

Kidney recipient is enjoying new lease on life

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

IRONDEQUOIT — Imagine sitting outside on a sweltering summer day and watching your friends drink glass after glass of water, while you can only suck on an ice cube.

You have to stick to ice cubes because you can't have too much water — the liquid that refreshes and gives life. You can't have too much because your kidneys just can't take too much fluid passing through them.

Karen Gledhill doesn't have to imagine any of this — she lived it.

In interviews with both the National Kidney Foundation and the *Catholic Courier*, Gledhill described what her life was like when she suffered from kidney disease.

A parishioner at Irondequoit's St. Cecilia Church, Gledhill was diagnosed 16 years ago with cystinosis, a disease caused by the settling of crystallized cystine in such organs as the kidneys. The settled cystine, an amino acid produced in the digestion of proteins, clogged her kidneys. One of the first changes the diagnosis made in Gledhill's life was her adoption of a low-protein diet.

"I had to watch my salt and potassium, too," she said. "I missed ice cream and Italian food then. My kidney function dropped to 7 percent. I had horrible headaches, constant nausea and exhaustion. I was always so tired, sometimes I couldn't carry laundry upstairs."

Gledhill joked that the only "advantage" of her disease was her ability to travel in a car for up to eight hours without going to the bathroom.

Eventually, Gledhill was forced to go on kidney dialysis, a process by which a machine filters impurities from the



Provided photo

Life for Karen Gledhill, a parishioner at Irondequoit's St. Cecilia Church, changed when she received a kidney transplant at age 30.

blood. Her dialysis appointments took place three times a week and lasted as long as five hours each, she noted.

"Other people control your life when you're on dialysis," she said. "You live by the dialysis unit's schedule, and you can't play hooky on dialysis."

That all changed when Gledhill received a kidney transplant at age 30. Eleven years later, her donated kidney is still holding up, and she emphasized that she will never get over the wonder

of a normal, healthy lifestyle.

"You don't take it for granted because you know what it's like not to feel good," she said.

Gledhill is working with the Kidney Foundation to encourage people to donate organs for transplant upon the donors' deaths. The foundation is especially urging Catholics to sign donor cards informing medical personnel that, upon their deaths, some or all of the donors' body parts should be used for transplants and/or research, she noted.

Contrary to mistaken notions that the church prohibits organ donation, the church has, in fact, long acknowledged the benefits of such actions.

"The free gift of organs after death is legitimate and can be meritorious," states the new Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Indeed, the church only prohibits organ transplants if they are done without the consent of the donor, or if a person was deliberately mutilated, disabled or killed solely for the sake of organ donation, the catechism states.

The National Kidney Foundation of Upstate New York is currently trying to offset a nationwide shortage of kidneys for transplant with an organ donation awareness campaign running through Jan. 15. In 75 percent of donations, the decision to donate organs had been made by the deceased. Decisions by relatives of the deceased make up the re-

mainder of organ donations.

Gledhill pointed out that her brother recently donated one of his kidneys to another sister who otherwise would have had to wait three years for a donated kidney. Her brother volunteered because their sister might well have died in those three years.

Gledhill added that she had had to wait one year for a kidney, even though there had been no shortage of organs at that time.

Indeed, according to the foundation, seven to eight people die each day while waiting for transplants of vital organs. And, unfortunately, only 15 to 20 percent of those whose bodies could provide such organs designate themselves as organ donors before their deaths.

Gledhill stressed individuals wishing to have their kidneys or other body organs donated upon death should inform their closest relatives of their wishes. This is necessary, she said, even if the prospective donors have signed donor cards because next-of-kin have the final say on organ removal.

She concluded by urging Catholics, in particular, to consider the possibilities they will open up for patients when they become donors.

"It's a second chance," she said of her donated kidney. "You never know when it's going to happen."

♦♦♦

EDITORS' NOTE: Many people considering becoming organ donors still have questions about the procedure. To learn more, call the National Kidney Foundation of Upstate New York, Inc., at 716/264-0420, or toll free 800-724-9421.

You can also write the foundation at 1 Grove Street, Suite 202, Pittsford, N.Y. 14534, or send a facsimile message to 716/264-0109.



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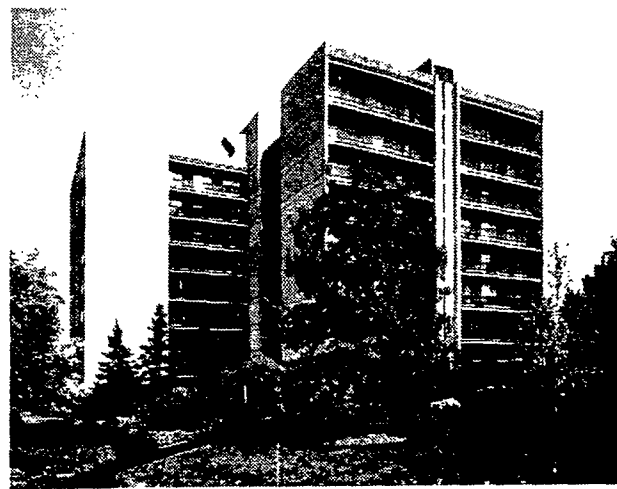
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