



Julie Bacher

By Claire O'Brien



"I felt like I had been living on borrowed blessings," says Zionsville resident Julie Bacher. "That's why I decided to become an organ donor." Julie, who has three daughters, ages 27, 18 and 16, decided to become a donor last year, when her oldest daughter was pregnant. "I thought, my life has been so blessed," she says. "I'm healthy, my daughters are healthy, and now this baby's going to be born, and I can't just take it for granted that he will be healthy. That's what started it."



Julie Bacher with her 8-month-old grandson, Dex

Julie, an F.C. Tucker realtor, was sitting in an office meeting on September 30, 2008, listening to a presentation by the United Way about giving. "That had been kind of a challenging year in real estate," Julie says, "so they said if you can't give of your resources, give of yourself." The next speaker was Zionsville resident and F.C. Tucker office manager Janet Hardy, who talked about her personal involvement with the Indiana Organ Procurement Organization (IOPO). Julie knew right away that organ donation was something she had to do. "Sometimes you get tapped on the shoulder," she says. "This was a slap upside the head."

She contacted IOPO the minute the meeting was over, but they usually handle donations from deceased donors. Julie wanted to donate beforehand. She was put in touch with Clarian Health, which handles living kidney donations, and started the eight-month process that ended with the donation of her kidney to a very grateful stranger on April 15, 2009.

The first test Julie underwent was a psychological evaluation, which was unusual, since this test is usually one of the last. "Apparently it's not normal for someone to just call and say, hey, can I donate a kidney?" Julie says. The evaluation was followed by a series of blood tests, then two 24-hour urine collections, a mammography, colonoscopy, stress tests and EKGs. "I think every time I passed a test, they would go onto the more intensive and more expensive tests," Julie says. She also made lifestyle changes, including what and how she ate. "I just wanted to be really, really healthy," she says. "I wanted to give this my best shot, because there's a line in the sand—if a test is even marginal, you're out."

Julie passed her tests with flying colors, although she had a slight scare the day before her surgery was scheduled. On a chest x-ray, a tiny spot had been found on one of her lungs.

"I was scared," she says, "but I was okay, because I knew that either it was nothing, or if not, then that was the reason I had to go through this—to find it early enough." Everything turned out fine, and she had the surgery the next day. She was back to work within two weeks. "I've had major surgery before," she says, "so I was prepared for being sore after the anesthesia. I had a nausea issue for a while, but they gave me medicine to mitigate that." Then, after the surgery, she had the chance to meet Linda Donaldson, the woman who received her kidney.

"There was no contact before the surgery," Julie says. "In fact, I went into the hospital under an alias. That's because I had until the very last minute to change my mind." Soon after the surgery Julie received a card from Linda, who had been on dialysis for five years; the card was addressed to "Special Person" (donation recipients aren't told whether their donor is a man or a woman). "She said what it meant to her, and what it was going to mean to her quality of life," Julie says. "She said she wouldn't have to live her life on a machine, and she would be able to go into the pool with her grandson." Julie's mother had been on dialysis for several years before she passed away, so Julie was familiar with the tolls of dialysis. "It's not only physically draining, it's mentally draining," she says. "I think after a while it just wears your body out." Julie says that watching what her mother went through then probably planted the seed for organ donation in her mind.

Her goal now is to get the word out about living organ donation. "It's like throwing a rock in the water," she says. "You never know where the ripples are going to go. Maybe someone will read this and think, I could do that."

Nationally nearly 80,000 people—including 1,000 Hoosiers—are awaiting kidney transplants. For more information about living kidney donations, please email nduncan@clarian.org, or log onto www.clarian.org.