



A Second Chance

by Lori Hartwell



I have always been fascinated by the history of dialysis. A historic breakthrough in modern medicine, the dialysis machine is now in common use and has saved millions of lives. In the 1960s, access to the life-sustaining dialysis machines that we now take for granted used to be strictly rationed.

The Renal Support Network's production of *Who Lives?* is a powerful and illuminating stage play that chronicles the agonizing moral decisions that were made by citizen's committees in the 1960's. These committees determined the lucky few who whose lives would be saved by dialysis. We are all thankful that dialysis or kidney transplantation now extends the lives of the vast majority, and not just a lucky few.

During the past four decades, I have witnessed many incredible advancements in the treatment of patients with kidney disease. I will be forever grateful for all of the people who worked tirelessly to preserve my life and the lives of the millions of others who have lived with this disease. Unfortunately, there is a widely

held public perception that kidney disease is still a death sentence like it was in the 1960s, and that individuals with kidney disease are bed-ridden and cannot live a satisfying life. Nothing is further from the truth.

My personal journey may help to illustrate the humbling and rewarding paths that many with kidney disease have experienced. I was diagnosed with kidney failure as a child in 1968 and, after a few dialysis treatments, my kidneys miraculously started working again. For the next 10 years I struggled to keep my own kidneys, but at the age of twelve I suffered complete kidney failure and both kidneys were removed. For the next 12 years I relied on dialysis to survive. Although I had two kidney transplants during that time, neither was successful. One day in 1990 I headed out the door for a memorable camping trip. Amidst the mountainous beauty and fresh air I received some life-changing news—my transplant coordinator called to offer me yet another transplant! Though haunted by past disappointments and discouraging medical statistics, I decided to go for it.

My new kidney has now been working for over 18 years and I am forever grateful to my donor who gave me the gift of life. During that time I have gone to school, held several jobs, married the love of my life, wrote



A still from the play *Who Lives?* from left: Matt Crabtree, Alice Ensor, John Timmons, Matt Gottlieb, Rachel Kimsey, Dale Wade Davis, R. Martin Klein. Photo: Jodie Younse

weKAN Live & Give is a publication of the Renal Support Network, a patient-run nonprofit organization whose mission is to identify and meet the non-medical needs of those affected by chronic kidney disease.

weKAN Patient Activists serve to mobilize, educate, motivate, and empower fellow chronic kidney disease survivors to advocate for themselves and for one another. Together we *can* make a difference.

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a book, trained a menagerie of pets, and started the Renal Support Network. Trust me when I say that I am not bed-ridden!

I encourage everyone to live their life to the fullest. We are so lucky to have options for a second chance, we need to embrace them. Take your meds, follow your health regimen, get involved and volunteer, take time to play, learn all you can about your illness and don't ever give up on your dreams. Hope is all around us. ☺

Chronically Yours,

Lori Hartwell

President & Founder

of the Renal Support Network