

# A Life-Giving Community

Rhona Lewis

**When Zev Gershon donated a kidney in 2012, he couldn't have known that his gift would have a domino effect in his community of Nofei Aviv, Beit Shemesh, a vibrant, growing area which is home to many Anglo-Saxon professionals.**

Donating a kidney doesn't happen in a vacuum. "Giving muscles" have to be well-exercised before a person can give away an integral part of themselves. Asked to comment on the fact that within the last five years four members of his community have donated a kidney with the help of Matnat Chaim, Rabbi Eliezer Schenkolewski, rabbi of Nofei Aviv (Feigenson), says, "While our Chessed Committee supports community members through their personal experiences (aliyah, a new baby, sickness), we also reach beyond the borders of our streets to greater Beit Shemesh. For example, one of our members invited the children of the neighboring Ethiopian community to our Chanukah party. Another member initiated a project that awards second-hand computers to underprivileged students. People here don't just act when asked, they search for places to give."

## Taking the Plunge

Zev Gershon, 55, lawyer, a regular blood donor, is one such searcher. "I had signed an ADI Donor Card testifying to my willingness to donate my organs after my death. One day, I wondered why I had to wait until after I died. On-line research showed me that kidney donation was a safe, relatively painless procedure and that recovery was quick," he says. Zev was fired to go. With his wife's support, Zev underwent the extensive testing and within six months, he became a donor.

Like Zev, Izzy Bromberg, 47, notes that the decision to donate a kidney comes after much thought and research: he had been thinking about kidney donation for two years before he was moved to give it more serious consideration. "Zev's amazing act of kindness prompted me to do some real thinking," he says. After Matnat Chaim's initial guidance, an email posting on the Beit Shemesh list sent him on his way. "My wife was very supportive" he says. "My giving is essentially also her giving." A year later, he donated a kidney to a member of Kibbutz Sde Boker. "The experience was amazing; saving another Jewish life

is great," he says referring to the well-known dictum that says that saving a life is like saving a whole world (*Sanhedrin 37a*).

The domino effect begun by Zev hit



Zev Gershon, kidney donor



Dani Waxman donated to Anat Kavashnik



Izzy Bromberg, kidney donor

Dani Waxman, 43, a product manager, too. A regular blood donor at the Nofei Aviv blood drives, it was here that he

met the indefatigable Ruth Posner who works tirelessly to recruit kidney donors and directs many of them to Matnat Chaim. "Ruth mentioned that she was searching for a donor with my blood type and asked if I was interested. Although I couldn't give her a definitive answer, when I saw Zev's quick recovery, I began looking into the short and long term implications." After Dani told his wife, he embarked on the lengthy testing process. "Matnat Chaim gave me the support that I needed," says Dani. "Together with that, and knowing that there was no long-term impact, the fear factor disappeared," he says. Both Izzy and Dani decided not to tell their children about their plans until the testing was completed and the procedure guaranteed. But there's a limit to how much under wraps something as great as organ donation can be kept. Says Dani with a laugh, "Our daughters are friends and unbeknownst to Izzy and me, they were sharing their feelings as we both approached surgery." A month after Izzy donated, Dani too became a donor.

## Meeting the Recipient

Like many donors, all three men met and have kept up a relationship with their recipients. Zev even met his recipient before the testing was completed. "Despite my hesitation, the nurse introduced us, leaving me to caution a very teary and grateful woman that there was still a possibility that it wouldn't work out," he recalls.

Dani met his recipient after surgery. "My recipient's life had centered around her dialysis treatments. She underwent dialysis three times a week. Each treatment left her too weak to work the following day, and when she began to recover, it was time for the next treatment," he says, empathy evident in his voice.



## After the Fact

Just as their research had indicated, recovery for all three donors was quick and relatively painless. "Initially coughing and laughing wasn't easy," says Zev, "but within a week, I was walking freely and within four, I was back at the gym." Izzy claims that he's never felt better and Dani says, "After three days in hospital, I spent two weeks recovering at home and a month after surgery, I was back into my normal routine."

And how does it feel to know that you've given someone a new lease on life? "I don't think about it until someone interviews me," says Zev candidly. "It's not a big deal. People worry that they need two kidneys in case they contract a disease, but kidney disease is bilateral—so having two kidneys won't help you. On the other hand, we know that someone who does a mitzvah is protected (*Pesachim 8a*), so donation seems safe scientifically and spiritually."

Both Izzy and Dani share the same matter-of-fact attitude that Zev has. "I don't think I did something above and beyond," says Izzy. "Everyone gives to society in different ways. Some people give more charity. This was my small way to give." Says Dani, "It's a good feeling to help someone, but I don't think about it every day."

"Kidney donation is a classic case of an act in which one person benefits and the other doesn't lose, so why not go ahead?" asks Zev.