

Adam's Kidney
by Jeni Bushman

When it rains, I think of Adam's kidney.

When I eat strawberry ice cream, I think of Adam's kidney.

When I watch my favorite romantic comedy, I think of Adam's kidney.

Sometimes, I think of Adam's kidney for no reason at all.

Believe it or not, I don't make a habit of musing over other people's organs. I've never thought about my father's appendix, or my neighbor's gallbladder, or my dog's spleen (though I'm now forced to wonder if she has one). I think of Adam's kidney because it used to be mine. Of course, it's not my kidney anymore — it's simply something that used to be a part of me for 28 years and now lives in someone else, purifying someone else's blood and making someone else's urine.

I wonder if it remembers me.

Organ donation is a selfless act. At least, that's what every billboard, marketing campaign, and hospital transplant coordinator will tell you.

You're committing a selfless act.

If giving up a piece of myself is so selfless, then I wonder why I feel so much guilt.

For 28 years, I've nourished my body with food and water, sleep and exercise, laughter and joy, and even a healthy pinch of well-deserved spite. The transplant coordinator tells me I am an excellent candidate: my heart vigorous, my bloodwork unblemished. Radiographs from the X-ray show two symmetrical bean-shaped blobs, illuminated against the dark grey background like two streetlights in a still night. Soon, there will be only one.

I wonder if I can take credit for my flawless health report. Did my daily commitment — to exercise, to eight hours of sleep, to fresh fruits and vegetables — nurture these unassuming but powerful organs like a watering can pouring life into seeds? I sit with the thought for half a moment, before a more uncomfortable notion emerges.

If I have good kidneys because I made good choices, then people with bad kidneys have made bad choices.

This isn't true at all. I immediately want to scrub the parts of my brain that allowed this trail of thought to trickle through my cerebrum like an uncontained stream. Adam is three years old; he was born with bad kidneys. This is not about choices. It never is.

The stream breaches into a flood.

Why did I get good kidneys? Why does anyone get bad kidneys? Is it my obligation to share? If life won't make things equitable, can I?

I am not afraid of surgery or hospitals or living with one kidney. There is not much that scares me — not even spiders or snakes or thoughts of death. *My death*. But there is one thing that keeps me up at night, and it's not demons or devils or the ominous threat of the dark. It's the thought of a three-year-old being strapped down for another day of dialysis, panicking about dialyzers and catheters and things no three-year-old should know about.

I worry about Adam the most, but I spare a bit of that worry for my kidney. Not whether it will be taken care of in its new home — this I know for sure. But sometimes, I worry that it will forget me. How much of ourselves participate in our best memories? I cannot run or jump, lift or climb, laugh or worry without my heart, lungs, and brain. My insides fuel my outsides, but how often do I thank them for their contributions? Does my liver know that it converted Olive Garden spaghetti into glycogen so that I could run a marathon? Does my kidney know that it eliminates toxins from my bloodstream and produces urine, which sometimes dribbles out recalcitrantly when I laugh too hard at my nephew's jokes? Will my kidney remember me, or will he start over? For someone I've carried around for 28 years, I don't know much about him. The realization sends a twinge to my stomach, like static from a balloon.

That familiar static vibrates through me when I wake on the operating table. I blink once, twice, three times. *How is Adam?* The doctor smiles. His face is obscured by a mask, but his eyes are soft, and I notice the upturned crinkles in their corners, so I know.

My old kidney goes to work in Adam's body immediately. It filters and excretes and regulates like its life depends on it. Like it knows Adam's life depends on it. In one week, Adam

is out of his hospital bed, free of the IV pole and the epidural and the constellation of wires keeping tabs on my kidney.

On *his* kidney.

After two weeks, Adam gets discharged. After eight weeks, his sutures come out, and he can splash in the pool on a sweltering August day. After three months, he starts preschool.

My kidney is going to preschool.

A piece of my heart is going too.

Adam continues to grow taller and stronger. He learns and laughs and makes messes and plays with friends and throws three-year-old tantrums, then four-year-old tantrums.

I wonder what my — now his — kidney thinks of this. Does it know it now lives in someone else? Was it startled by the sudden, blinding light of the operating room as it made its brief transfer between abdomens? Does it miss my remaining kidney? Does it feel the weight of its new job — to nourish and protect a tiny person who spent the first 45 days of his life in the NICU, and to ensure that tiny person never has to return?

Nowadays, when it rains, I wonder if Adam and his kidney are also tracing water droplets on the window.

When I eat strawberry ice cream, I wonder if Adam, too, now likes strawberry ice cream.

When I watch my favorite romantic comedy, I wonder if Adam will also grow up to pine after Harry and Sally.

I wonder if Adam and his kidney think of me for no reason at all.

As I wonder and reminisce, I'm reminded of a selfless act. Not mine, but that of a kidney. After 28 years of powering me through sports and school and friendship and life, my kidney has a new job: as Adam's kidney. It's a full-time job; a very important job.

I hope it doesn't think of me at all.