And so, it made me actually feel a little bit better to donate my kidney and not get any things for it.

Because I think that would make me feel a little bit uncomfortable. I didn't want anyone to feel like they owed me anything. I wanted to do it anonymously. I felt like that was better. Since it didn't cost anything at all. And the risk was very low and it wouldn't take out much time of my life. I really thought this may be something I can do. So, I reached out to other people that had donated their kidneys through Facebook and other social media and asked them about their experience. And one of the things that was really important to me is because I exercise a lot and I'm very have a very active lifestyle. I wanted to know how donating a kidney would impact my current lifestyle. And from what I could find out really, I would still be able to do everything that I like to do.

The only thing that is maybe not recommended. It is combat sports, football, things that I wasn't doing any way to try to help protect that kidney. So, by talking to other people, I felt really comfortable. And I actually had thought about it probably 10 years prior to when I seriously thought about donating, I knew someone that had donated a kidney to someone else. And so, it just made me think about that. So, the first time I brought it up to my physician, he sort of was shocked that I have even considered that and said, we'll come

back to me in six months. And if you're still thinking that we can start the process, so in six months, I went back and filled out some paperwork, and we started the ball rolling. And so how I donated my kidney is I signed up through the National Kidney registry. And what you see if you're not very familiar, you may be with a kidney chain. But this is how it works.

So, I donated my kidney to someone that had a person, a loved one that was going to donate for them, but they were incompatible. So, I donated my kidney to that person, and their person that was willing to donate on their behalf donated their kidney to someone else who had a person that was incompatible. So, as you can see, on the screen, we're basically just swapping who are kidneys, don't you but you need someone to start that chain. And if I had designated my kidney to a specific person, that is where the chain stops. So, by being a non-directed donor and being willing to give it to anyone, was able to start this chain where all these people on the exact same day received a kidney. So, that I felt like was the best deal, because so many more people would get a kidney that needed one.

And also, because my blood type I'm B negative and less than 2% of the population has my blood type, I found out that someone that was waiting for my kidney had been waiting a long time because there's less donors with that same blood type. So, this is really what influenced my decision to donate all of these factors. And I was pretty set early on that this is what I wanted to do. And my husband and I weren't married yet. And so, I remember telling him and he was sort of surprised, but I was already sort of set that this is something I wanted to do. And I did have children. But it's still, that's what I would want someone else to do is step up for my children. So, I wanted to step up, because whoever received my kidney is someone's child as well. So pre surgery, there was a lot of testing, because they have to make sure that you're a healthy person.

I had every test imaginable from the first time I ever met with the surgeon, I remember my husband and I laugh because he basically was really me like I was trying to take someone's kidney, not give a kidney, which was actually pretty funny to make sure that I wanted to do this, I had to have psychological

testing, I had to have mammograms, dental check-ups, eye check-ups, every kind of test imaginable to make sure that I was very healthy. And so luckily, because of my job I'm in a lot of hospitals already, a lot of times I was already at that hospital to work and could get that testing done. So, they have to make sure you're of sound mind and sound body, they draw a lot of blood. And then they have to make sure that you meet the guidelines that you meet all the criteria that they have set forth. So, it was a lot of testing. But that was absolutely fine.

And then I remember them telling me that they were going to list me as a potential donor. And then I want to say was maybe a week later, I got a call, telling me that they found a match for my kidney. And I remember exactly where I was, I was in a parking lot about to go into a store. And when they called me and said that my immediate thought was that someone else had just gotten a call, telling them that they had a kidney for them, and just what that had to mean to that person. And that just made me happy that I could give someone that gift. I remember and excuse my language, but I remember telling my sister about that. I said guess what the first thought was in my mind when they said we found a match. And she said the first thought you thought was oh shit.

And of course, that's not what I thought so excuse my language, but that's what she would have thought but I was so excited. So, then they did a few more testing and then we ended up having a date. And this is a picture of my husband and I we actually ran the half marathon in Louisiana on a Saturday, and I donated my kidney on the next Wednesday. So, I remember being we were in Louisiana and got the call saying that it definitely was a go. So, we were very, very excited about that. So, then the day of surgery, we had to get to the hospital pretty early, my parents came in town to be there with this to be with my husband as well. And I didn't feel nervous at all. But I could see on my husband's face, how nervous he was, I could see it on my dad's face, I don't think my dad was very excited about it.

Because I'm his child. And he was worried about me having a surgery that he didn't feel was necessary. But everybody knew that this is something that was

extremely important to me. And I admit that I thought to myself, if something happens during the surgery, I mean, because there are risks, they're very small. I felt like if I died, attempting to do something good for somebody else, I would be okay with that. But luckily, none of that happened. But the only time and they told me throughout the whole testing process at any point in time, if you say, I don't want to do this, even if they will do in and they're putting you on, if you want to say stop that you absolutely can say stop. I never once thought that but there was one brief moment. And that's when they were about to wheel me away.

And my husband was kissing me goodbye, that I could see the worry on his face. And that's the only time I felt bad because I the thought of knowing that I made him worry, I didn't like that. But I knew I was going to be okay. I had no doubt at all. So, those were my last thoughts. The surgery itself. Of course, I don't really remember very much about it. But my husband actually remembers seeing the helicopter because the floor that we happen to be on was near that helo pad of them putting the cooler on the helicopter and the helicopter actually leaving. So, that was sort of nice for him to be able to see that. So, the surgery went well, they brought me back to the room. Luckily, I didn't have many problems at all. I will say that first day was sort of the only tough because I didn't, I had it laparoscopically.

So, there was only three small incisions. And the pain was a little tough that first day and that was really the worst of it. The first and second day, I guess. And I was only in the hospital two nights. Everybody was as nice as they could be. I mean, the housekeeping staff every time someone came in to take picked up the trash, whatever it was everyone asked if there was anything they could do for me. I will say something that was nice for me is when we were in the hospital, my husband and I it was the first time I'd up and walked in the hall because they tried to get you up right away. And we ran into a gentleman. And since we're both were runners, and I actually write as a dietitian for our local runner's group, this gentleman had on the runners group t shirt.

So, I actually asked what happened. And realize that in the same group. Sorry, I'm hearing some feedback. I don't know. Hopefully, that's not me. So, I see that he's from the same runners group. And I asked him about it. And we talked for just a brief minute. And then he said, do you mind if I ask what you're doing here on this floor, and I told him that I had just donated a kidney. And he asked me who to and I told him a stranger and started a chain and he just started crying, because he was there with his son that had just received a kidney from his own best friend. And so, the dad was just overcome. So, we are actually still friends today. And I see him out when I'm running. And we still talk from time to time. So that was pretty nice. The hospital stay, I was only there two nights and got back home.

I had mine on December 13. I will say at Christmas time we actually went out of town. I was mainly just sore. But I really, and just very little pain. I want to say I took pain medicine for maybe one or two days at the most and then switch to Tylenol. I had it on December 13 that actually went back to work at the beginning of January. But of course, it was limited with regards to I could only lift 10 pounds. I exercise normally on a daily basis. So, I actually started exercising again, they gave me the okay, for the first of the year. But again, I had to limit what I could do. I couldn't run, I could only walk, and I couldn't lift anything over 10 pounds. But I was really excited. That was what I wanted to get back to because that's how I felt my best and I do think being in good shape really helped minimize the recovery time for me.

But the good news is when someone donates a kidney whoever that is, they have to be in pretty good shape anyway to make sure that they will do okay. And this picture that you see right here is actually four months, four months post-transplant, my husband and I ran the St. Louis, half, I'm sorry, the Louisville half marathon. And so, to be able to run again, just four months out, made me quite happy. And that was a really good time. And you can see that we're both quite happy to have been able to do that. I want to share with you this is a poem that my sister gave to me in the hospital that a lot of the doctors kept that I think is pretty funny. So, I thought I would read it to you.

So, this is an ode to my sister and her kidney. Oh, what's in a sister, I've heard them say about one kidney less after today.

They're taking one out there giving it away. I think I'll keep mine; I might need it someday. But not Ashley no, donates what she'll do, they'll cut a hole in her middle, you can look straight on through, she'll take time to recover. I'll help her the most, except clean her stitches, that would be gross. So, remember, a sister will love you, she'll be your best friend, just don't need a kidney, you'll be on your own then. So, this just meant a lot to me to have this poem. So, I've always really enjoyed that. So, now it's almost 10 years later, that will be December 13 of 2023 will be 10 years later. So, how's my health been since then, my health has been absolutely great. There has been no physical, mental, emotional downside at all to donating my kidney.

I would say I've always been a big drinker of fluids, my husband, we joke about how much fluids I drink, that if we you know that if sometime, he ends up dead of dehydration, it's because I've taken his water from him and consumed it myself. So, I drink a lot of fluids. The only thing that's been recommended to me is that I don't take Advil or Ibuprofen. But besides that, I've had no issues. I still exercise on a daily basis. I've run multiple half marathons; my husband and I have done 150-mile bike ride. I've we've hiked the Appalachian Trail, and this is a picture of my daughter and I this past year, hiking together, and my pack actually weighs more than her pack because I actually can carry more weight than she does. So, I'm still just as fit and healthy as I was before.

So, I've had no downsides whatsoever. And I would absolutely 100% do it again, if I had additional kidneys to give away, I would do it. I've even mentioned to my husband about being a potential liver donor to give a low, but he says absolutely not. But I'm on the bone marrow registry. But I mean, it is only added to my life. And again, I'll mention that I have no idea who received my kidney, I don't need to know I don't necessarily even want to know because I don't want anyone to ever feel like they owe me anything. And giving a gift anonymously actually feels pretty good. So, I actually feel

like I'm the one that benefited the most from this, knowing that I did something to help someone else out.

And we only need one kidney. And research shows that people that donate kidneys actually usually live longer than people that do not. And they're not sure if it's because people that donate kidneys are usually healthy people to begin with. Or if it's based on the altruistic personality type. They're not exactly sure. But I'm not worried at all. And if something happened to my other kidney, I don't think that's a worry, the research shows that that's not likely going to happen. So, I would definitely do it again in a heartbeat. But it's not negatively impacted my life in any way, shape, or form. And what I hope is that I encourage and influence more people to hopefully donate their kidneys. I have another dietitian friend that's actually considering it right now. But to have two that have already done it one be another chain; I want to say hers was six people.

So, there's almost 20 people that have received a kidney because of one person stepping up. And I just hope more and more people decide. I think what's been frustrating to me is to see, I understand it, but I hope it changes that there are people willing to donate to a specific person, but then if they don't match that person, they don't want to donate to someone else. And I really hope that they will reconsider because there's someone out there that really needs that kid Be and they could start a chain and help so many more people. So, I think that's one of the only thing that sort of frustrated me. But I get it. I mean, everybody's different. But I really hope that that's one of the things that people can understand what a benefit it would be to donate anonymously to someone else or to help start a chain and actually help their person in the process by doing that.

PKD Staff: Ashley, we have 10 minutes.

Ashley: Yeah, okay. Well, we are at the Q&A. So, anyone have any specific questions for me that I can answer?

PKD Staff: There are no questions in the chat at the moment. If anyone has got any questions, please type them into the chat.

Ashley: That I mean, I hope if you're able to donate your kidney, that you will do that again. I mean, it costs nothing. It took zero time out of my life, really, I did it over the Christmas vacation, I was only off for a little bit. I mean, all expenses are paid. They follow you for two years, I went every six months. I even recently, because they stopped following you after certain amount of time. But they've always told me you can call us anytime. And I had received some lab work and just had a question. And one of the physicians actually called me from the transplant clinic, to be happy to go over my information. Everything was fine. But I mean, you sort of get first class service. It was everyone was extremely nice.

PKD Staff: A couple of questions come in come in now, actually, one from Jessica. I don't know if you're tracking your GFR since you donate your both, with only one kidney? Has it affected your GFR at all?

Ashley: That's a good question. It is just slight. I can't remember what the last number was. But they said it's absolutely fine. It's always stayed about that number. But it's not elevated at all. And what they do say is your remaining kidney does take over some of the work of that first kidney. But based on having one kidney, my numbers are absolutely fine, I think would be considered slightly high if I had both of them. But based on all my other numbers, they said everything is good. Someone else I see asked about if I follow a specific diet, no, you do not have to know, I do try to have a healthy diet just in general, because you are more at risk for high blood pressure and other issues, just having one kidney. But the thing is that really has encouraged me to make sure I stay in good health because I really want to protect that kidney.

But there's no. And as a dietitian, I mean, that's something I had was concerned about. But there is no special diet I have to follow at all, thankfully. Because especially, a kidney diet is very difficult. And I'm glad and hopefully, I was able to get someone else to not have to follow that diet. So, that made me pretty happy.

PKD Staff: Any other questions in the chat? Doesn't look like it. So, it looks like we've covered all the questions. Any additional comments Ashley, before we wrap up?

Ashley: I would just want to say, as I mentioned before, it only added to my life. When I didn't really, I don't think I expected how much better I feel about having done that. I mean, I felt like I mean, I had a purpose. And that's what I think most of us always want. I mean, I have two children, I have college degrees, I have a wonderful husband, but doing something like this for someone else. For that purpose. I mean, that just I was really surprised at how good it made me feel. I've heard some people talk about that you could have some depression, I mean, to expect the whole gamut of feelings and emotions, but I've only had positive, that person could reach out. I have no idea why they haven't. But I'm totally fine with that.

I don't I don't need or necessarily even want to know it's better just because I can just imagine in my head who would be some I said, let's say somebody asked about after the donation, any risks that the doctors told me. I mean, yes, there. I mean, there are risks of complications from having surgery, but I want to say and I actually looked it up, and I was actually pretty surprised at what the risk was, here it was very interesting to me of what that was, I mean, like super low compared to regular types of surgery. So, they said you might have some tenderness, no heavy lift at all, but yeah, there's no long term and there's no chain change in life expectancy whatsoever. And then with looking at research of people that donate kidneys, it's like up to 97% of people that donate a kidney say in retrospect that they would absolutely do it again.

And everybody that I know that has donated a kidney, they felt like it was the best decision that they could have made him would give again, if they could. So yeah, good question. Yeah, and try to get somebody, that's the thing, get, try to start a chain that helps so many more people, and especially if you have people willing, if you're in need of a kidney, and they're willing to donate to you see if they'd be willing to start a chain, because they maybe they maybe just don't understand what that is. So, education, I think is the key. And I did a lot of research before I decided to donate. And everything

that I saw was positive. But I think that's the thing is people are afraid of what they don't know. But if they get some more information about it, they might feel a lot more comfortable.

So, instead of necessarily just looking for a donor for you, looking for a donor that would donate on your behalf can increase your risk of actually getting a kidney, because getting a live kidney allows that person, they say that that kidney lasts twice as long as getting it from a cadaver kidney. I also what was it that I saw on that? Something on, I wanted to mention that at the hospital I donated since the kidney came from my local hospital. And no one received one at my hospital, that allowed my hospital to get a live kidney for a person that was actually going to get a cadaver kidney. And I do know that it was a young I think widowed man with three young daughters, he was able to get a live kidney because of my donation.

So, I mean, how could you got to feel good about that? I mean, that's just what it is. And I don't talk about it. I don't normally, that's not something that comes out of my mouth often that I did this. We didn't tell anybody until the day that we were doing it. But I do want to spread the word just so other people will donate because it only gives to you.

PKD Staff: Okay, I can't see any other questions.

Ashley: John Rich, who I know who's with the PKDF said, Ashley is being modest. She's an incredible athlete and a positive example for everyone she comes in contact with. Thanks, Ashley, for sharing this with us. Well, thank you. Thank you for asking me to.

*[Audio Ends] [00:50:50]*