

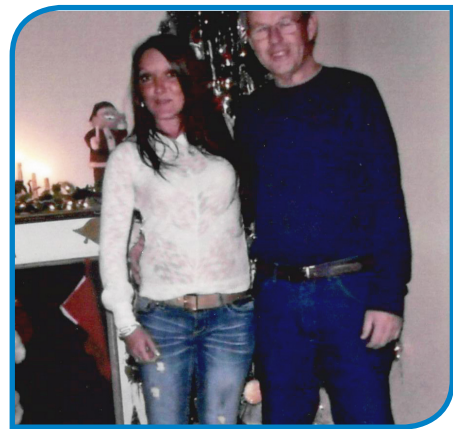


Larry Drake is #GeisingerGrateful

It was April 2013 when Larry Drake of Factoryville, then 63, went for a routine physical for his commercial driver's license renewal. While he was there, his blood pressure registered quite high — high enough that the nurse said Larry should visit his primary care physician immediately.

Larry's wife Patricia recounts what happened next: "But it was right before Easter weekend, and we had family coming, so he put it off."

When Larry finally scheduled an appointment a few weeks later, he still had very high blood pressure. In fact, the nurse checked it three times before asking the physician to come in and check it, too. Thinking there must be something wrong with the blood pressure monitor, his physician ordered an EKG — and upon seeing the results, sent Larry directly to the emergency department (ED) of their local hospital.



Pictured left to right: Amy and Larry

While in the ED, "the automatic blood pressure cuff pretty much blew off his arm," recalls Patricia. Larry was admitted and spent four days in the intensive care unit, where numerous tests revealed that not only were his carotid arteries — the vessels that carry blood from the heart to the brain — almost completely blocked, but the resulting high blood pressure had severely damaged his kidneys. Patricia said, "He was not doing well at all. His physician gave us three choices: dialysis, get on the transplant list, or death." Choosing the transplant list, Larry was sent to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center to begin the process.

Aside from the numerous tests and procedures involved with being approved for a kidney transplant, Larry also needed to have his carotid arteries cleared. "That was hurdle No. 1," says Patricia. "And that went well, so we could move on to the rest of it." Hurdle No. 2 turned out to be Larry's blood type: O-positive. Larry could donate to anyone, but only those with Type-O blood could donate to him. The match had to be perfect. Knowing the odds of finding a perfect match were now more difficult, Patricia turned to their friends and family for help — and got a big surprise.

Patricia's best friend had the same blood type, but her kidneys weren't viable for donation. However, the friend's daughter, Amy, had the same blood type and agreed to donate!

Years before, Amy had lost her sister to cystic fibrosis when she was in sixth grade. “I wanted to give someone else a chance at life if I could, in her honor,” Amy states. During the week of Christmas, tests showed that Amy’s kidneys were a match for Larry, and Feb. 13, 2014, was set as the transplant date.

The transplant was conducted at Geisinger Wyoming Valley. The transplant team went over everything with the couple and their donor as many times as they needed them to. “They answered any question we had. It’s an overwhelming process, but they were so great to us,” Patricia says. The day finally arrived, and: “It went fine! Amy was home after three days and Larry was home after only four.”

Both Larry and Amy recovered very well, and now Larry’s health is “just great; he’s still working — although he’s supposed to be retired!” jokes Patricia. As for Amy, Patricia says, “She’s our angel. It was just meant to be.”

Patricia adds, “Be an organ donor if you can. And if you need a donor, don’t be afraid to ask those around you for help, because it could be the person next to you who’s perfect. People might not think of it, so you have to ask.”

In honor of their experience, the Drakes decided to make gifts to Geisinger’s Kidney Transplant Fund.

“We are so grateful for the care Larry received at Geisinger. We want to help out somebody else who may need it. You just don’t know when it could happen to you or someone you love,” says Patricia. “We are so grateful we got a second chance at life!”