

A brotherly bond

Two brothers donate kidney to third brother

By **Marian Dennis**

mdennis@21st-centurymedia.com

@MarianDennis1 on Twitter

Ask anyone with a brother and they'll tell you that the relationship is a uniquely deep kind of friendship.

Nobody knows that better than Scott Fluharty, 57, of Perkiomenville, who not only shares that bond with his brothers but a vital organ as well.

In 1996, Scott needed a kidney transplant when his own failed after prolonged exposure to formaldehyde, a toxic component in glue that he used in his custom wood-working business. At that time, his younger brother, Ken, also of Perkiomenville, stepped in to donate his and keep him from going on dialysis while on the waiting list for new a kidney.

"When Ken did it, it was a lot more involved," explained Scott. "Twenty years ago they practically cut Ken in half and had to remove a couple ribs for the surgery. Now, it's about a 3-inch incision and you're out in a few days."

Which was good news for Scott and another of his brothers, Mark.

In 2015, Scott again needed a new kidney when he began feeling unusually tired and blood tests showed he needed a second transplant. He got on the waiting list at Lehigh Valley Hospital-Cedar Crest in Allentown, expecting to start dialysis and wait for three years to get a kidney.

That's when Mark stepped in.

But accepting a kidney from a second of his brothers wasn't a risk Scott was immediately willing to take.

"I didn't want to take his kidney," said Scott. "I said I wasn't going to take it because he had two businesses and kids in college. Back when I needed my first transplant, Ken was 34 and he didn't have kids or family."

Mark, whom Scott said had never even been to a doctor, went through multiple tests at Lehigh Valley Hospital-Cedar Crest and was approved to become a donor. In addition to being physically and mentally evaluated for

the procedure, Mark had to lose weight and quit vaping.

After going through all the tests, however, Scott said Mark was not willing to take no for an answer and gave him a choice.

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"He said, 'I'm just going to stay on the list. I didn't go through all that for nothing. If you don't take it, I'll just donate to someone else.' I thought he was crazy," said Scott.

"I decided to donate because my brother who I love was very sick. I can't imagine anybody who loves anyone allowing that to happen. How can you let someone you love suffer so much? My younger brother also already done it so I knew for a fact that there's no issue," Mark added.

Not too much later, doctors contacted Mark to let him know that he was officially a good match for Scott.

"They called later and said it was a match and could be a perfect transplant. So we did it and he wanted to do it right away. We scheduled it for Jan. 4, 2017 and it worked out phenomenal. He was back by the 5th day and I'm doing great," said Scott.

Scott added that if he hadn't gotten the transplant, dialysis would have taken a huge toll on what he would be able to do. He would have had to go to a dialysis center almost every other day and would be incredibly limited in what he could do or even eat.

"You have to be at the center every other day depending on how bad you

are. They have other ones for in the home and my daughter lives out in Tacoma, Washington and we'll be able to go out there but otherwise I wouldn't be travelling. Hopefully I never need another one," he said.

Scott said the transplant was one of the best Christmas and New Year gifts he could ask for and that ever since, his relationship with his brothers has felt closer.

"Knowing you have their body part, you feel like you owe them more. I try to grab the bill every time we go out. Every time he needs me or wants me I'd be there anyway but now I'll be there more because there was no life before I got this transplant. It brings us closer. We were always close though and we're together every Christmas and everything. They'll be here on Sunday for the Superbowl."

Mark said he hopes that Scott's experience will help others realize that donating a kidney is something more people could and should do.

"We're born with two and really only need one to live a normal life. If more folks would donate their spare kidney, it would decrease the number of patients who require the arduous dialysis regimen that often goes on for years," Mark said. "I've already committed to my wife and family that I'm donating my entire body to science. I told my brother I'm sort of giving him an advance," he joked.

For more information on becoming a living donor visit www.americantransplantfoundation.org.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FLUHARTY FAMILY

Scott Fluharty, in middle, stands with his brothers, Mark, left, and Kenny, right. Kenny and Mark both donated a kidney to Scott after he needed one transplant in 1996 and another in 2015.