

*Dennis Moses*  
*Transplant*  
*Story*

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## **Dennis Moses**

### **Transplant Story**

Let me introduce myself. My name is Dennis Moses. From the time I was born in 1956 I have lived all my years in and around DeRidder, Louisiana. My wife Cissy and I have been married since June 1977 and the Lord blessed us with a son and a daughter, Cody and Beth, a great son in law and daughter in law, and with three of the bestest grandchildren ever, Remington, Melody, and Mathew. I retired secularly in 2018 after a career in IT writing application software for a local paper mill. I gave my heart and life to the Lord when I was 12 years old and preached my first sermon around the age of 16. I currently pastor a nondenominational church in DeRidder. We are blessed with a home and some property about 10 miles outside the city in a rural area I have loved all my life. I love working around that property, doing a little building, and hunting, or fishing, but most of all spending time with my family. I am a blessed man and I would like to share my story.

My mom's side of the family suffered from a hereditary kidney disease called Polycystic Kidney Disease. This disease grows cysts on the kidneys, interfering with their function, and eventually rendering them inoperable. Although not every one of my siblings would inherit this disease, I did. The progression of the disease finally led to me having a kidney transplant on January 9, 2018, at the age of 61. As I write this, I am doing great with lab results showing normal kidney function. I feel better now than I had in many years prior to the transplant and am able to do anything I want, or should I say, my age will allow, LOL. I have told this story many, many times but not one time without tearing up with emotion. I often hear, "You should write that testimony so it is publishable and others will be able to read it." I am finally taking that advise and now take pen in hand (actually computer keyboard at fingers) to record how wonderfully God worked in my life to bring me to this point.

This will sound really odd but I must start this story much differently than expected, bringing up events that happened over 40 years ago. You see, back then my dad had a long-term affair with a lady and that relationship produced two daughters – my half-sisters. I was working my way through college, getting married, settling into a new job, and all the other things you do at that age. Consequently, we had very little interaction. In fact, Sara, the youngest daughter, was only around 9 years old when they moved to Texas. Her mother had broken the relationship with my father and remarried several years earlier. I'll come back to why this is so important in a bit.

Late in my twenties I began having significant trouble with high blood pressure. By the time I was in my early thirties my doctor began to have concerns that it might be related to my kidneys and referred me to a nephrologist for testing. I cannot tell you the blow my wife and I took finding out that I indeed had the disease. My kidneys were covered in the cysts that would continue to grow until they caused the kidneys to fail. I had watched my mom suffer through this and had some idea what was in store. Consoling myself that science had made great improvements in treatment and even the transplant process since my mom's battle brought very little relief to my worry. I remember thinking that about the time I should be enjoying my retirement and maybe grandkids I would be facing the end results of this disease. There were many anxious days and sleepless nights. One night stands out in particular. My wife and I were lying in bed and we were pretty

broken, trying to discern what the future held. In the middle of the tears and grief and maybe a little self-pity a thought came to me as quickly as you can turn a light on. I looked at Cissy, “What is the worst thing that can happen? If I die, I go to Heaven, and that ain’t bad.” I won’t lie and say I never struggled again, but that realization had a great impact on me. I know it had to be God.

Sometime later we were in a Sunday morning service at our church, Abundant Life Church in DeRidder, LA. God was moving mightily and Cissy and I had gone to the front with many others to pray and praise God. In the middle of it all Cissy turned to me and told me that God had spoken to her. “God said you are never going to die of kidney disease.” She had hardly finished speaking when our pastor, Pastor Bob Rutherford, who was on the platform praying for people and too far away to have heard, turned to us and said that he wanted to confirm that whatever it was that Cissy had said to me was indeed God speaking. We did our share of rejoicing that morning! I have always tried to trust God and now I had something for my faith to hand on to.

So, being the analytical that I am, I figured it all out... almost. I determined that the word God had spoken meant that either He was going to miraculously heal my kidneys of the disease or He was going to sustain my kidney function until I lived a ripe old age (which isn’t 61). Imagine my thoughts when my kidney function began to decline. The numbers began to go down in 2015 and kept dropping in 2016, to the point that in September of that year my nephrologist said it was time to get on the transplant list. Believe me, I was confused. I had beat back worry by trusting on the promise that God had given to me at church that day. Where was that word now? What had happened to my promise? Where was my healing, or at least my sustaining? I wasn’t wanting to question God but believe me, I took that conversation to Him often enough. One day I felt God again drop something in my heart that steadied my course, “Keep going down the road before you until you see Me do what I’m going to do.” I was reminded of the verse in Isaiah, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. Isaiah 55:8 (KJV)”. So, I did what my nephrologist ordered and made an appointment with the J. C. Walters Transplant Center at the Houston Methodist Hospital for December 2016. After two trips and a lot of testing we were told that I was being placed on the transplant list. We were told other things too, like, being on that wait list was a 3 to 5 year wait for a cadaver kidney and at the rate I was declining I would be on dialysis way before the 3-year mark. I dreaded that and will confess that I asked God if He could spare me having dialysis. The last thing the doctor told us was that a live donor would be best. Live donor kidneys have twice the life expectancy as a cadaver kidney and are much safer because of the intensive testing that could be done while matching a donor. My comment to that doctor was ok, I don’t see myself asking anyone for a kidney and know of no one that can offer. Something he said next stuck with me, “Just put it out there. Put it on Facebook and let people know.” Well, we had “put it out there” to family and to a number of churches who were all praying for us even at this point. As I said, I am a pastor and the organization I am affiliated with had spread the word to churches across the nation. But Cissy and I struggled with the Facebook thing. I didn’t even have a Facebook account at the time. Finally, we worded a short post just letting people know what was going on and where we were in the process and posted it on Cissy’s

account. We ended it with “Please pray for us as we go on this journey and share with family and friends”.

My story is so intertwined with my brother’s that I need tell you what was going on with him at this same time. Mike had the same disease and although younger than me, the disease had progressed more rapidly. He faced kidney removal in March 2017 and was on dialysis until his transplant. Mike had previously reestablished a relationship with our sister Sara, who I mentioned earlier in this story, and her family. Unfortunately, the older sister had passed away. Sara graciously offered Mike a kidney and after being tested found that she was a great match. Sara’s favorite saying is that God brought “beauty from ashes” (Isaiah 61:3) from a wrongful situation 40 years earlier to a lifesaving miracle today. Surgery was scheduled for September, 2017. Mike told us she wanted to know if we were interested in reacquainting with her and my answer was immediate and absolute – yes! She came over in early 2017 to a benefit given to help Mike with expenses but somehow our timing got mixed up and we missed seeing each other. I was very disappointed but looked forward to seeing her soon, most likely in Houston at Mike’s transplant.

A few days after the benefit I called Mike to tell him I had a couple of donation checks for him that had come to me after the benefit. I asked if he could swing by my work place and I would bring them out to him in the parking lot. A little later he called and I walked out. When I walked up to the truck, I found Mike crying to the point he could barely talk to me. Scared me because I thought something was terribly wrong. He held up his phone and said, “Moe, you need to call this number.” I asked him who I was calling. Through the tears he said, “Sara”. I asked, “My sister Sara?” “Yes.” “Why am I calling her?” “She just called me and said her daughter Renae wants to donate a kidney to you.” Now I was a mess! Still struggling for words, he said “call her then call me back”, and drove away.

I sat down right there on the curb of the parking lot under the shade of a tree and dialed the number. Sara answered and the first of many miracles happened. I got reacquainted with my sister which would eventually lead to getting acquainted with the family that I had lost 40 years earlier. We talked for almost an hour. Her mom had married a fine Christian man, recommitted her life to Christ, and raised her girls to love God. I later told Cissy that Sara had shown me more Christian love in an hour than some people had in a lifetime. Towards the end of our conversation, Sara explained why she wanted to talk to me. When she saw our Facebook post she had added to her Facebook a post about another sibling needing a kidney. Her daughter Renae saw that post and responded that she had a kidney to give. After they had talked, Sara had called Mike to reach out to me on Renae’s behalf. You can imagine that I was still having trouble absorbing the news. Renae wanted to give her uncle, who she had never met, a kidney. What can I say? I was stunned, overwhelmed, almost couldn’t believe what I was hearing and immediately too choked up to talk. I was afraid to even think it. I will tell you that I could find no words then and still struggle now to fully express how I felt. Two miracles in one conversation.

Renae wanted to talk to me but was working as a flight attendant at the time and had said she would text me when she could talk the next Saturday. It was early in the week and I could hardly

wait until Saturday! I was excited. I was scared! I didn't know what to say. I must have rehearsed the opening line a million ways. But the text did come and I called. We talked, getting acquainted the first time. I don't remember every word but some details stick out to me to this day. When asked "why" Renae explained that she had wanted earlier to give an organ but it didn't happen. She knew her mom was in the testing process to give a kidney to her Uncle Mike and when she read that his brother needed a kidney, she knew God was speaking to her. I remember thanking her but I remember more clearly thinking that there was nothing I could ever say that would be adequate to express how I was feeling. One of my favorite memories came at the end of our conversation when she asked, "I call Uncle Mike Uncle Mike, what should I call you? Just Dennis doesn't seem right." My reply was, "All my other nieces and nephews call me Uncle Moe." to which she said, "That will work!"

Let me tell you, the transplant team in The Houston Methodist Hospital is phenomenal! In fact, I have received nothing but the best personal care at the Methodist Hospital. Renae contacted the coordinator who guided her through the entire process of being tested. It was kind of cool that my brother and I had the same team and so did Renae and Sara. The testing process showed that Renae was indeed a match for me, but gave us another scare. While testing Renae they found a lump that had to be removed and tested. Tests showed it to be benign at that point but could have been life threatening later if undetected. This was indeed miracle number three (yes, I'm counting). In November 2017 we set the transplant date for January 9, 2018. I may forget a lot of things but January 9, 2018 will not be one of them.

Now here is where I want to tell you, I was a sick man. My kidneys were not filtering toxins from my body and I was slowly being poisoned. Some symptoms, high blood pressure, fatigue, and shortness of breath had plagued me for several years. By November, if I walked out to the mailbox, about fifty yards, I would have to wait to catch my breath to walk back. Severe muscle cramps and pain in my side increased as my kidney function dropped. I would have to jump up at night, awakened from a sound sleep, to walk off the most severe "charley horses". I felt like I had severe flu symptoms 24-7. My GFR, the number that measures how well your kidneys filter blood, should be above 60 but was now at 19 and considered kidney failure. By the time I went in for surgery it had dropped to 12, bringing increased fatigue, full time nausea, and times when I would pass out. (By the way, try passing out at your granddaughter's elementary school and see the chaos it brings.) I had the mindset that if I quit working, I would be giving up. So, I continued working in my office job and tried my best to keep doing things around the house and property that was more laborious. My realization that I could no longer do those things is still as clear now as the day it happened. I had gone out to cut a huge limb from our oak tree and cut it up for firewood. I got the limb on the ground and a couple of cuts made then found myself unable to do anything else. Sitting on the ground leaning against the tire of my side-by-side I called my wife to come get me in and put up my tools. I simply could not go on. When I checked into the hospital for the surgery my creatinine level was five times higher than normal. Creatinine level is how they check how good your kidneys are cleaning your blood and my blood was five times more toxic that it should be. I later learned that at that point I was even at the risk of stroke – the one fact the doctor told Cissy

and she didn't want me worrying over. I remember that at the 8-to-9-week time frame before my transplant date I was not sure I could make it. I prayed daily that I could make it to the transplant day without having to go on dialysis. I probably should count the fact that I did make it as another miracle because I only made it by God's mercy.

Around the first of December 2017 I received a call from the transplant donor coordinator. She explained that nothing had changed with the planned surgery and they would transplant Renae's kidney on the scheduled date. They did however have one concern; Renae was petite and her kidney in my 6'3" 190-pound body concerned them about longevity. The question was, would we consider a swap? This is a tremendous program that the Transplant Center has! If a person has a live donor that does not match, they can enroll in the swap program. The team then matches up donor – recipients, matching any number from 4 to 8 and then preform the surgeries the same day! My answer was two-fold, if Renae was ok with doing that and if the team thought it was the best course of action, then I was ok with it. I called Renae to talk about it and found out that the coordinator had already given her the same information. Her response, "If Jesus could save two lives instead of just one, what would He do." Wow! I actually didn't have a reply for a minute there! Three weeks before the transplant another call came. It was the coordinator telling me a two-way swap had been found. A young man needed a kidney and his father had passed the testing as an eligible donor but was not a good match for his son. In the conversation I had been switched over to the chief of the transplant team who said that Renae was a great match for the son, and the dad was a great match for me. He assured me it was the best course. He also explained the tremendous odds against such a match happening and I knew this was miracle number four. I again called Renae and the decision was finalized; now the son was getting a kidney his size and I was receiving one from a healthy 44-year-old man in great shape.

Miracle number five?! Our surgeries all went perfect. Juan and I immediately started getting better with our new kidneys and his dad, Jose, and Renae made full recoveries. In fact, the surgeon explained that a newly implanted kidney might take up to a couple of days to "wake up" and begin functioning. He told me that as soon as he attached the blood flow to my new kidney it began producing! I have to tell you a funny thing at this point. My brother who had received his transplant four months earlier told me just before the surgery, "Moe, I'm the only one in this family who really knows how sick you are and how bad you are feeling right now. But, when you wake up from the surgery you are going to sit up in the bed and say 'Wow, I can't believe I feel this great!'" . My reply was that he was crazy as a bed bug. You don't have major surgery, get cut open and a new organ inserted, then wake up the same day and say, "Wow, I feel good". The evening of the surgery, after being moved from recovery to a room I was sitting in the bed visiting with my wife and son and daughter and was answering texts and emails on my phone. I even had one person respond to my reply with, "This better be Cissy texting not you." Suddenly it hit me! The realization caused my expression to change so drastically my wife jumped up asking what was wrong! I could only reply, "I feel great! I can't tell you how great I feel!" All the symptoms were gone! In fact, I only hit the pain medicine button once that night, not for pain but just so I would

sleep. I never took one pain pill after the surgery. My recovery and my lab reports were perfect. And, so were Juan's. Yep, that is miracle number five.

Juan? You see, they will not tell you before an organ swap who the donor or recipients are. During the surgery Cissy and the wife/mother of the other family soon figured out what they were both doing there. By the end of the day, they had developed a friendship. On the day before being released from the hospital we were told that if we all agreed the families could get together. We whole heartedly agreed! I remember vividly walking into Juan's room and meeting the Negretes. I could hardly speak as I met Jose, the father whose kidney I was carrying. And meeting Juan, the son who now had Renae's. We feel we have gained more family – miracle number six. By the way, Cissy keeps hoping my Mexican kidney will make me want more Mexican food – she loves it!

On our first check up with the surgeon two weeks after the transplant, I saw the chief of the transplant center who had actually set up the swap; my surgeon was out that day. During the conversation he asked had we met the other family. We assured him not only had we met but we were forming a great relationship. What he said next brought me to tears – again. He said that had we not decided to make the swap, there was a good chance Juan would not have lived long enough to have found another transplant. Wow, miracle number seven, this young man is now doing great and we continually stay in touch.

You see, I told you I am a blessed man. I can't finish this without telling you that one of my biggest blessings is my wife Cissy. She has made every step of this journey with me. She listened to every lab report and doctor prognosis since this started years ago. She has been right there during every high and every low. We have cried together and we have rejoiced together. When I was sick before the transplant, she was my care giver (and hasn't stopped to this day). When I went into the surgery, she was the last face I saw and that same face greeted me when I woke up in recovery. So many times, she had the faith that I was struggling to find. Simply put, she took care of me when I could not take care of myself and I know that I could not have made this journey without her.

I am writing this in August of 2023 and celebrated my five-year anniversary last January. As I said in the beginning, I am doing great. Better than great. When I asked my urologist how long this kidney and my health would last, his replied with a grin that something else would take me out before that kidney did if I took care of it. Just a confirmation of what God had spoken to Cissy 30 years earlier. I am taking care of it, and God has kept His hand on it as well. So many times, when I am out working on our property, or hunting, or fishing, or doing any of the many other things I enjoy, or I'm just spending time with my family, or I'm just feeling good, I stop and think that I could still be sick. I could be spending days sitting in a dialysis unit, or worse. I could not be here. That's when I think of a niece that was willing to give a gift that would change my life so drastically. I hope she never tires of me telling her that. I also think of my God, who had a road for me to go down, but didn't let me go down it alone. He was there. He blessed me with family and with friends to travel along that road with me. I may never know how many people all over this country had prayed for me diligently. I have to lift my head and my voice to praise and thank my God for all He

accomplished. No, not the way that I had determined He would, but in a way filled with miracles that touched so many more lives than just mine. I named seven in this article, but that is just the “bigger” ones. All of them would be too many to count.

“Keep going down the road before you until you see Me do what I’m going to do.” I did. I still am.

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