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CHEERY, Don

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Life behind the bench of the Boston Bruins was not always an easy one for NHL coach Don Cherry, but back in 1978 coaching the "lunch pail gang" was a lot easier for Cherry than facing the tragedy that had invaded his home life.

Cherry admits now that the strain of coaching those years was nothing compared to the anguish he experienced watching the deterioration of his young son, Tim, who was suffering severe kidney disease.

"In hockey you have to deal with a lot of injuries and blood," said Don, "but most of us are big babies when it comes to needles. I would gladly have donated my kidney for Tim, but I just couldn't watch the needles involved in dialysis."

The Cherrys' ordeal began as early as 1976 when Tim, then 13 years old, developed a disease of the joints. The swelling in his elbows and knees was kept under partial control by steroids, but after two years of treatment, his kidneys were slowly being destroyed.

"Less than 2 per cent of both his kidneys were functioning," explained Rose Cherry, the less famous, but quiet force in the Cherry family.

This total kidney failure resulted in intensive dialysis treatment for Tim who visited the famed

Boston General Hospital three times a week for treatments that each lasted four hours.

Don describes wife Rose as the hero of that six-month saga of their lives.

"I'm afraid I coped the least well," admits Don. "I tried to keep out of it as much as I could. I was almost happy when the team went out of town."

While Don was kept busy with his coaching duties, Rose coped as best she could with an extremely ill 13-year-old boy.

"I guess everyone goes through the same phase, but we kept thinking, 'Why us?'" said Rose. "All through that worst stage I never spoke to anyone who had been through the same experience and could offer a word of encouragement."

#### MISSED SCHOOLS

The effects of Tim's kidney disease were so debilitating that he missed an entire year of school and was confined to bed for most of this time.

Throughout this period of constant dialysis treatments the possibility of a kidney transplant kept Rose going.

"Almost every time I'd see the doctor I'd ask him when we could go for a transplant," remembers Rose.

Finally, when all signs of the original joint disease had disappeared, the doctor proclaimed Tim ready for a transplant.

At this point, all members of the Cherry family including 20-year-old daughter Cindy were tested for tissue compatibility.

"Don and I were 80 per cent compatible, which is not too bad but not good either," explained Rose, "but Cindy was a 100-per-cent match."

Throughout most of Tim's illness, Cindy had been attending college in Kingston, Ontario, and she was shocked on her return to Boston to see how radically his condition had deteriorated.

"I didn't realize how sick Tim really was," said Cindy.

When the preliminary testing revealed that Cindy's compatibility was similar to that of an identical twin there was no doubt in her mind that she would give one of her kidneys to brother Tim.

"There was really no question of whether to do it or not," said Cindy, who pooh-poohs the notion of being any kind of hero. "We knew it was going to be one of us to do it — it just happened to be me. As far as danger and risking your life — it's just not like that."

Rose remembers watching as her only two children were wheeled together into the operating room. She also remembers the long wait.

"I can still see them both being wheeled up the hallway," said Rose. "Then we sat and waited and waited. I don't think I've ever prayed so hard in my life."

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# Kidney donor can give patient a second chance

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After the waiting was over and the brother and sister team were wheeled back out of the operating room it soon became apparent that the operation had been a success.

## OUT OF BED

"Tim was up, out of bed and in to visit me on the day of the operation," said Cindy. "We broke the record for being in and out of hospital the fastest."

Cindy was home in seven days and back at work after a further two week's recuperation. Tim returned home after a 10-day hospital stay, returning to school not long after.

"Right after Tim came out of the operation, they had intravenous flushing through," said Don. "As I sat there watching, I could see the color coming into his face minute by minute. He had been pasty white for three years and I was seeing color in his face for the first time. If other people could see a miracle like that there would be no hesitation about donating kidneys. It's too bad you have to go through something like this to make you more aware."

Throughout Cindy and Tim's recuperation period, players from the Boston Bruins and league referees were constant visitors to the hospital. Cindy remembers how one evening the referees dropped

in, and asked if her father was going to visit that night. She answered he was planning on coming after that night's game, if it was over in time.

"I watched the game that night and you should have seen the things the refs let go, just so dad would get to the hospital in time," said Cindy.

"I reminded Don about this and told him that refs are human beings, too," chimed in Rose. "He was nice to them for about three months after — but that's all!"

Today, Tim Cherry is a student at Mohawk College in Hamilton and includes in his hobbies swimming, waterskiing, weightlifting, and street hockey. The only remaining sign of his kidney disease is medication he must take for the rest of his life.

"The only thing he really had to give up was hockey," said Rose. "When he took ill, he had been playing on three teams. He was heartbroken that he couldn't play hockey."

## SAME AS BEFORE

As for Cindy, she finds that life with one kidney is much the same as it was with two.

"Having one kidney doesn't affect you at all," she said. "Your body can survive on one with no problem."

The Cherrys' story of kidney disease has a happy ending, but not all families experience such success with kidney transplants.

There are currently 950 kidney patients in Ontario on dialysis machines. Of these, 600 are suitable for transplants and are waiting for the proper kidney.

"There are about 200 transplants a year in Ontario," said Martha MacGray, campaign assistant for the Toronto and District Chapter of the Kidney Foundation. "Approximately 80 per cent of these will go on to lead normal lives."

As part of Kidney Month, canvassers will be campaigning door to door throughout the month of March.

Carol Nicholson, team leader for canvassing in Mississauga, stresses that volunteers are badly needed to make this campaign a success.

Last year, the Mississauga Division raised only \$2,000 and their aim for this year is \$6,000.

Money raised will go towards medical research, summer camps for kidney patients and their families, programs in public awareness, early detection programs and an organ donors program.

Anyone thinking of volunteering to help canvass or those considering filling out the necessary form for a kidney donation should think of the Cherrys and remember how one kidney can change a life.

Call 624-4781 if you'd like to be a part of a success story.