

# Spotlight

Yale  
New Haven  
**Health**  
Yale New Haven  
Hospital

YOU gave  
John a second  
chance at life!  
Thank you,  
donors!

## A Perfect Match

Diana and John share life, love, and kidneys

Thanks to your support, Diana discovered she was the one person in thousands who could save her husband's life

**THE AWFUL DAY** last spring was 23 years in coming. That's when John's doctor told him he wouldn't survive without a kidney transplant.

### Decades of unrecognized signs of kidney disease

Throughout John's life, there had been clue after clue, but each one alone didn't seem all that serious.

When John was 16, he went to a local blood drive where he learned he had very high blood pressure. Then, when he was 28, his doctor discovered a heart

murmur. At 37, excruciating back pain drove John to the emergency room.

X-rays revealed a frightening diagnosis: *polycystic kidney disease* (PKD) — an inherited condition that often causes kidneys to fail by age 60. High blood pressure and heart abnormalities frequently accompany the disease.

**“When I learned I had PKD, I was shattered,” says John. “My father had it. His kidneys failed when he was 39 and he died at 43.”** *(continued inside)*

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“John thought for sure he was going to die in his 40s,” adds Diana. But with a healthy diet, blood pressure medication, and the care of his dedicated physicians, his kidneys held out for 23 more years.

Last year, John’s time ran out. He had two options if he were to survive: dialysis for the rest of his life (regular, invasive treatments to help his damaged kidneys clean his blood) or a transplant. John desperately wanted a transplant, as it would give him a far better quality of life.

### How to find a matching kidney

John looked into getting on the waitlist for a matching kidney from a deceased donor. But there was a six-year wait. He knew he didn’t have that much time.

John’s only other option was to find a living donor — and the odds of quickly identifying someone who was compatible, healthy, and willing were vanishingly slim.

That’s when Diana and John learned about **paired donation**, where an incompatible patient/donor pair swaps with another pair

to make two matches. John’s donor wouldn’t need to be a perfect match, dramatically reducing the waiting time.

Diana didn’t think twice about offering her own kidney in exchange for a matching kidney for John, and she quickly began the onerous donor screening process. “When you love somebody,” Diana says, “you’d give anything.”

Miraculously, the screening showed Diana’s kidney was a perfect match for John. **“The odds of matching with a perfect stranger are roughly one in 100,000,”** says Diana. **“And to have married that one in 100,000! What are the odds of that?”**

Last May, the couple awoke at the crack of dawn and headed into YNHH where Diana gave John two of the most profound gifts anyone can give — her kidney and a second chance at life.

“There is no way I can ever repay Diana for what she did,” says John. But for Diana, John’s new lease on a healthy life is much more than enough. ♥



With YOUR generosity, Diana and John never lost hope – or their sense of humor – as you can see from the custom pajamas they wore to the hospital on transplant day. The photo on the right shows what Diana calls “the sweetest moment of the whole experience,” when John’s nurses brought him down post-surgery to see her.

## Will you give someone with failing kidneys the gift of a second chance at life?

### 3 ways you can make a profound impact today:

- 1. Consider becoming a living kidney donor.** You can live a healthy life with just one kidney, and through paired donation, your kidney can be someone’s perfect match. Learn about it here: [ynhh.org/services/transplantation/center-for-living-organ-donors](https://ynhh.org/services/transplantation/center-for-living-organ-donors)
- 2. Register today to become an organ donor** in the event of your death. One organ donor can save up to 8 lives and restore sight to 2 people. Learn more here: [registerme.org/campaign/ct](https://registerme.org/campaign/ct)
- 3. Make a generous donation to the YNHH Transplantation Center Patient Care Fund.** Your gift will help transplant patients, organ donor patients, and families who are struggling to afford prescriptions and pay bills.

Donate here:  
[givetoynhh.org/transplantpcfund](https://givetoynhh.org/transplantpcfund)





**REV THE ENGINES!**

A welcome break from cancer treatment upstairs in Smilow, to mingle with the annual motorcycle rally riders. Thank you, Don Perrotti's family, for your incredible generosity!

## Motorcycles and hats bring joy to kids with cancer

When 23-year-old Donald Perrotti lost his battle with cancer in 1998, his heartbroken family wanted to keep his spirit alive.

THAT'S WHY DONALD'S MOTHER, Roe, and her close-as-family, lifelong best friend, Gale, created Don's Hat Rack in 1999. (Roe and Gale actually became "real" family when Roe's daughter — Donald's sister — married Gale's son.)

Don's Hat Rack is located in the reception area of the Pediatric Oncology Outpatient Clinic at Yale New Haven Children's Hospital, where Donald spent much of the last six years of his life. The Hat Rack is a large, colorful cabinet that's loaded with donated

kid-sized hats of all kinds — free for the taking by any child undergoing cancer treatment at YNHCH.

Roe and Gale had spent many days and nights at the hospital when Donald was there, and they'd seen how tough it was for kids to go through treatment — including the embarrassment of losing their hair from chemotherapy.

Friends and family donate new hats of all sizes and shapes — from knitted beanies to firefighter hats to crazy hats with paws and ears that pop up

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From left: Gale sorts through baskets of hat donations in front of a photo of Don in his hockey uniform; A selection of hats on display at Don's Hat Rack in Smilow; Riders celebrate after the rally

and down. Anything that might bring a smile to a sick child.

“As a family, we’ve kept the cabinet filled for 22 years,” says Gale. “It’s never been empty.”

### The rally roars in . . .

Creating Don’s Hat Rack was just the beginning.

As Donald’s 30th birthday approached, his family wanted to do something more to honor him.

Several family members are dedicated motorcycle riders, so they decided to organize a rally. “We asked everybody to bring a new hat for Don’s Hat Rack,” recalls Roe. “We would donate the riders’ entrance fees to raise money for the Children’s Hospital.”

That first rally was in 2005. It was such a great success that it became an annual tradition and celebration of Donald’s life. In the years since, the rally has raised over \$100,000 for pediatric oncology.

Roe, Gale, and their family direct the funds to a range of needs in pediatric oncology — whatever the staff tells them they need most, including gaming

systems and toys, new furniture, support for the Smilow/Telesz Teen Center, and Thanksgiving dinners and holiday gifts for patient families in need.

### . . . After a two-year pandemic hiatus

This past June, the 16th annual rally took place on a beautiful, sunny day. Just like in years past, riders gathered at the Louis Asterino Ice Arena in Hamden, because that’s where Donald led his high school hockey team to countless victories.

More than 400 riders roared into action and headed to a park just outside the hospital. “The kids who are able to come outside are so excited,” says Roe. “They sit on the motorcycles and rev the engines.”

Next, the riders headed to Milford, rode up the shoreline, and made their way to the Polish American Club in West Haven for a huge picnic and party.

It was a wonderful day for all, but was especially emotional for Roe, Gale, and the family. “We feel so great to be able to honor Donald and keep his memory alive through this,” says Gale. “He’d be thrilled.”♥

## You can bring a smile to a child with cancer with your gift to Don’s Hat Rack

**Donate a brand new hat** for the Hat Rack. Or donate a cash gift to the Don’s Hat Rack Fund. Your donation will be used to fund the most pressing needs of pediatric cancer patients and their families.

Hats or cash will be gratefully accepted at Posh Salon where Roe and her two daughters work Wednesday through Saturday.



**Find Posh at 1658 Whitney Avenue Hamden, CT.**  
Or **Venmo your gift to Don’s Hat Rack at @donshatrack**