

Learning survival skills

Athenian wilderness trip teaches life lessons

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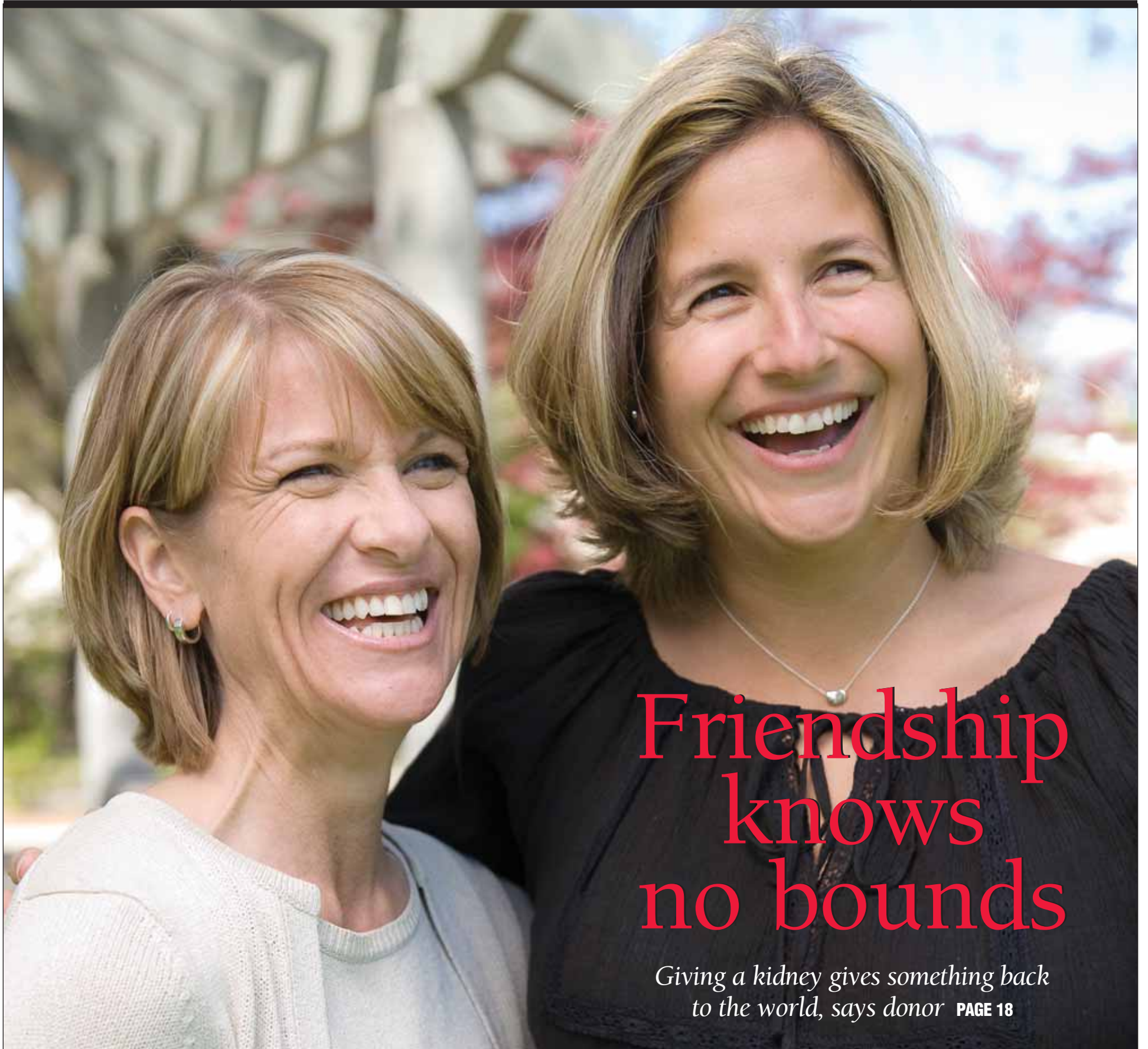
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Friendship
knows
no bounds

Giving a kidney gives something back
to the world, says donor PAGE 18

“Tanya knew that she was going to be the donor. You could see the energy in her. She was uplifted by the whole commitment. There was never a second look back.”

—Bill Lombardi, husband of Tanya Lombardi, kidney donor



Maxine Moir Furminger (left) and kidney donor Tanya Lombardi relax and share laughs after their successful transplant surgeries at UCSF Medical Center. Tanya had faith that if tests found her to be a good match for donating a kidney that it was meant to be.

Friendship knows no bounds

Giving a kidney gives something back to the world, says donor

By Susan Astbury

Who would think that joining a book club could save your life? Almost six years ago, Maxine Moir Furminger e-mailed some friends from Danville inviting them to start a book club. Maxine had suffered from kidney problems since her late teens, but when she began the book group, she had just gotten married to Michael Furminger and her kidney function was fine.

In spring 2006, one member invited a new neighbor to join—Tanya Lombardi. The meeting of Maxine and Tanya would grow into a friendship unlike few others and have a profound effect on their two lives.

Maxine was a 19-year-old college student with no previous health issues when she was admitted to the hospital with extremely high blood pressure. Extensive testing showed that her left kidney had never developed from birth, and her right kidney was functioning at less than 10 percent.

“My life changed dramatically—life style, food choices, everything,” Maxine, now 38, recalled. “After three years, while pursuing my college career, it came time for a transplant.”

On April 30, 1992, Maxine’s father donated a kidney to her.

“I’m an only child and typically they go to a sibling or parent,” she said.

After the transplant Maxine went on with her life, including backpacking around Europe with a friend. But in 2007 it became apparent that Maxine’s kidney function had started to decline.

“The thing with transplants is that it’s not guaranteed it’s going to last forever,” Maxine explained. “It depends on the match, how you take care of yourself. Anything can happen.”

One of Maxine’s best friends from childhood, Jen Good, came to her rescue, offering to donate a kidney. At the same time, Jen’s sister had offered to be a surrogate mother for Maxine and her husband since going through a pregnancy would jeopardize Maxine’s health.

Jen went through the matching process for the donation. “Everything looked really good,” said Maxine. “The twins were due in November so we decided to put things on hold until they arrived.”

After the twins were born, the women resumed working toward the kidney transplant in the spring of 2008. But they found out that during the last six months, Maxine had developed antibodies to Jen’s blood.

“We had spent almost a year thinking that I was going to be the donor,” Jen said. “And

we had this really safe feeling. The twins were born, and we celebrated, and we knew that I was going to be the kidney donor.”

Jen wrote to tell their good friends and families what had happened and asked them to consider being a donor.

“I wanted people to know that it was so much more than just giving something to Maxine,” said Jen. “It was giving something to everybody and it was giving something to yourself.”

As a result of that letter, four friends—including Tanya Lombardi and Maxine’s mother—decided to go through the testing process.

“I found out that it’s pretty unusual to have multiple donors and multiple donors who are healthy and can actually be a donor,” said Maxine. “It’s a big fear of people to have major surgery and give up an organ.”

She explained that with a living donor, there is not a wait to have the transplant. When an organ comes from a deceased donor, it usually must be flown in from somewhere else.

“You go on a list if your kidney function is 20 percent or lower,” said Maxine. “The wait for me was going to be five to seven years. Here I am with twins in my late 30s. I knew that I had a small window and that’s why I was really vigilant and proactive in my process.”

After the long testing process, it got to the point where Maxine just wanted to know who would be the best donor.

“Everybody has genetic markers, then they look at the size of the donor and the age and all these different factors,” said Maxine.

It turned out that the best match was Tanya, whom she had met in her book club.

“We were at a July Fourth party and Tanya came up to me and said that she wanted to be a donor,” remembered Maxine. “I said, ‘Hold on. This is a huge commitment. Have you really thought about it?’ She said that she had talked to Bill, her husband, and she really wanted to do it.”

Tanya, 35, recalls that she wanted to donate the kidney because she could.

“Somebody was in need and it’s something that I was able to do,” she said. “On the surface you have to be a blood type match in order to go down the path and I was. I guess I just have a faith that things were meant to be.”

However, she did think about it long and hard.

“I’m not alone,” she said. “I have a husband and two young children. I made the decision to go ahead and get tested, which I made on my own with my husband’s awareness. After that we talked and went through our own thought process.”



Maxine Moir Furminger with her family, husband Michael Furminger, and twins Olivia and Harris, 18 months.

"We spoke with various medical professionals and went online to see what the medical press was saying and did our homework," said Bill Lombardi, Tanya's husband. "We found that there was a low probability of complications. We had our children's blood tested to see who would be a better match for a donation and it turned out that I was the better match."

"It was a mother-to-mother type of gift. It was the right thing to do—if we could do it, we would do it," he added.

Tanya said she was very open and straightforward with her young children, Mitchell, 7, and Isabelle, 6. Before she committed, she told them that she was thinking about donating a kidney to Maxine.

"When I finally decided to donate I told them that I am giving a kidney and I'm going to the hospital," she recalled. "My 7-year-old son wanted to know if he could come and see the kidney. Apparently the doctors hear this all the time, so we took a little camera and they took a picture."

"When I told them we were good to go they got me in the next week," said Tanya. "Assuming that all the tests come back fine you go back to meet with their doctor and have one final test when they actually physically look and see what's inside there. And that's it. It's just those two days including meetings with a sociologist, the doctors."

The surgery took place at the UCSF Medical Center on Dec. 22. Tanya and Maxine went together the week before surgery for a meeting with the surgeons and the pre-op. And then it was the big day.

"I was scheduled for surgery for 7:30 a.m. and Maxine for 8:30," Tanya recalled. "They took me right in and explained the process and confirmed with me like three times that I was there to donate a kidney."

"I'd like to give credit to the surgical transplant team at UCSF for their tremendous work," said Maxine. "They are first class."

Both women returned to their families on Christmas Day.

"We basically needed babysitting for two weeks," said Tanya although they were up and walking the morning after surgery. "We weren't supposed to be alone and we weren't supposed to drive. After the two weeks I felt pretty good but had to be conscientious to not do the things they told me not to do."

Tanya was on leave for six weeks from her full time job doing consumer research at the Chlorox Corp.

"When I went in to talk to my boss and his boss and told them about the kidney donation, their immediate reaction was, 'Oh, my gosh, we're so amazed and impressed,'" Tanya said. She recalled them saying, "From a work perspective it's a non issue. Just make sure you're OK and you're doing the right thing for you, your kids and your husband. Whatever you need from work, you'll get."

Maxine, a human resources manager at Bank of America in San Francisco, took it very easy the first 30 days after the surgery.

"For me, I had new kidney that was functioning

Raising funds & awareness

Forty-eight runners from Forward Motion Race Club of Danville are preparing to run in The Relay, a 199-mile race May 2-3 to help raise awareness for organ donation. This year the club is running in honor of 6-year-old Katie Grace Groebner, a Clayton resident who is awaiting a heart-lung transplant. Each team has to raise at least \$600 to benefit Organ 'R' Us, said Larry Feigenbaum, one of the team captains.

really well, although I was on a lot of medication in the beginning, and still am on a good amount," she said. "The incision site was sore but I wasn't tired."

Bill Lombardi said that both he and Tanya felt good about the donation, and they hope to make other people aware that the procedure is safe.

"Tanya knew that she was going to be the donor," he said. "You could see the energy in her. She was uplifted by the whole commitment. There was never a second look back."

Maxine has been a member of Northern California National Kidney Foundation serving as vice president of the board 2007-08.

"My focus is creating awareness for living donors," she said. "The Kidney Foundation has educational seminars on the Peninsula. So I'm going to try to start up something in the East Bay."

"I feel like we need an outlet for patients and their potential living donors to come and speak to people who have gone through the process to allay their fears and address their concerns and let them know that it works and you can go on and live a very healthy life as a donor or as a patient."

There are 78,957 people in the United States waiting for a kidney to be donated, according to the National Kidney Foundation. The number of kidneys donated nationwide in 2008 was 16,514. Of those, 5,963 were from living donors.

Currently in California, 16,083 people are waiting for a kidney. In 2008, there were 1,925 kidney transplants in California. Of those, 1,220 were from deceased donors and 705 were from living donors.

"Whenever people thank me for donating, my reaction is that I feel blessed that I was able to do something like this," said Tanya. "I felt somebody was looking over me and said, 'You would be good for this.' And to me that's a compliment beyond anything else."

"Meeting Tanya means that I can live a healthy long life directly because of her and her actions and her compassion and her willingness to be a donor," said Maxine. "She's an incredible woman; she's a lifesaver—literally."

When Maxine sent out e-mails to start the book club in 2003 her kidney problems were not a consideration. Now she says, "Who would have thought that five years later that somebody who joined the book club would be donating a kidney and saving my life?" ■



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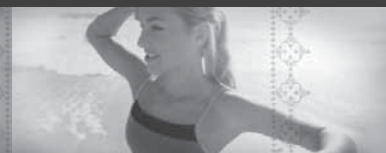
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