

Donate
Life
Week

SAVED *by a* KIDNEY SWAP

Who | Survivor



After receiving a kidney through an exchange program, Quinnie Westwood (in January 2015) is thriving.

Through a unique exchange, Geelong's Rod Westwood gave his granddaughter the gift of life

Although initially overwhelmed by the news that she was carrying identical twins, Clare Westwood had a dream first pregnancy, experiencing no morning sickness and no significant fatigue. But on Feb. 4, 2014, in her 34th week, everything changed. "I couldn't feel the baby on my left moving, even after taking a bath, which would normally have them jumping about as if they were in Cirque du Soleil," recalls Clare, 33, at the Geelong home she shares with husband Jarrod, 32, and their daughter, Quinnie, 3. "I rang

"We'll never forget what he did for us, for Quinnie"

—Clare Westwood

Jarrod at work, he came home, and I remember us holding hands in the car on the way to [Geelong's St John of God] hospital telling each other that it was simply sensible to check, that everything would be all right."

It wasn't. To their dismay, the Westwoods discovered that one of their twins, Harriet, had died in utero—of asphyxia, they would later learn—and the other baby could be in grave danger. Clare underwent an emergency caesarean and discovered that

the surviving twin, Quinnie, was in a critical condition due to kidney failure caused by oxygen deprivation during Westwood's pregnancy trauma. Showing astonishing resilience, Quinnie survived her first few months but they were just the beginning of a three-year ordeal; one that was only resolved late last year when Quinnie received a donor kidney through the Australian Paired Kidney Exchange Programme. "That happened because my father-in-law volunteered to donate a kidney to a complete stranger," says Clare, her voice cracking with emotion. "It was the most incredible thing. We'll never forget what he did for us, for Quinnie."

Today, on the eve of DonateLife Week (July 30–Aug. 6), Quinnie is a cherubic, precocious 3-year-old with a verve and energy that belies her first few months, when she fought for life in the neonatal intensive-care unit of Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital. During this period, in which Quinnie endured nine operations on her tiny body including the insertion of a dialysis catheter, the Westwoods had to ask themselves whether they were allowing intervention beyond a reasonable level. "There were times when we had to ask



Quinnie in hospital in 2014. "We've had incredible support from medical staff and our families," says Westwood.



Under medical care in February 2014.

LIVES IN LIMBO

Before Quinnie received a new kidney, family life was difficult. "Daily home dialysis from 6 PM meant no dinners, no holidays together for two to three years," says mum Clare Westwood.

if we were pushing too far, if it was time to let her go, to let her be with her sister," says Westwood.

But the insertion of a second catheter after the first didn't work saw Quinnie's condition rapidly improve and the swelling that had caused her body to balloon from 2kg to 5.5kg in four weeks began to reduce. Six weeks after her birth she opened her eyes for the first time and her father, Jarrod, a coordinator for recreation planning at Victoria's Surf Coast Shire, was finally able to hold her. Then, after a few months in hospital, Quinnie went home, though dependent on the daily use of home dialysis.

It was burdensome, says Clare, a graphic designer, but a blessing considering Quinnie's start in life. Nevertheless, the family began thinking about Quinnie receiving a donor kidney, but that couldn't happen until she reached 10kg. For Quinnie to gain that weight "didn't seem like much, but it took 2½ years due to the fact the poor thing would vomit up to 30 times a day," says Clare, "which contributed to



Quinnie, now 3, with parents Clare and Jarrod. Her progress has been "unbelievable," says Clare.



"Donating was a no-brainer," says grandfather Rod Westwood (with Quinnie on Dec. 16 last year).

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: NESPIX (2); COURTESY OF WESTWOOD FAMILY (3)



"It's been hell," says Clare Westwood (with husband Jarrod and baby Quinnie in 2015).



Now a healthy 3-year-old, Quinnie would once vomit "up to 30 times a day," says Westwood.

more than 40 hospitalisations."

Finally Quinnie attained the ideal weight and abdomen length and was eligible for a donor kidney. "The problem then was getting one," says Clare. As she and Jarrod wanted more children down the track, she couldn't donate herself. Jarrod wanted to give one of his but testing discovered he wasn't a match. Finally, Jarrod's father, Rod Westwood, offered. "He went through the intensive testing and though he was found to be a suitable blood type, there wasn't a perfect tissue match," says Westwood. "So it was back to the drawing board."

It was then the Westwoods became aware of the Australian Paired Kidney Exchange Programme, which finds matches for patients who have a willing donor but one who is unable to donate to them due to an incompatible blood or tissue type. And Rod was a match for someone on the program. The 62-year-old says having to offer a kidney to a stranger instead of Quinnie didn't change his mind since the outcome would be the same: Quinnie receiving a kidney she needed to live a normal life. "There were risks for me and that was well explained, but I could live well enough on one kidney," says Rod, a financial analyst for VicRoads. "And after everything Quinnie had been through, my wife, Wendy, and I wanted to do all we could for her."

Late last year, Quinnie and Rod were operated on at the same time—Quinnie receiving a kidney, Rod giving one up. Both operations were successful. While Rod's recovery took about seven weeks, Quinnie was home from hospital within a week. "She had

never eaten solids before, so she had ice-cream and custard in a Dixie cup," says Clare. "Dialysis stopped, of course, and at the same time her eyes became clear, colour came into her cheeks, she started sleeping through the night. It was unbelievable."

"It's been hell but it's getting better and better"

—Clare Westwood

Now thriving at home, Quinnie enjoys regular visits from her grandfather and she is known to lift his T-shirt, spot his scar and declare, "I've got one of those, too, Pa!" Clare says Quinnie also likes to talk about her sister, Harriet, whose ashes sit on a shelf in Quinnie's room.

"Quinnie," says Clare, "wraps a framed photo of Harriet in a blanket and pushes it around in a toy pram and then takes it to bed at night."

Looking at Quinnie, Clare continues, "is a constant reminder that there should be two of them," but considering the past few years,

INSIDE AN ORGAN SWAP

The Australian Paired Kidney Exchange Programme (AKX) was created by the national Organ and Tissue Authority "to increase the options for living kidney donation," reads a DonateLife statement. In 2015, the AKX oversaw 154 paired-donation kidney transplants—19 per cent of all live-donor kidney transplants in Australia. While donating his kidney to a stranger to save his granddaughter's life was a "no-brainer," Rod Westwood has had to be mindful of his lifestyle: "Staying a healthy weight, not overindulging, exercising," he says.

she says she and Jarrod and their families feel lucky. "Quinnie's strength and love of life helps us stay positive and we're grateful we have each other. It's been hell but it's getting better and better."

■ By Paul Connolly

To register for organ donation visit register.donatelife.gov.au