



SIDE BY SIDE: Karen Weddick sits by her husband Joel's bedside before he gets wheeled off to surgery.

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH



A KISS FOR LUCK: Both hooked up to machines, Karen and Joel Weddick kiss as he visits her in her room the day after the surgeries in which he donated a kidney to her at Stanford Hospital in Palo Alto.

Husband's kidney donation to his wife a true test of love

KAREN WEDDICK knows her husband loves her.

At least, in theory, she does.

Because Karen and Joel, they have the love story. A Friday night, a dimly lit restaurant, disco night at the bar. She's out with her friends and bored, he's out with his friends and on the prowl. He spots her across the dance floor. She spots him spotting her. The right song finally plays and two years later they're at an altar promising to have and to hold in sickness and in health.

It's been 22 years now since the day of Karen and Joel's union, and please pardon them the pun if they say their marriage has gone off without a hitch. They've raised two boys, Matthew, 19, and Brian, 17. They've enjoyed their careers. Karen's in nursing,

Please see **KIDNEY**, Living 4

Story by Candace Murphy | Photos by Bea Ahbeck



PREPARED: Karen, toting her own pillow, and Joel Weddick walk to their hospital room with Joel's mother, Phyliss Weddick, the day before the kidney transplant.

Attention comic fans!

We're happy to announce that starting today you'll find two new features in our Sunday comics section: Non Sequitur by former Bay Area editorial cartoonist Wiley Miller and www.4kids.org, a family friendly guide to the Internet.

This interactive children's feature, created by students and teachers at the University of Kansas, highlights several kid-oriented (non-commercial) Web sites each week and poses questions that can be answered by visiting the sites. There are also weekly polls and a question-and-answer column.

For the grown-ups, it's safe to say that Non Sequitur definitely lives up to its name, taking a wry look at the absurdities of everyday life in a single-panel format. In 1988, Wiley was named Best Editorial Cartoonist by the California Newspaper Publishers Association. He won the prestigious Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award for editorial cartooning in 1991.

Living the American dream, one con at a time

■ "The Riches"
■ 10 p.m. Monday on Fx

EDDIE IZZARD jokes about the European dream, which is driving around on a moped with no helmet on shouting "ciao" to people.

"But the American dream," the British actor and comedian says, "it was the place where people came from monarchy systems and aristocracy systems to go and make a lot of money or to practice religion and be really weird."

His "Riches" co-star, British actress Minnie Driver, says "It's spit in the eye of the class system, America."

Grabbing the American dream is exactly what series creator Dmitry Lipkin conjures up in this riveting drama about a family living on the fringe of American society — until they crash into an opportunity to live the American dream.

Lipkin's own family immigrated from Russia when he was 10 and moved to Louisiana, where the series is set.

"I wanted to write a show about a family who pretends to be someone they're not. I always felt that's sort of what I was doing in my own life,"

Lipkin says. "I wanted to kind of capture that oddness and that kind of outside perspective onto America."

Lipkin stumbled upon the travelers, roving con artists who number about 30,000 in the United States.

"In the time where everybody's on the grid, these guys are off the grid completely," Lipkin says. "We know nothing about them, and they're living in America, and they're completely outside from us."

Thus was born one of the most innovative series we've seen in quite some time. These are people we haven't seen before with a story that reels us in from the first scene.

The Malloy family includes dad Wayne (Izzard), a dreamer who believes he was meant for something better, and his desirable, tough,



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Please see **YOUNG**, Living 4



EXPERIENCING CANCUN

Today in Great Escapes: Contrasts abound for visitors at the real Yucatan.

— IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH —

Soulmate gives wife
'the best gift ever'► **KIDNEY**, from Living 1

and Joel is a lifer with Lockheed Martin. They've made a life in the Bay Area, in a modest ranch-style home in a Fremont cul-de-sac.

And all this time, they've never once had to cash in on those vows.

Until a year ago, that is, when Karen's kidney began to fail.

Karen, 49, didn't know her one working kidney would fail. Though she received a kidney transplant at age 16, no one ever told her it would eventually run out of gas. But after squeezing 35 years of use out of the thing, probably 29 more years than the typical 1972 kidney transplant, failing it was. And Karen was looking at a six-year wait for a donor kidney, most likely from a cadaver.

In the meantime, Karen would return to the painful and tedious dialysis of her teen years — the scars of which are still visible on her arms today — just to stay alive.

Statistics aren't kind

Would Karen last long enough on dialysis to get a kidney? Probably. Maybe. No one could say. But statistics aren't kind to someone in her predicament. Each day, 18 people die while waiting for a transplant of a vital organ, such as a heart, liver, kidney, pancreas, lung or bone marrow. And in 2005, 3,198 kidney patients died waiting for a transplant.

That wasn't how Joel and Karen wanted their love story to end. So Joel suggested to Karen that he find out if he could give her one of his kidneys.

"Once I was sure nothing was going to happen to me, I had no problem donating my kidney to Karen," says Joel, 46. "If I had any more organs to donate and someone I loved really needed it, I would do it in an instant."

In January, after months of testing at Stanford Hospital and Clinics, doctors finally gave Joel and Karen their approval. Their surgeries — to remove one of Joel's kidneys and place it in Karen — was scheduled for Feb. 14.

"For Valentine's Day, my soulmate is giving me the best gift ever — the gift of life," says

Karen. "I mean, how do you thank someone for something like this?"

A husband's gift

No one ever knows what dominoes will fall after one fateful glance across a bar. It's chaos theory. The butterfly effect.

A butterfly flaps its wings in the rain forest and sometime later a tornado tears through Texas. A guy gives a girl the eye on a Friday night at the Fremont Black Angus in 1982 and 24 years later he's in the pre-anesthesia room saying a final goodbye to life with two kidneys.

Please see **KIDNEY**, Living 5



A PICTURE AND A HUG: Joel Weddick takes a picture of his wife Karen (left) shortly after being admitted to Stanford Hospital. The couple embraces (below) before Joel gets taken to surgery to donate a kidney to Karen. Note the couple's lucky No. 14 on the wall behind them.



BEFORE AND AFTER: Joel is taken by medical personnel to surgery (above). A recuperating Karen (right) sits in her hospital room the day after her husband donated a kidney to her.



'The Riches' live own version of the American dream, one con at a time

► **YOUNG**, from Living 1

outspoken wife Dahlia (Driver), whose harshness hides a person who lives for her family above all else.

Their children are the pragmatic Cael, 17, (Noel Fisher), whose computer skills serve the con; clever beauty Dehliah, 16, (Shannon Woodward) and young cross-dresser Sam (Aidan Mitchell).

This cast has considerable skills, with Izzard absolutely mesmerizing as the ultimate con artist. From the first moment we meet Wayne, we know that he's not your average traveller. He's taken on airs, already living an upscale life in his mind even though he's trapped in a motor home with barely enough cash to keep the gas tank filled.

It's a testament to Driver that we never second-guess why Wayne is

smitten by a character who could be a harridan in the hands of a less skillful actress. Dahlia's an unwieldy storm, ready to bring down pain on those who cross her. She's also completely happy with her life as a traveller, a woman the extended family calls a queen and celebrates as royalty.

She made her own match with Wayne, an outsider the extended family barely tolerates.

No one is better than Wayne when it comes to conning and swindling, and the traveller's clan benefits financially from his considerable skills.

But Wayne is tired of abiding by the rules of the clan, which include a fellow traveller's marriage claim on his 16-year-old daughter. Dahlia's fresh out of prison and just wants the comfort of what she knows back. The last thing she wants is to leave again.

That notion gets tossed out the window when Wayne fights the elders and swipes the clan's fortune. On the lam, with the ruthless would-be clan leader Dale Malloy hot on his trail, opportunity crashes on Wayne's family.

On a blind curve, the family's RV swerves over the line. Doug and Cherien Rich are driven off the road and killed when their car crashes. While Dahlia feels only guilt, Wayne senses an opportunity.

After learning that the Riches were moving to a new community where no one knows them, the Malloys decide to take over their lives. Now, they have to convince the neighbors, classmates and all those suburban folks that they are one of them.

It's not going to be easy.

Still, suburbia is nothing if not

quirky. Their neighbors Nina (Tony nominee Margo Martindale) and Jim (Bruce French) help them out. Jim used to be an engineer who now raises alpacas and avoids physical contact with Nina, who copes by popping pills.

Wayne even gets a job doing what he does best: conning people. He hooks up with multi-millionaire Hugh (Gregg Henry), who knows there's something not right with Wayne, but doesn't care as long as Wayne can help him with his own scams.

"The Riches" promises a good return on your time investment.

Call Susan Young at (925) 416-4820, send a letter to 4770 Willow Road, Pleasanton CA 94588 or e-mail syoung@angnews-papers.com. Check out the blog at www.ib-abuzz.com/unscripted for more TV tidbits.



INCOGNITO COUPLE: Eddie Izzard plays Wayne Malloy and Minnie Driver is his wife, Dahlia, in "The Riches."

— IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH —

Lucky No. 14 follows couple everywhere

► **KIDNEY**, from Living 4

"That's the big question," says Joel. "Would I have stuck around knowing what I do today? Yes."

Joel's words aren't spoken lightly; Karen's kidney issues have always loomed in the background of their lives. Especially when Karen thought it might prevent her from having children.

"Close to the time that I proposed, she got all upset thinking that she may not be able to have children, and she didn't want to tie me down in a relationship," says Joel. "After (their conversation) I hung up, I got in the car and drove over to her house. She was kind of shocked when I arrived. And she completely broke down when I told her that I love her for who she is, not what she could give me."

Eventually that issue became moot. Karen was able to bear children, and the family of four lived their lives not really thinking about any health issues, let alone kidney troubles.

But then, in the fall of 2005, Karen got sick. Really sick. She became terribly tired. She developed excruciating joint pain. Her normal after-work walks around Lake Elizabeth left her limp with fatigue.

"I was like, 'Whew — what is wrong with me?' " says Karen. "The energy was just sucked out of me."

After tests revealed that Karen's red and white blood cell counts were plummeting, her physicians initially feared leukemia. They hypothesized that taking immunosuppressant drugs for more than 34 years to prevent Karen's body from rejecting her transplanted kidney had brought it on.

In December of 2005, Karen took a turn for the worse. Her bone marrow, the doctors said, was in a virtual coma and wasn't producing red and white blood cells. In an attempt to kick-start it, doctors tried taking Karen off one of her anti-rejection drugs, a medication called Imuran. Though it worked, and her bone marrow came out of hibernation, Karen still wasn't feeling well. Days later, she was hospitalized for nausea and vomiting.

It proved to be an unlucky, yet lucky development. Karen's gallbladder was full of sludge and had to be removed. But in the process, her doctors also realized her creatinine levels were elevated, indicating a reduced level of kidney function. A battery of blood tests later, it was official: Karen's kidney was shutting down.

Karen couldn't process the information at first. "I said, 'No. I just said no. This isn't happening,'" says Karen. "I was in denial."

The transplant dilemma

These days, there are two kinds of kidney transplants. There are kidneys that come from unrelated donors who have died, called non-living donors, and there are kidneys that come from living donors.

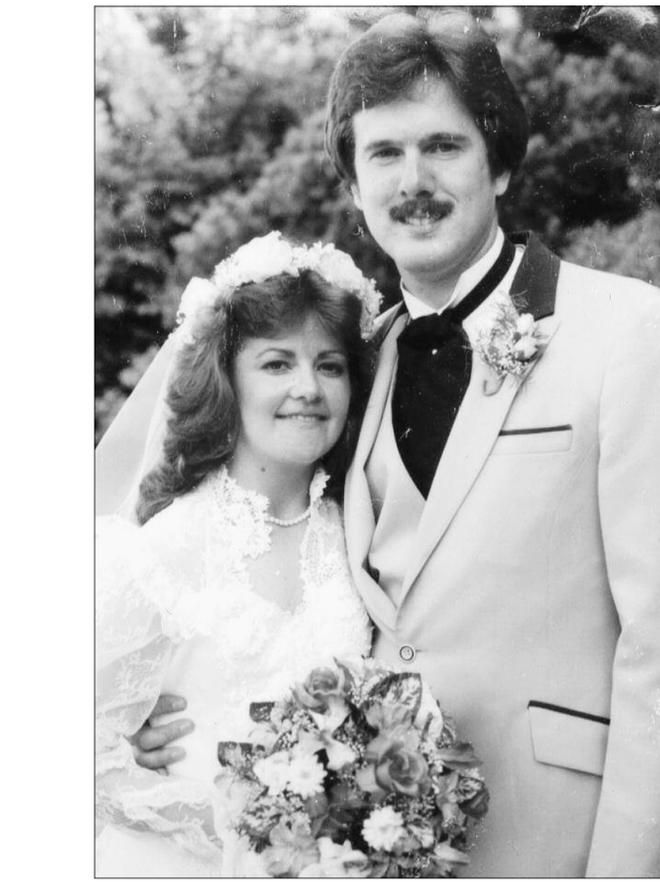
In 1972, Karen Weddick, like most kidney transplant patients at the time, received a kidney from a non-living donor.

"They said I was an easy match," says Karen, who as a teen took BART from her Fremont home to San Francisco, where she'd get her dialysis treatments at San Francisco General Hospital. "I'll never forget the day they found one, either. They had these old elevators, you know, the kind with two doors? Well, as the second door was opening, the dialysis technician was all excited. He said they'd found a kidney. And right away, they took me away in this special shuttle."

Details about the donor were slim. It was a boy. He was younger than she. He'd been killed in a car crash.

"I did everything I could to find those people," says Karen. "If I could show them what they gave me, that they allowed me to finish high school, to become a nurse, to meet a man . . . somebody's son lost his life, but gave me mine."

Since 1972, the science of organ transplantation has changed. Whereas deceased donors were once overwhelmingly favored in kidney transplants — despite the fact the world's first kidney transplant from a living donor took place in 1954 — the number of living donors is slowly increasing. In 2005, 6,570 kidney transplants came



THEN AND NOW: Joel and Karen Weddick (far left), on their wedding day, April 14, 1984, were married at Newark Presbyterian Church. More than 20 years later, Joel and Karen (near left) snuggle in their Fremont home shortly before the kidney transplant surgery.

Left photo courtesy of the Weddick family



GETTING AN UPDATE: Karen and Joel Weddick talk to Dr. Greg Magee as he checks in on them the day after Joel donated a kidney to his wife at Stanford.

How to become an organ donor

More than 95,000 people are in need of donated organs. And while 77 people receive an organ transplant every day, 18 people die each day waiting for a transplant that will never be because of the donated organ shortage.

Becoming a living donor is rare — information about doing so can be found at www.livingdonors.org, which is supported by the National Kidney Foundation — but otherwise, giving the gift of life by becoming an organ and tissue donor is easy.

Here's how to get started:

- 1. Register with your state donor registry.** California's is the California Organ and Tissue Registry (www.donatelifecalifornia.org).
- 2. Designate your decision on your driver's license.**
- 3. Sign a donor card and carry it with you.** The HRSA Information Center (ask.hrsa.gov/detail.cfm?id=HRS00259) has cards available at no cost.
- 4. Let your family know about your decision to become an organ and tissue donor.** Your family members may be asked for consent for donation or provide information at a time of need.

— Candace Murphy

from living donors, while 6,700 came from deceased donors.

Still, of living donors, spousal living donors are the minority. And when doctors gave Joel and Karen the go-ahead, they joined a select population. While 29 percent of living kidney donors in 2005 were either parent or offspring, 24 percent were siblings and 20 percent were unrelated, only 11 percent of living kidney donors were spouses.

That's just 720 people. In a country with a population of more than 298 million.

Still, Joel and Karen's doctors assured them that success rates between spousal donors were high.

"They said there's something about married couples — the longer you've been together, the

greater success type of thing," says Karen. "The best of course, is if you had a twin, or a sibling. But my husband, I wasn't going to ask. He just stepped up and said he wanted to do it."

Lucky 14

Anyone who knows the Weddicks knows there's this thing about them and the number 14. They met on May 14, 1982. They were engaged on May 14, 1983. They were married on April 14, 1984. They wish each other a happy anniversary every time the day of the calendar turns 14, regardless of the month.

So it's pretty much a given that Karen thinks it's kismet that on surgery day, Joel is in the pre-anesthesia room and lying in Bed 14. On Feb. 14,



Courtesy of the Weddick family

IN THE BIG APPLE: The Weddicks, with sons Matthew (then 17) and Brian (then 15), visited the Empire State Building on a trip to New York City in August, 2004.

She loops her index finger through Joel's identification bracelet and points with her free hand at the stenciled tiles above Joel's gurney.

"Look! It couldn't be more perfect!" says Karen.

"Well, stand up and kiss me, then," says Joel.

Moments later, it's time. As Joel is wheeled out toward the operating room, Karen stands and offers a small wave.

"Bye," she says.

By 1 p.m. on Valentine's Day, Karen had received Joel's kidney. It started working as soon as the doctors hooked it up and by the time Karen was wheeled into recovery, where she was met by Joel's mother,

her entire being was flushed with new life.

"Once Karen got a working kidney, she perked right up," says Joel, who's now at home, finishing up the six weeks of leave he took from work for the surgery. "My mom said that as soon as Karen got back to her room, you could see that her eyes were much brighter than they'd been before."

All is not yet perfect, of course. Karen is on 22 different medications, some of which, over time, will probably be discontinued. And Joel, who's lost 10 pounds, was extremely uncomfortable until his incisions began to heal.

But neither is complaining.

"When Karen and I got married, we gave ourselves to each other spiritually," says Joel. "Now I have given her part of me physically."

It's true love, nods Karen.

"You know, I would have totally understood if he didn't want to do this," says Karen. "He's given me so much already. But we're going to support each other. I'm going to get healthy again and get back on life. It's a steep hill we've climbed together and now we're almost at the top. It'll be a good ride to get over with."

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