



Episode 2 Transcript A New Kidney & A Big Surprise

Torah Kachur:

A hundred miles northwest of Birmingham sits the town of Russellville, Alabama. That's where Terrell Potter is sitting in his doctor's examining room. The air conditioning is a pleasant relief from the August heat. The paper sheet crinkles underneath him as he shifts his weight back and forth.

He's a cop: the kinda guy used to helping other people, not waiting around for someone to help him. The doctor returns. His eyes glued to a clipboard he's holding with both hands.

Terrell doesn't like the look on his doctor's face. The way he isn't making eye contact. The way his lips are pressed together, determined not to make an expression that would give away what he's thinking... but in doing so... tells Terrell everything he needs to know.

Terrell Potter:

He said my kidney function was rapidly decreasing. It dropped some earlier on, but then all of a sudden it just started going downhill in a hurry. He said, "We're going to have to do something."

Torah Kachur:

That something is Dialysis. It means using a machine to do the work that your failing kidneys can't: cleaning toxins out of your blood.

Terrell Potter:

It changes your life completely. You go to a center, which the closest one, I would have would be 15 miles away, three days a week for about three and a half to four hours. It limits where you can go or what you can do. Your quality of life is just really drastically changed.

Torah Kachur:

People can live on dialysis for years. But Terrell isn't one of those people. Just three months after his initial diagnosis, his doctor has more bad news.

Terrell Potter:

My kidneys started failing and at that point, then my health started going down. I found out that I was going to have to have a transplant.

Torah Kachur:

Terrell needs a new kidney. But there aren't many available.

Terrell Potter:

Well he told me it would take up to eight years to get a transplant, to get a kidney.

Torah Kachur:

That's time Terrell doesn't have. If he doesn't find a donor soon - he'll die. I'm Torah Kachur - and this is "Tell Me What Happened - True stories of people helping people" - an original podcast by OnStar. It's a series of stories about how and why people help other people. Sometimes even, a complete stranger.

October turns to November and Terrell Potter's health continues to decline. It's not just his body - The disease is also chipping away at his self esteem. For the first time in his life, he feels needy and vulnerable.

Terrell Potter:

I served 44 year in law enforcement. I'm pretty well an outgoing person. You know I meet people well. I enjoy folks. I enjoy talking to people and just helping people. That's how I got into law enforcement, was I just had a desire to want to help other people.

Torah Kachur:

He's had to quit the force, he's too sick to walk a beat. And now he's tethered to machines daily.

Terrell Potter:

We actually done the dialysis in the house here four times a day. Takes about an hour and a half to do a treatment. I was used to going and doing what I needed to do and being out in the public and everything. It was just a real hard setback when you get to a point where you're no longer able to do that.

Torah Kachur:

His hopes for a better life rest on finding a donor. But that's hard. Not just finding someone that's willing... but someone who is also biologically compatible. The statistics for anyone living with kidney failure are frightening. Right now there are more than 100,000 people in the US waiting for a transplant. Last year only 23,000 people got one. The doctors tell Terrell, the wait could be years.

Terrell Potter:

I just didn't believe that was going to be the case with me. I felt the whole time, like it would not take that long to get a kidney.

Torah Kachur:

He's optimistic, but he's also not someone who's going to go begging for

help. The doctors tell him that other people in need of an organ have bought billboards on the highway, or generated massive social media campaigns. Terrell... he doesn't even have a Twitter handle.

Just before Thanksgiving, Terrell's daughter April, with his reluctant blessing... posts a desperate plea on Facebook. She's hoping that someone, anyone, can help her father.

Terrell Potter:

She worked in Nashville and was involved in social media a lot. She'd done a lot of ... she was a booking agent for several different groups. She was really well versed on how to get on social media and do those things.

Torah Kachur:

Over the holidays that request for a kidney sits online. It bounces around the social media universe between photos of families eating turkey and playing football in the backyard. But instead of getting lost in the shuffle... it gets amplified.

Terrell Potter:

I mean immediately, it just took off. I had people contacting me from different states and wanting to know how they could help or what they could do and things. So it was just an immediate response. Unbelievable. Unbelievable. We had over 800 shares on it. There was people on there that I had no clue and don't really know how they got the time to contact my daughter.

Torah Kachur:

Terrell was overwhelmed by the response.

Terrell Potter:

As a police officer, you don't think you've made that many friends. I've had a lot of contacts in the community and relatives and things like that. But I had people contacting me, I didn't even know.

Torah Kachur:

It's a wave of attention, well wishes and prayers. But Thanksgiving comes and goes, and all that good will, hasn't produced a suitable donor.

Terrell keeps getting sicker.

Terrell Potter:

Well, it was right before Christmas, I was jokingly telling my family and everything. I said, "What I want for Christmas is a kidney. If y'all can get me a kidney for Christmas, that'd be great."

Torah Kachur:

I've got a teenage step-daughter who uses social media a lot. I've told her a hundred times 'you need to be careful.' Once things get posted, you lose control of them, they can get shared, then reposted, they end up in the hands of complete strangers... and they stay online forever.

Usually that is a cautionary tale. But for Terrell it's a blessing. You see, even though he doesn't know it, his daughter's post is still out there circulating, and one day it pops up in the feed of a woman named Jocelynn James Edmonds.

Jocelynn James Edmonds:

I was so tired that night that I honestly came in and just laid on my bed. I thought if I scrolled through Facebook, that would make it better. I just started scrolling through Facebook and I seen a post. She was just reaching out to the world, honestly, begging for someone to be tested because her father was in kidney failure and he was not going to live if he didn't get a kidney.

Of course, I was like, "I don't have time to give him a kidney. I know I'm a nice person, God, and I've got a huge heart, but I really don't have time for anything else in my life right now." I just threw my phone down on the bed that night and actually just went to sleep.

Torah Kachur:

And that's the reality of organ donation - we all understand how important it is. And I think most people are aware that we have two kidneys and you can give away one and still live a healthy normal life....But still, giving up an organ to a stranger? That's a big ask.

This is "Tell Me What Happened - an original podcast by OnStar" - and in every episode we share a story of someone who was saved by a stranger - and I know you're thinking ... "I can see where today's story is going... some stranger is going to give Terrell a kidney" ... and yah that's kinda what happens, but there's a twist.

Jocelynn James Edmonds:

I've been arrested 15 times. I'm actually in recovery from drug addiction and I'm a 16-time felon

Torah Kachur:

That's Jocelyn - the woman that came home from work, read the post, but figured she had too much else on her plate. For starters she's a single mom with two kids. And she's got a history. Fifteen years ago she had cancer. She had a series of operations, and while recovering from those got hooked on prescription opioids. To support her habit she turned to petty crime... And from there, her life spiraled out of control. She was added to the county's Most Wanted List.... And the local news ran a story about her.

Jocelynn James Edmonds:

When I seen my picture come across the TV screen, I was just sick. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. I knew I had to do something and I had to turn myself in.

Jocelynn serves six months in jail. She gets into rehab, and it changes her life. She comes out with a new focus. Her life is no longer about taking drugs, it's about giving back.

Jocelynn James Edmonds:

I have a non-profit and we help women get into treatment. We're in the process of building a rehab for women. That's just my heart. I have a servant's heart. I want to serve and do all I can all the time because I just want to give back.

Torah Kachur:

Maybe that's why Jocelyn couldn't just forget about the plea she had read on Facebook. I mean thousands of people had seen the post, felt bad for a moment, and then gotten on with their day... but not Jocelyn. In fact, a week later she was still thinking about it, and during a Friday evening church service, where they were teaching the Book of Leviticus she heard the phrase "love thy neighbor."

Jocelynn James Edmonds:

And I knew then that I was supposed to give him my kidney.

Torah Kachur:

Her decision is firm - she wants to make the donation. But with a situation like this, willingness isn't always enough. The doctors have to make sure that Jocelynn is a biological match.

Jocelynn James Edmonds:

They have to do lots and lots of tests on you to make sure many vials of blood, I think 70-something to be exact, and lots of time off work, and you have to see a psychiatrist.

Torah Kachur:

And during these tests, Jocelynn keeps it a secret.

Jocelynn James Edmonds:

I didn't tell anyone that I was doing this. It wasn't for anyone to know.

Torah Kachur:

She doesn't even reply to the post. She doesn't want to get their hopes up in case she's not a match. But in her heart, she's confident she will be.

Jocelynn James Edmonds:

Like I never had any doubt or I never had anything in my spirit telling me that I wasn't supposed to get through this. I was never nervous. I was never nervous. It almost made me think that I was trying to save my child's life. I was so excited about it.

Torah Kachur:

Jocelynn does have one worry. Did years of drug use damage her body? Could her addiction have destroyed the kidney Terrell needs to survive?

It's a cold morning in early December. Jocelynn sits at her kitchen table. Her hands around the day's first cup of coffee. And then...

Jocelynn James Edmonds:

I was considered a perfect match on December 5th.

Torah Kachur:

Jocelynn's ready, willing - and now able to donate her kidney to Terrell. She reaches out to his daughter April, explains what she's been doing, and gives her the incredible news. Terrell's holiday wish has come true three weeks early.

Terrell Potter:

April called me one day and said, "Dad, I have your kidney. I have your Christmas present. I have your kidney." I thought she was joking. She said, "I'm serious." She then told me that someone wanted to donate me a kidney.

Torah Kachur:

Terrell's kidney function was down to 6% - he was on dialysis constantly. This was almost certainly going to be his last Christmas. That all changed.

So, what do you say to someone who's just offered to save your life? I guess for starters you want to do it face to face. And luckily Terrell and Jocelyn both lived in the same county, a five-minute drive apart! Terrell isn't very mobile, so Jocelynn came to him.

Terrell Potter:

Well, she come over to the house and I remembered her, it was probably seven or eight years ago, I was working as a police officer.

Jocelyn James Edmonds:

Terrell was actually a police officer who arrested me on three different occasions.

Terrell Potter:

She was running crazy, doing drugs and stealing and whatever she could to

get by. So I'd actually put her in jail.

Jocelynn James Edmonds:

He is a very kind, and compassionate man. He was always very professional and very compassionate.

Torah Kachur:

It is a reunion like no other.

Jocelyn James Edmonds:

I honestly had not seen Terrell since the day he arrested me until the day I walked into his home.

Torah Kachur:

That revelation - that they aren't strangers, that they share this complicated, messy past, puts Jocelyn's offer in a whole new context.

Terrell Potter:

And I asked her, I said, "Jocelyn, are you sure this is what you want to do?" She said, "No doubt." She said, "I'm not going to back out. I'm definitely... I've got your kidney."

It was a shock that someone would be that strong and that firm, but I believed her. It was very convincing to me that, yes, this is what she's going to do... It just made me feel a lot of gratitude to her, to even think about doing it.

Torah Kachur:

Jocelyn understood that years ago, when Terrell was locking her up, he was actually just trying to help her.

Terrell Potter:

It's just kinda my nature to try to encourage people and to help them. So I would tell her things like, "You need to quit this crazy stuff and straighten your life up. You got kids and everything. You just need to get your life together. You're going nowhere, the way you're going."

Torah Kachur:

She did straighten up her life. And now she had the opportunity to save the person who had saved her.

Vanderbilt University Medical Centre in Nashville looks like almost any other modern hospital. Overhead fluorescent lights. Clean wide corridors. But today something extraordinary is happening here.

Terrell Potter:

I actually met Jocelyn and her future husband at the hospital, the morning of

the transplant. We met downstairs for a few minutes. So they took her on up to prepare her probably an hour and a half before they did me.

Torah Kachur:

Removing and then inserting a kidney is a six-hour procedure. Thankfully everything goes smoothly.

Terrell Potter:

I mean, I immediately felt different. When I got to the room and come to, the toxins and things, it was already been taken out of my body. That kidney was functioning immediately. The doctor said as soon as they removed it from her and attached it to me, it immediately started functioning and so it's done a great job, I might add, too.

Torah Kachur:

Over the next week, as they recovered... they grew even closer.

Jocelynn James Edmonds:

Oh yah, we walked to each other's room every day. I mean, the recovery for both of us was amazing.

Torah Kachur:

And those visits haven't stopped.

Jocelynn James Edmonds:

He lives, two miles from me. It's nothing for me just to walk in over there. I don't have to knock on the door. I just walk in, get something to drink, hug him, lay on the couch.

Terrell Potter:

Well, we talk almost every day. I talked to her last night. It's just like part of the family.

Torah Kachur:

The moral of the story? - well ... that sometimes the help you need comes from the most unlikely person.

This is Tell Me What Happened - an original podcast by OnStar - and on every episode I like to wrap up the show by making a human connection of my own, talking to an expert about making the world a little safer everyday, because you know that's what OnStar is all about.

In this episode I want to talk to Naomi Grant... She's an Associate Professor of Psychology at Mount Royal University, in Calgary. She teaches Social Psychology: that's the Social Influence & Persuasion. And I want to ask her, "What kind of people help strangers?"

Naomi Grant:

Well, I think we're all motivated to help strangers to some extent. You could almost think of it as we have this motivation to be liked by other people and follow social norms, and there is a general social norm that if somebody needs help, sort of the right thing to do is if we're able to, to help them.

Torah Kachur:

When we start talking about things like this extreme forms of help, you're giving up an organ to what at the time was thought to be a stranger, is that something we're already pre-programmed to do just to be part of the fabric of society?

Naomi Grant:

Well, I think that with something that's very costly to oneself, like giving an organ, that involves a huge cost to oneself. That is sort of a more extreme example of altruism, and some researchers have actually looked to see if there is some sort of altruistic personality. And there is some evidence to suggest that some people just have this sort of tendency to give to others in lots of different settings. And perhaps that's even genetically inherited.

Torah Kachur:

So you say genetic, in what way?

Naomi Grant:

If you think back to sort of caveman times, the people who are going to survive are people who are included in the group and well liked by others, and so one way we can achieve that goal of being liked by others is by following those social norms around helping.

Torah Kachur:

I do see though, personality wise and motivation wise that there's a difference between picking up groceries for a neighbor or helping do that extra, hauling the kill in if you're a caveman, and now all of a sudden donating an organ.

Naomi Grant:

Yeah.

Torah Kachur:

They're both definitely acts of kindness, but one requires this big commitment. So how would you separate those two from analyzing them psychologically?

Naomi Grant:

Categorically I don't think they're different, I think they're just sort of on a

continuum, one is just more costly than another. And so that's what I think differentiates the two is just that one is more of a cost to oneself. And so some researchers have been interested to find out well when are people likely to engage in acts that are very costly to themselves? And it seems that one of the key factors is empathy, so the ability to put yourself in another person's position to really feel the feelings that they're experiencing, to walk a mile in their shoes so to speak. And so there's research that shows when we feel empathy for someone we're able to kind of help just out of the goodness of our hearts, but then when we don't feel empathy that's when we're going to weigh the costs and benefits and we'll likely only help if the benefits outweigh the costs.

Torah Kachur:

Is there a benefit to the donor?

Naomi Grant:

Absolutely there's a benefit to the donor, there's always benefits to helping others. There's benefits to our mood, we are going to feel more positively if we help other people, we can increase feelings of our own self worth, right, if I can help someone in this way. Even, it's a benefit because seeing someone else in distress is going to make me feel negative as well. So if I can help that person it relieves some of my distress by helping others. So there's always... You really can't think of any situation where there's not a benefit to oneself when you help someone else.

Torah Kachur:

Do you think that Jocelyn, the donor, part of the story is that she really did turn her life around, do you think that there's a certain degree of that empathy or that ability to be a donor inherent in everyone and sometimes it just takes another perspective to kind of bring it out in us?

Naomi Grant:

Yeah, I do think the potential is there for anyone to do something like that, but I do think you would have to stay open minded to kind of entertain that possibility, but I don't see why any one of us couldn't do something as sort of noble and dramatic as that. If you stay open to it I think that yeah, anyone could have the potential to do it if they're able.

Torah Kachur:

Well Naomi, thanks so much.

Naomi Grant:

Oh, you're welcome.

Torah Kachur:

That's it for this episode of Tell Me What Happened - brought to you by

OnStar. This series is all about people helping people, just like how OnStar empowers people to get out there, safely.

Over the past 25 years, they've collected a lot of incredible stories of 'people helping people' you can check those out at onstar.com. And while you're there, maybe you have a "saved by a stranger" story. If you do, share it with us, we'd love to hear your experiences. And in the show notes on your podcast app you can find out more about Terrell and Jocelynn and how they've been doing recently.

Please share the podcast with your friends, so they can enjoy these good news stories as well. And you can follow us on whatever app you are using so you'll know when the next episode is released. I'm Torah Kachur -- and as always.... "Be safe out there."

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