

He's ready to live life: Big sister will donate kidney to 17-year-old

By Erica Molina Johnson / El Paso Times

Posted: 08/16/2009 12:00:00 AM MDT

EL PASO -- High-school junior Wayne Curtis wants his 58th surgery to finally be the one that allows him to give up his place courtside and get in the game.

The Eastwood High School basketball manager will travel to Dallas next week to prepare for his third kidney transplant. He hopes the delicate surgery will open a new world for him.

"I want to play (sports). I want to go out with my friends, stay out past 12 o'clock, have a car and do whatever I want," Wayne said.

His big sister, 20-year-old Caila Curtis, is excited about her role in helping Wayne live a normal life. The kidney he receives will come from her body.

"He's my brother. It's harder for me to imagine life without him than with him and one of my kidneys that I don't even need."

She said it was important to her that Wayne get a kidney as soon as possible.

"He's 17 years old. This is the most important time in his life," she said, adding that doctors estimate he could keep the kidney for 20 to 25 years.

"The next 20 years of his life, from here to 37, that's when he gets married. That's when he has kids," Caila said. "That's when he goes to college and hangs out with his friends and gets to go out and doesn't have to be in bed at 10 o'clock because he has to be hooked up to a (dialysis) machine."

Now he is connected to the machine for 10 hours every night.

She does not want her brother to miss out on any more life experiences she's had the fortune to enjoy.

"It's her chance to give him a normal life," said Vince Curtis, the pair's father.

The family said the journey toward Wayne and Caila's Aug. 31 surgery has been long and arduous.

"(Wayne) was born without kidneys and was not expected to make it through the night," mother Sandy Curtis said. "But they found a little bitty kidney in his back that sustained him for six months, and then he went on dialysis."

He had regular dialysis from the age of six months until he was 2 and received his first kidney transplant.

His body rejected the organ after only 10 days. He returned to dialysis and waited another five years for a donor kidney.

Wayne struggled to remain healthy, and he and

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his family received a trip to Walt Disney World from the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Wayne's true wish, to meet then-Dallas Cowboys quarterback Troy Aikman, would come true later. Cowboys offensive coordinator and then-backup quarterback Jason Garrett befriended Wayne and often played games with the boy at Children's Medical Center in Dallas. Many members of the team also reached out to the boy, giving him autographs and other mementos.

When Wayne turned 7, he received his second kidney transplant.

He lived a normal life with that organ for seven years.

But the medication he took to prevent the organ's rejection caused an artery leading to the kidney to thin and deny the organ blood.

Doctors removed it from his body.

When Caila turned 18 two years ago, she immediately was tested for organ donation compatibility with her brother.

Doctors told her that her body contained two antigens that could cause Wayne to reject the organ. With an 80 percent chance of rejection, the family backed off the idea.

She later went back for tests to determine what exactly the antigens were. She was surprised to see they had disappeared. Their absence cleared the way for doctors to proceed.

Wayne received two new drugs to essentially kill his immune system, along with any memory of the antigens in his cells and plasma.

Meanwhile, Caila underwent psychological testing to make sure she knew the full impact of her decision, including the slight possibility that she might never have children after donating the organ.

"I said I can always adopt. I have an adopted older sister and two foster sisters," Caila said.

"I don't love something that I've never had before. I love my brother now. How can I refuse life to someone that I love now?"

She will miss two weeks of school for the procedure.

Wayne will be tutored while in Dallas for two months and will resume classes at Eastwood after that.

With the kidney transplant now a reality, his dreams are to finish high school, study broadcasting, become a radio sports commentator and live a normal life.

"This is the part of life where everybody looks back on their life and talks about this time," Caila said.

"Why not give him the time that's most important?"

Erica Molina Johnson may be reached at

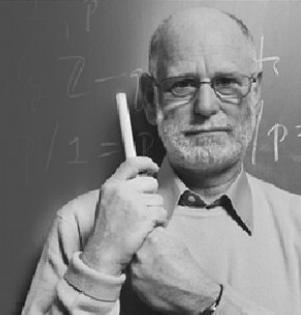
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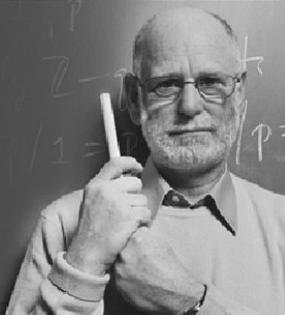
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