



Kidney donor calls it greatest experience of her life

By CAROLYN BLACKMAN, Staff Reporter

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Two years ago, Lori Palatnik, an author and Jewish educator, had what she describes as the greatest experience of her life.

Lori Palatnik

Palatnik, the rebbetzin of Aish Hatorah in Washington D.C. – her husband is Rabbi Yaakov Palatnik – as well as a mother of five children and director of the Jewish Women’s Renaissance Project, donated a kidney to a woman she had never met.

Palatnik, originally from Toronto and formerly of the Village Shul, spoke last week at Aish HaTorah in Thornhill, at an event sponsored by friends of a 22-year-old in need of a kidney.

Her journey began, she said, when she was living in Denver, Colo., with her family, and she met a man who needed a kidney. “I Googled kidney donations and realized I was a good candidate.”

She offered her kidney, but was told she was too small to help the man. She was disappointed, she said, but after moving to Washington D.C., she received an e-mail asking her to be tested for a woman who needed a kidney.

“I clicked back that I was willing to be tested, I filled out forms and I was accepted as a donor. I was tested for three Jewish women, and I matched two of them.”

She told very few people, she said, because she was “hearing a lot of negativity,” but her husband’s rabbi told him it was a mitzvah.

“God runs the world, and when presented with a mitzvah, an opportunity to save someone’s life, one should grab it, for it may not come again.

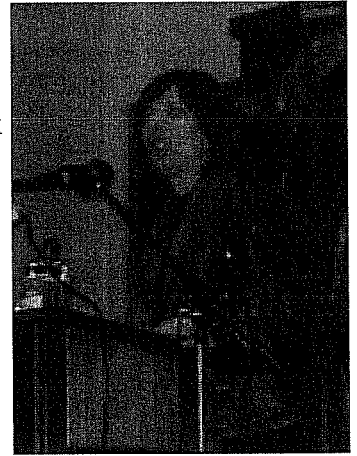
“To hold back, and live in a world of ‘what if’ could cost lives. How [could] I not give away my kidney just because it’s someone I don’t know? Somebody knows them. They are someone’s wife, sister, friend and daughter.”

When she asked the transplant doctor why people had two kidneys if they could live with one, “he told me that God gave you two – one to keep and one to give away.”

Two weeks before the scheduled surgery, the woman was told she had a donor, and Palatnik was asked if she wanted to talk to her.

“I said ‘yes, no, yes, no’ and then decided I wanted an emotional connection. We talked on the phone for four hours. [She told me] she was my age, and had a husband and seven children. I realized, this wasn’t just about her. It was about her husband, her children, her grandchildren.”

The only moment she had any doubts, she said, was when she entered the operating room. “I freaked out. There were 30 people in the room, and there was a [table] in the middle where I was supposed to lie down. “I asked myself, ‘What am I doing?’



“But, the next thing I knew, I was in recovery. The first person I asked about was this woman, and the first person she asked about was me.”

Her kidney began working immediately in the woman’s body, Palatnik said. “She was steps away from dialysis, and now she is almost perfect.

“She told me that it is hard to explain how she feels about me. She said it is like a truck was hurtling towards her, and at the last minute I pulled her out of the way.”

Looking back, she said, “this was the purest opportunity I had to give. I felt better giving to someone I didn’t know, because if you give to a friend, it creates an unbalanced relationship. When you give to someone you don’t know, you are giving to give. If you knew the joy [it gave me], you would do it, too. The pleasure is indescribable.”

She said she was speaking that evening, two days after the two-year anniversary of her surgery, “because a 22-year-old boy needs a kidney. Someone here can save the boy’s life.”

She is close friends with the woman now, Palatnik said, and plans on attending her daughter’s wedding. “I thank God that He made it possible for us to meet.”

John Anhang, director of the Toronto office of Renewal, a non-profit organization dedicated to assisting people suffering from various forms of kidney disease, said that the organization, started up three years ago in New York, helps recipients get kidneys from potential donors.

“We opened here in September with the [three-fold mandate] of raising awareness, making a match, and supporting the donor,” he said.

“We make people aware of how devastating kidney disease is, and we make them aware of the opportunity of becoming a donor.”

Renewal is also building a database of people who need a kidney and those who are donating a kidney. “We support the donor through every step of the process, including any out-of-pocket expenses they may incur. It’s not about pressure or encouraging people. We give them the information so they can make their own decision,” Anhang said.

For information, call 416-628-7633, 877-247-0616 or e-mail anhang.renewal@bell.net .

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