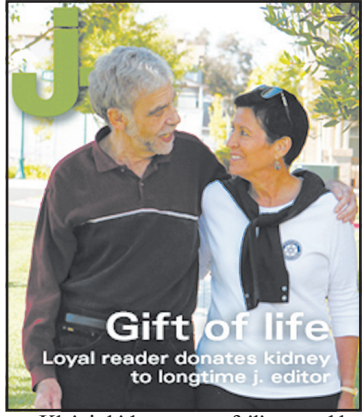


# GIFT OF LIFE: LOYAL READER DONATES KIDNEY TO LONGTIME J. EDITOR

## TOBY ADELMAN'S TESTIMONY TO THE BIBLE'S WORD

Toby Adelman loves to put people together; she has been doing so with gusto her entire life. But last month, the 54-year-old San Jose resident outdid herself with the most extraordinary - and personal - connection she's ever made. Adelman donated one of her kidneys to someone she met only two weeks before the surgery, but with whom she already felt a deep, spiritual bond.

The grateful recipient was Marc Klein, editor and publisher of *J.*, and before that the Jewish Bulletin, until he stepped down last fall after a 28-year run. "It blew me away, just blew me away," he says of Adelman's gift



**Gift of life**  
Loyal reader donates kidney to longtime *J.* editor

Klein's kidneys were failing, and he had started feeling the more acute symptoms of end-stage renal disease, including loss of strength, balance and appetite. The next step would be life on dialysis - succinctly described by one nephrologist as "a fragile, vulnerable existence" - something Klein, 63, desperately wanted to avoid. But he was told his wait for a deceased-donor kidney could be up to eight years.

Instead, on June 13, just a few short months after putting out the word about his situation through an article in *J.*, an email blast from the S.F.-based Jewish Community Federation and a Facebook appeal, Klein was a man with a healthy new kidney. And Adelman had put her own life on the line to help him reclaim his.

Why did she do it? For Adelman, a nurse educator at San Jose State University and a single parent raising a 16-year-old daughter - who describes her mother as "ridiculously kind" - the path was clear from the start. "Why do things for others? Why be giving?" she asks. "It's my absolute favorite thing to do. Connecting with people is my greatest joy." Another favorite thing: the Jewish newspaper, where she first found out about Klein's predicament. Adelman says she felt a special bond with the man well before they ever knew each other.

"It's all about the *J.*, the Jewish Bulletin," says Adelman, a reader for nearly 30 years. "The whole time I've lived in California [since 1983], Marc was running the paper. Even when I moved back to Maine and even when I made aliyah, I still ordered the *J.* To me it was like the [S.F. Chronicle's] Pink section; I loved that I could see what everyone was doing. It keeps people connected."

In March, *J.* ran the short article about Klein. When Adelman read that no one in his family was a suitable match, "I remember thinking, 'Wow, someone should donate that man a kidney,'" she recalls. "Then I read that he had O-positive blood type. And I said to myself, 'I'm O-positive. I'm somebody. I should donate Marc Klein a kidney.'"



**Marc Klein and Toby Adelman a month after the surgery photo/michael fox**

And then she suddenly spoke out loud to herself. "I said, OK, God, you take it over. I've gotta go back to work."

While donating a kidney puts Adelman in good company - about 5,700 living donors in the United States gave a kidney in 2011; another 11,000 came from deceased donors - the numbers don't come close to meeting the need. Some 93,000 Americans are waiting for a kidney, and nearly 5,000 died last year, according to the National Kidney Foundation.

The majority of living donors give to someone they know, a family member or friend, and the transplant can happen right away. Other patients must wait for a deceased-donor kidney on a list that is maintained by a national data bank and linked to local agencies. Each hospital keeps track of its own patient lists and makes sure those in the top tier are ready for transplant. The order is based on a complex point system of allocation, and the wait typically is several years.

That was the scary reality facing Klein when Adelman read about his crisis. Fortuitously, she had just completed a spiritual seminar that helped clarify her core beliefs. "I got very clear that one of the things I was committed to was freedom, my own and everybody else's," she says. "Dialysis is one of the most challenging things in health care, with people having to live their lives around these three visits a week. I thought, 'Wouldn't it be great to give him a kidney and not have him be dependent on dialysis?'"



**"Just a few times in my life have I felt so clear, like, yes, that is exactly what I should be doing."**

Biking in the San Jose Municipal Rose Garden five weeks after surgery. The story easily could have ended there. But beshert, or destiny, was working its charms. Around the same time, Adelman was interviewed for a *J.* story on an entirely different matter - but one with a familiar theme, in which she got word of someone in need and jumped in with little hesitation to help.

Adelman and her daughter, Shy, volunteered to be local ambassadors for a little girl who was visiting the Bay Area for medical treatment, taking her around Palo Alto and to the Oshman Family JCC. The 5-year-old had traveled with her mother from tiny Mars Hill, Maine, the town of 1,480 where Adelman grew up. ("We were the only Jewish family for 14 miles," she notes.) She didn't know the girl or her family, but the fact that they were from her hometown was enough.

While being interviewed for that April 2012 article, Adelman casually mentioned to the reporter her interest in helping Klein, and that nudged the ball forward a little more. "I thought, this is crazy ... and I'm going to do it." Shortly after, she called to put her name on the designated-donor transplant list.

She wasn't the only one. A number of people from the Jewish community stepped up, though none were suitable matches. One candidate who did show promise was David Kaim, 47, of Austin, Texas. His wife, Natalie Weinstein, was a *J.* reporter and copy editor until 2000, and Klein gave a memorable toast at their wedding. Kaim put his name on the donor list right after he read about his friend's plight.

"Maybe it was something I should have contemplated more, but as soon as I heard about it, I went on the Internet to register. He was desperately in need of help, and it was a no-brainer, it was something that I could provide," says Kaim, whose children are 8 and 10. "I have a special place in

**"By this we know Love, because He Laid down His Life for us. And we Also ought to Lay down our lives for brethren" (1 John 3:16) (From Bible's Word Editor).**



**Stills from a documentary video show Toby Adelman visiting Marc Klein at the hospital the day before the transplant images/courtesy of brett wiese saunders**

my heart for Marc as someone who has contributed to the community. It was my way of giving back to him."

Klein, meanwhile, had little expectation that his outreach efforts would result in his finding a kidney donor. "I figured I'd try," he says, "but I didn't expect it to work out the way it did."

After Adelman completed blood, urine and radiology testing and turned out to be the best match, she and Klein spoke on the phone. "The more we talked, the more she convinced me that this was the real thing, that she really meant this," he says in a video made by a member of Adelman's extended family. "I thought, 'How many people would be willing to go through all of this for somebody else?'"

Klein was extremely touched - and inspired. "Toby has become a dear friend and will remain so the rest of my life," says the former newsman. "I love the woman. She's amazing."

The two remain in frequent contact. Adelman snapped back to 100 percent within a few weeks and has returned to biking and swimming, and Klein is feeling better every day. He is also prepared to offer a gift of his own. "I've decided to donate my body to medical science after death," he says. "I want to give back just like she did."



**A nurse preparing Toby Adelman for the surgery**

"She's an incredible person, extremely altruistic and giving, and she just has a wonderful spirit about her," adds Klein's wife, Sandy. "I'm just amazed that someone who read a story in a newspaper would be willing to come forward and give such a gift and take such a risk with their health."

According to Dr. Steve Katznelson, medical director of the kidney transplant program at California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco, what Adelman did is becoming more common among living kidney donors, a third of whom are not related to the recipient.

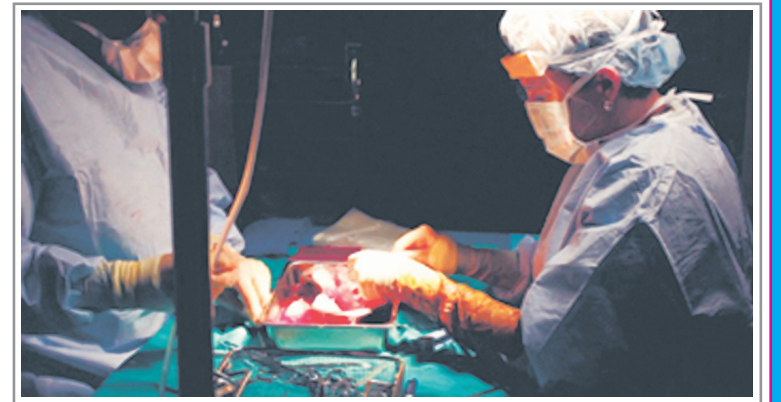
But "it's unusual for someone like Toby, who wasn't really close to Marc before, to be so forthcoming, so giving," says Katznelson, 50, a San Francisco native who grew up at Congregation Beth Shalom in the city. "She basically dropped everything and said, 'Take my kidney.' All donors are amazing, but she was something else."

Adelman, who has a Ph.D. in health policy and gerontology and spent 10 years in acute-care nursing at UCSF, stood out in other ways as well: She came in certain about which kidney she wanted to give.

A few days before the surgery, she told Katznelson, "I want to give my right kidney away. I've been meditating on it." The left side "is where energy comes in, and the right side is where it goes out," says Adelman, who has

meditated daily for six years. "I'm kind of grounded in my left side, and the right is the one presented to the public. My left side is mine."

The doctor excused himself and left the room. "I felt like I was in the principal's office," she says. "Like, uh-oh, I'm in trouble." Katznelson returned with a surgeon, who went over details of physiology and anatomy to explain why the left kidney was preferred (the right one is close to the liver, and the left has more material to work with).



**Transplant surgeon Dr. Nikole Neidlinger working**

"I thought I had a choice," Adelman says. "Suddenly I realized, holy shit, I'm giving away a kidney. But once they explained it, I was OK with it. It made me more aware of what I was doing. It felt like a deeper giving."

CPMC performs more than 200 kidney transplants a year. The operation usually is minimally invasive for donors, who leave the hospital in two or three days and can resume normal activities after six weeks. Long-term studies, including one by the University of Minnesota published in 2009, have found that donors have fewer kidney problems than the general population and live as long as other healthy people. Serious complications are unusual, but donors do assume some risk, primarily related to the surgery itself. Postop bloating and incision pain are common complaints; not surviving the anesthesia is an extreme (and extremely rare) occurrence.



**Adelman and Klein sharing a hug at home**

Those risks naturally were of concern to Toby's daughter, Shy, a rising junior at Kehillah Jewish High School in Palo Alto. "Are you going to die?" the teen asked her mother. "We had a really frank conversation," Adelman says, "and it was actually a great conversation to have. At the end she gave me her blessing."

"Some of my friends were like, 'What? Why is your mom doing this?'"

She doesn't even know the person," Shy recounts in the chronicling video. "And I said, well, now she does."

Adelman waited until a few days before the surgery, after the final tests were completed and she knew for sure it was happening, to tell the rest of her family: five siblings ("It's hard not to be proud of her," says brother Todd) and her 87-year-old father. "Toby, you're always full of surprises," he told her.

For good measure, she asked for a special pre-surgery blessing from her rabbi at Congregation Beth David in Saratoga. Rabbi Daniel Pressman, who has known her as a congregant for five years and who officiated at Shy's bat mitzvah and at Adelman's adult bat mitzvah in 2010, describes Adelman as "completely, transparently good."

And then it was June 13, transplant day. Brett Wiese Saunders, the videographer, was there to document the event, as he'd been doing in the days leading up to it. Right before Adelman went under, she slipped in a request: to hear the Grateful Dead. The anesthesiologist put the music on the sound system ("No problem, I've got

Pandora back here," he told her), and Adelman's groggy thought was, "'This is sweet.' And that was the last thing I remember. Donate a kidney, go to a Dead show, all in one day."

Giving "is the most natural thing as human beings that we do," Adelman says in the video. "It comes naturally when we're not afraid. Sometimes it takes people a lifetime to get that, because we hang on tightly to things. We think there's not enough."

"There's plenty for everybody, kidneys included," she says. "Should half the planet need one and half the planet gave, we'd all be fine."

A 19-minute video documenting Toby Adelman's journey, made by Brett Wiese Saunders, can be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/46312889>.

**For information about organ donation, visit [www.organdonor.gov](http://www.organdonor.gov), [www.donatelife.net](http://www.donatelife.net) or [www.unos.org](http://www.unos.org). For kidney information, visit <http://www.kidney.org>.**

Sidebar: Organ donations in Israel, which are on the increase but still marred by religious controversy.