

# Melrose man's e-mailed plea for a kidney donor a success



WENDY MAEDA/GLOBE STAFF

**David Shakespeare and Nancy Stockford, both on the mend.**

By Kathy Shiels Tully | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT AUGUST 31, 2014

Nancy Stockford asked herself: If you had a chance to save a person's life, someone you didn't even know that well, would you?

The answer would change her life, and that of Melrose resident David Shakespeare , a friend from college whom she hadn't seen in years.

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For months, he had been contacting a wide net of family and friends as part of his search for a kidney donor, asking them to get the word out. In late December, his health worsening, he sent out one last e-mail blast, attaching a [Globe North story](#) about his campaign, "Shakespeare Needs a Kidney."

This summer, thanks to Stockford, his wish came true.

Shakespeare, 55, has [polycystic kidney disease](#), an incurable genetic condition affecting 600,000 people nationwide. He lost his mother and brother to the disease. With both of his kidneys losing function, he had decided his best chance was using the reach of the Internet to make as many people as possible aware of his need for a donated organ. Besides the e-mails, he had a [website](#) with links to Facebook, Twitter, and Google.

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## Quick facts about living organ donation

A genetic link is not required for living organ donation: An organ can come from anyone, even a stranger.

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The end-of-the-year push generated "lots of interest," he said. Friends in North Carolina paid college students to post fliers, leading to about seven calls.

But no kidney.

In late April, his phone at work rang.

“I’m your donor,” a voice said.

“I almost fell off my chair,” Shakespeare said.

The caller was Stockford.

“There was something about the e-mail,” she said recently, her voice trailing off. “I felt like I had to do it . . . like I was called to do it.”

It’s not that the two college friends remained close. After leaving the University of Massachusetts Amherst, they lost touch. They bumped into each other eight years ago in Boston — turns out, they worked on the same street — only to lose touch again.

Shakespeare said he must have omitted Stockford on earlier group e-mails. But he added her to the last one.

When she received it, her immediate reaction was “I could do that — I could totally do that,” she said. “I thought about it a lot.”

In mid-March, Stockford, 54, of Jamaica Plain, contacted Massachusetts General Hospital and attended a presentation about donating a kidney. (People can live healthy lives with just one.) Though she appeared to be a viable candidate, Stockford said, there was no pressure from the hospital staff. “Their constant refrain was, ‘You don’t have to do this.’”

She decided not to contact Shakespeare until she completed the evaluation process, which included both physical and psychological assessments, and was approved as a donor.

She also had to be sure she had the full support of Mark Huston, her husband of 30 years, who said he initially “wasn’t too keen on the idea.”

But he came around quickly when his wife said she had “a feeling” about the decision.

“We have strong Christian beliefs,” Huston said. “I trusted her faith and her trusting of God on it.”

As members of the Church of the Covenant in Boston's Back Bay for 30 years, Stockford said, "I'd hear the message to 'love and serve other people.'"

But even her minister's reaction was, "You took that seriously?" Stockford said, laughing.

Stockford's faith and superb health — a vegan, she also doesn't drink alcohol or smoke — fortified her ability to donate, the MGH team told her.

"Their eyes were lighting up — doesn't drink! doesn't smoke! I was told I was the best candidate so far," with two others on the list.

Then the impact of her decision hit. It wasn't panic, she said, just the realization that "this is a really big thing to do, but the right thing to do."

Meanwhile, Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore had contacted Shakespeare on April 18 (Good Friday) with more news: It had a cadaver kidney for him.

Given the choice, he went with Stockford's offer. Kidneys from living donors typically last twice as long as cadaver kidneys, about 20 years versus 10.

"I had to pinch myself," Shakespeare said. "After all this time and worry, it was all finally coming together."

The surgery was scheduled for July 1. One week prior, both went through a final round of intense health screening tests. Shakespeare also was checked to see whether he had developed any antibodies that would reject the new kidney.

As the date drew closer, so did the families. The two couples met for dinner. Nancy and Mark invited David and his wife, Leslie, to their church for a prayer service.

The Melrose couple also met Eva, Nancy and Mark's 24-year-old daughter.

"She was pretty freaked out," Stockford said. But the timing was good. Eva, who was finishing a stint with Americorps, arranged to move back in with her parents to help care for her mother during recovery.

The bond between the families continued to strengthen.

“What was very moving,” Leslie said, “was being in the waiting room and sharing that with Nancy’s husband and daughter. We were a team. It was like we became one family.”

Technology also aided them, she said. Both families could send e-mail updates to friends and family who waited for news.

“It felt like running a marathon. We got cheers every step of the way,” Leslie said.

The transplant was a success.

David Shakespeare said his surgeon, Dr. James Markmann, chief of the division of transplantation at MGH, reported that the donated kidney started functioning immediately. (It can sometimes take days for a kidney taken from a cadaver to work properly.)

Eight weeks after the surgery, Stockford has bounced back. Shakespeare is doing well, but his body is still adapting to the new kidney.

The experience has galvanized Shakespeare to be an advocate for support groups and mentoring for kidney recipients and also for donors.

“I find it surprising in a metropolitan city like Boston that there are so few support groups,” he said. He knows of a group in Worcester, and another in New Hampshire.

Stockford shuns the spotlight. “It’s all about David,” she said.

“If you want to make a difference to someone, this is a cool way,” she said. “I want people to understand, not how ‘great’ I am, but you can do it, and help someone in an amazing way.”

Shakespeare’s wife agreed. “People want to help in a way bigger than themselves.

“It’s like the Beatles song: ‘We get by with a little help from our friends.’”

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