

Kidney Anniversary

By C. Gregory Albers '83, M.D. '87, FACC

On our wedding day, Feb. 4, 1989, I gave my wife, Francie my heart. 24 years and one day later, I gave her my left kidney. For Francie and me, our 24th wedding anniversary will always be the most special because it will be known as the “kidney anniversary.”

Greg and Francie Albers during pre-op.



Photo courtesy of the Albers

It was a love story right at the start. I met and got to know Francie in the early '80s. I was attending the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA and was active with UCLA's Catholic Center, playing guitar with the music group for several masses every weekend. Francie showed up (with another guy, I might add) at a “Punk and Preppie” dance that the Center hosted one Friday night. I was part of a rock band performing and had dyed my hair blue to go with the punk theme. I was impressed with Francie right away, and, luckily, she saw past the blue hair and said later that I made a great impression on her. I suspect that was divine intervention. As time went on, we got to know each other, and, during one of our conversations, Francie told me about her autosomal polycystic kidney disease. I knew even before we started dating that someday I might gladly donate my kidney to her. We were so happy to be married at UCLA on Feb. 4, 1989.

On Feb. 5, 2013, I returned to UCLA again, where I donated my left kidney to Francie via a living-donor transplant performed at Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. Life had come full circle at UCLA. Through the expertise and knowledge of the wonderful surgeons, nephrologists, coordinators, and other healthcare professionals, along with lots of prayers and faith, a miracle occurred. Francie went into surgery with approximately 10% kidney function and two days post-op, the function was 100% normal. The procedure was a great success. As for me, I was home within 24 hours and back to work in four weeks.

“Our” kidney is doing great, and so are Francie and I. We owe the success of this surgery first of all to our Heavenly Father; the amazing pre-, intra-, and post-operative care we received at UCLA; and the outpouring of love, support, prayers, and help of families, friends, and colleagues. It's awesome to think what God has in store for Francie with the renewed energy and vigor that a healthy kidney is bringing her. This kidney donation was one of my life's purposes, and Francie feels incredibly blessed and joyful for the gift of renewed life. I feel certain that God brought us together at UCLA so many years ago, so I could someday donate my kidney to her.

C. Gregory Albers '83, M.D. '87, FACC earned his B.S. degree at UCLA in 1983 and M.D. degree in 1987. After completing a gastrointestinal (GI) fellowship at UC Irvine (UCI) in 1993, he was in private practice for seven years before his passion for teaching and research brought him back to a growing and dynamic GI division at UCI. Now at UCI for almost 13 years, he is professor of clinical medicine and medical director of diagnostic GI services at the H. H. Chao Comprehensive Digestive Disease Center and an associate in the Inflammatory Bowel Disease Center. His interests include colorectal cancer screening, chemoprevention research and capsule endoscopy.