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Going Home - One of the Best Decisions of My Life



In 2008, a routine trip to donate blood changed my life forever. Over the years my husband, James, and I have donated blood on a regular basis. We know how important blood donation is to saving lives, and it was a great way for us to give back to our community in Seneca, Illinois. Little did I know, one routine donation visit would reveal my own health risk. Like so many times before, a nurse took my blood pressure--but this time she told me that I should visit my doctor right away.

I learned I had very high blood pressure. I began taking medication to manage hypertension, and felt that my condition was under control. But just a few months later I was rushed to the hospital because of a potential allergic reaction to the medication. While there, I was shocked to learn that, as a result of my high blood pressure, I was in partial kidney failure. Like many people with high blood pressure, I had no idea it could take such a serious toll. I knew very little about kidney health at that time, and couldn't believe that at just 48 years old, I had End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD).

While one of my kidneys was still partially working, it was not enough kidney function to avoid dialysis. For a little over two years I received treatments three times each week in a dialysis center. While far too many patients are not so fortunate, I'm glad that my nurses told me about all of my therapy options up front. As soon as I learned about home hemodialysis, I was interested in the treatment. The ability to dialyze at home and on my own schedule was extremely appealing. But the idea of self-cannulation was intimidating, and I wasn't sure it was something I could do.

Meanwhile, in-center, thrice-weekly therapy was taking its toll on me and my husband. I was exhausted after each treatment, and there were many occasions that I had to call James to pick me up from the center because I was too tired to drive home. Once I made it home, I would often spend the entire day sleeping to regain my energy. Sometimes it felt like I was spending more hours of my life sleeping than awake. I wanted better health, and a better life. I decided it was time to overcome my doubts, and to try home hemodialysis.

With the dedicated support I received from my nurses and the advice given by current home hemodialysis patients, my husband and I completed training with the NxStage System One in October 2012. During training we both were surprised how easy the System One was to learn to use and operate, and I was able to overcome my concerns about self-cannulation. Once we were back home doing my treatments, I felt confident knowing that if I had any questions or problems, I could call a 24-hour support line anytime and get the answers I needed.

“Going home” was one of the best decisions I have made for my health and quality of life. Not only do I have the flexibility to dialyze when I want, but I am no longer on the energy rollercoaster that I was on while receiving in-center therapy. More frequent dialysis prevents me from having energy crashes, and instead of going right home to sleep after treatments, I am able to have a life beyond dialysis. I am fortunate to be able to continue working. I’m self-employed and travel all over Illinois to set up and maintain retail store displays, something I could not imagine doing while being restrained to a center’s schedule or while feeling exhausted and sick. I truly feel 100 percent better, and like myself again.

My two “four-legged children” –my cat Tuula and dog Timo–also seem to be glad that I have more energy to play with them. Next up is taking my NxStage System One on the road! My husband and I love camping and we are looking forward to enjoying the outdoors and traveling once again with my newfound energy--and without having to schedule around a dialysis center’s availability. Despite having kidney disease, I realized I can still feel healthy and have the flexibility and freedom to live life on my own terms.

- **Written by:** Retta Shanahan
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