

The Best Gifts Come from the Heart... or Kidney

BY LINDSAY DRENNAN

Retired Chief Justice **Carolyn Wright** and Former Justice **David Evans** already shared a fairly exclusive connection as members of the Dallas Court of Appeals. Now they share a second, even more unique bond: each of them has one of Justice Evans' kidneys.

In September, Justice Evans donated a kidney to Chief Justice Wright through Baylor, Scott & White's organ transplant services, but the path to donation is an amazing story in its own right.

In 2013, Chief Justice Wright contracted pneumonia. Within a few days, she developed sepsis and then lapsed into a two-month coma, resulting in multiple organ failure and requiring life support. Doctors lost hope and encouraged her family to remove her from the respirator. Her family agreed, confident in her fighting spirit and the power of their prayers. Shortly after doctors removed the respirator, she awoke and resumed breathing on her own.

After her coma, Chief Justice Wright required therapy to relearn how to speak and to walk. Moreover, she learned she had sustained serious kidney damage and would require dialysis. Nonetheless, she returned to the bench. Opting for in-home dialysis so she could fulfill her obligations to the court, Chief Justice Wright meticulously and successfully administered her own dialysis for two years. Then, she explains, "I miraculously recovered my kidney function and was removed from dialysis. My nephrologist told me this was very unusual...but agreed it was a very good thing."

Unfortunately, in March 2018, Chief Justice Wright learned her kidney was failing again. Her nephrologist urged her to consider a kidney transplant, but she felt it would be unethical to actively seek a living



Carolyn Wright and David Evans. Courtesy KDFW FOX 4.

kidney donor from the bench. She sought a delay until her retirement and then one more delay in February 2019 to travel to Nigeria to speak with the Nigerian court about the importance of an independent judiciary. With the guidance of her doctors, she made the trip, but by the time she returned she was seriously ill and could delay no longer.

Once she applied for transplant, Chief Justice Wright was surprised to learn there was no existing registry of willing living donors. Instead, those seeking a transplant are urged to be their own advocates or recruit friends and family to help. Chief Justice Wright's sisters and former court staff stepped in to advocate for her, and a number of friends and family were moved to apply as donors. Sadly, several volunteers were summarily disqualified and at least six potentially qualifying donors failed the clinical tests. With her condition worsening, Chief Justice Wright needed an

O+ blood type donor whose kidneys were in good health. Enter Justice Evans.

During their time on the Dallas Court of Appeals, the two shared strong mutual respect, but were not close friends. Nonetheless, Justice Evans learned of Chief Justice Wright's need and had "never before had the opportunity to significantly help or save somebody" and he "did not want to finish life having missed this chance to do so." Justice Evans says if he had not donated a kidney, he "would take both of them with me to my grave... that would be a waste of one of my kidneys and would risk Carolyn's life right now."

However, despite Justice Evans' Type O blood and healthy lifestyle, the match was not an obvious one. The two are not

related and have little in common physically. Fortunately, as Justice Evans learned through the application process, healthy donors can donate not only beyond their own family, but to someone of another age, gender, or race.

Doctors successfully transplanted the kidney, affectionately nicknamed Kevin, and the transplant gave Chief Justice Wright a new lease on life. "I cannot describe how different I feel. Kevin has been working overtime," she shared. A team of three surgeons performed the surgery, approximately the 50th one Baylor has performed this year.

Chief Justice Wright believes the bar has a chance to set an example for the community in terms of living organ donation.

"Donors can continue to live a healthy life with one kidney, but they give the recipient a completely new life," she observed. "People just don't realize the need."

Justices Wright and Evans encourage those who are interested in donating to learn more about their eligibility. In particular, the two want to share their story to raise awareness of the ability to donate organs despite differences in age, family, race, and gender. The story is a powerful reminder for an increasingly divided world that we are, after all, the same inside.

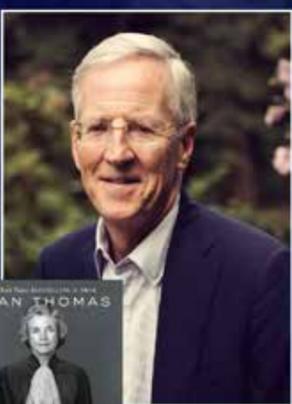
Information on becoming a living donor is available from the National Kidney Foundation or from Baylor at www.baylortransplant.com/Pages/donor-information.aspx. **HN**

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