

Baptist layman provides gift of life to music minister

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LUBBOCK—Alzheimer's may sometimes cloud Hal Rowe's memory or derail his train of thought, but it has done nothing to damage his love of life and his desire to help others.

Shortly after his diagnosis in the spring of 2005, he began thinking about how he might make a difference in someone else's life. That led him to an organ transplant office where he told the workers on duty wanted to donate a kidney.

He never heard from them again.

"This disappointed him greatly," recalled his wife, Joyce. "He couldn't believe they didn't want his parts."

	
Randy Parsons	Hal Rowe

Rowe, a member of Bacon Heights Baptist Church in Lubbock, didn't give up the idea. And when his friend Randy Parsons mentioned about a year ago that he would probably have to begin kidney dialysis, Rowe again made the offer of a kidney.

"But Hal teases so much, no one took him seriously," Mrs. Rowe said.

Parsons, a former music minister at Trinity Baptist Church in Lubbock and instructor at Wayland's University's Lubbock campus, was facing kidney trouble because the anti-rejection drugs from a liver transplant 15 years ago had damaged them. He and his wife, Myrna, now are members of First Church in Lubbock.

At that time, however, while Parsons' doctor was looking toward dialysis, he was not. "I told him I felt too good, and I didn't want to get into that," he recalled.

That changed quickly, however, and Parsons' overall physical condition began to deteriorate rapidly. As his creatin level approached 10—normal is 0.5 to 1.5—he no longer was able to walk like he used to, nor could he read as his eyesight deteriorated. He even lost the ability to sing.

"I just had absolutely no muscle tone in my diaphragm to be able to support any singing," Parsons explained.

"I was getting to the point where I had to have dialysis or stop moving. I didn't realize how much your kidneys affected your muscles. My body was just filling up with toxins because my kidneys were filtering them out. I couldn't even read anymore."

On May 2, the Rowes had mutual friends over to visit and play 42, and they learned Parsons was to have a shunt put in the next Tuesday so that he could begin hemodialysis at home.

The next morning, Mrs. Rowe called Parsons. She told him, "Hal's really mad because he offered you a kidney, and you're not taking him up on it."

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In his defense, Parsons said: "You don't just call a guy up and say, 'What

about that kidney you offered some time back? I'll take it now.””

After finding out Rowe had the same blood type, Parsons called to cancel the surgery for the shunt.

On May 5, blood tests began and from the very beginning Rowe and Parsons were a perfect match.

“That’s an incredible thing,” Parsons said. “When it’s a non-related donor, only about six percent of the time is there a match.”

“It’s been such a God-thing from the very beginning,” Mrs. Rowe agreed. The realization that God had his hand in things made it much easier for her to go along with the idea, she said.

“From the very beginning, there has been something that has let us know that this was what we were supposed to be doing,” she said.

“My prayer all along had been that if this were not the thing for Hal to do that God would shut the door at some time. There was never even a window closed. To see Hal’s determination and joy and how strongly he felt about donating the kidney, there was no way I could do anything but support him in his decision.”

The Rowes’ children were much more concerned about their father giving up a kidney, but he never gave the matter a second thought.

“When you’ve got something like that that you can give and you don’t, you feel guilty,” he explained. “I saw I could help somebody, and I wouldn’t have the joy that I have in my life if I didn’t help them.”

And it didn’t hurt that it appealed to Rowe’s well-exercised sense of humor. He had been a long-time blood donor, but had been prevented from donating blood because of his Alzheimer’s medication.

"I showed them. They wouldn't take my blood, so I gave a kidney," he said with hearty laugh and a twinkle in his eye.

Rowe and Parsons checked into Covenant Hospital July 9. It was Rowe's first time as a hospital patient in his 67 years.

And his demeanor there was just as upbeat as ever. After stopping by his room, the chaplain told Parsons, "I hate to tell you, but your personality is probably going to change because that guy giving you a kidney is a character."

When Parsons, 72, checked into the hospital, his creatin level was a 10. At the end of the day of surgery, it was a three, and when he left the hospital four days later it was a one. He hasn't required any pain medication since the day of the surgery.

Rowe's post-surgery results were a bit more painful. Doctors had to remove a rib and make an eight-inch incision to remove the kidney. But he's still so glad he was able to make the donation.

"If I could, I would do it again. I would just love for everyone to realize how much joy there is in helping someone else," he said.

He also is hopeful that people will realize an Alzheimer's diagnosis does not mean life is over. When he was initially diagnosed, he had his doctor make video telling about Alzheimer's and what people in the congregation might expect. "So many people want to hide that they have Alzheimer's, but I didn't want to do that."

Parsons now can walk to from his house to the end of the block 10 times—something he wouldn't have dreamed of before the surgery. One of the greatest encouragements for Rowe was when Parsons called to tell him he had just finished reading a book.

And Parsons has begun singing at home. Soon his quarantine period will be over, and then his wife is looking forward to hearing him sing again. "That's probably what I've missed the most," she said.

And Rowe will be just as pleased. "The pain goes away when you see that you've helped somebody. The pain went away when I saw his face."

[View a video of Rowe and Parsons here.](#)