

ETBU alum donates kidney to longtime friend

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MARSHALL—Shared experiences bond Shane Moore and Joey Sutton—boyhood friendship, growing up at Immanuel Baptist Church in Marshall, student days at Marshall High School and [East Texas Baptist University](#), membership in Pi Sigma Epsilon fraternity and serving as groomsmen in each other's weddings.



Joey Sutton (left) of Hallsville and Shane Moore of Houston pose for a picture before undergoing transplant surgery at Methodist Hospital in downtown Houston. The two have been close-friends since age 12, and both graduated from Marshall High School and East Texas Baptist University. (PHOTO: Moore/Sutton Family) Now they share an even closer bond. Sutton donated a kidney to Moore.

Moore suffers from focal segmental glomerulosclerosis, a genetic disorder that affects the kidneys. In his case, injuries from a car accident triggered the malady to progress at an abnormally rapid pace.

“The trauma to my body was like pouring gas on the fire and caused a lot of stuff to happen in my kidneys, which might have happened a little later in life,” he explained.

Moore, who lives in Houston, underwent dialysis five days a week the past seven months. He needed a kidney transplant to improve his quality of life.

The average wait for someone on the kidney donor list is five years unless the person can find a donor among family or friends. Family members did not match, so Sutton stepped up to the plate.

Moore and Sutton have been friends since age 12, when they played on the same summer league baseball team. After graduating from Marshall High School, the two attended ETBU, where Sutton earned his undergraduate degree in religion in 2003.

“Not too long after Shane’s wreck (several years ago), he got news that he was going to have problems for a while,” Sutton said. “As we would talk about his medical condition, I made the comment one day, ‘Listen, if you ever need a kidney, I’ll give you one.’”

Honoring a pledge

Sutton—who lives in Hallsville and works as director of patient experience with Good Shepherd Health System of Longview—honored that pledge Jan. 27 at Methodist Hospital in the Houston Medical Center.

Transplant surgeons performed laparoscopic surgery to remove one of Sutton’s kidneys. While Sutton was in surgery, another surgical team prepared Moore’s body to receive the organ.



Joey Sutton (left) of Hallsville and Shane Moore of Houston grasp hands in the recovery room after a successful kidney transplant surgery. Sutton donated his kidney to his lifelong friend Moore, who needed a transplant. The two grew up together in Marshall and have been close friends since they were 12 years old. (PHOTO: Moore/Sutton Family) While the two were in the recovery room after surgery, Sutton's wife, Wendy, posted on social media: "Shane has a new pink, producing kidney. All glory to God. I cannot express the level of gratitude I feel for everyone's prayers, support and love."

Moore reflected on his friend's promise and his willingness to give.

"He was serious when he said it, but also (offered) in a joking manner. ... Here we are, years later, and now he is doing that, being able to donate a kidney," Moore said.

Sutton remembers asking Moore early 2014 about his condition.

"He told me that his kidneys were getting worse," Sutton said. Moore's doctor urged him to look for a donor and prepare to be on dialysis.

"I went down to visit Shane in May and noticed just how tired and weak he was getting. It really bothered me," said Sutton, a member of [First Baptist](#)

[Church in Hallsville](#). “I knew his family was being eliminated as possible donors. I told him to let me know how it goes and, if needed, I will be happy to donate one of my kidneys.”

During Thanksgiving week, Sutton traveled to the transplant center in Houston to begin three days of testing.



Wendy Sutton (left) and Mary Moore hug after learning the good news that the transplant surgery involving their husbands had been completed successfully. Joey Sutton donated one of his kidneys to his lifelong friend Shane Moore. The two grew up together in Marshall and both are graduates of East Texas Baptist University. (PHOTO: ETBU/Vince Blankenship) “The evaluation team works really hard for you not to be a donor,” he said. “They look for all kinds of reasons to eliminate you. I was praying, ‘Lord if this is how it is going to work, and if all works out, let’s just do it.’”

The week before Christmas, Sutton received the news: He was a match.

“I was at my wife’s office, our two children were with us, and my phone rang. I noticed it was a Houston number,” he said.

Sutton put the phone on speaker to allow his wife to listen: “This is Valerie from the transplant center. I just want to call and let you know that you are going to be a good match for Shane. We want to go forward and set a date.”

“Wendy and I were hugging, high five-ing, and crying a little bit. Our children didn’t know what was going on, and they were saying, ‘Why are you so happy?’”

Sutton asked the caller if Moore had been notified.

“No, why don’t you call him?” she suggested.

“The phone call took me by surprise at first, because we have had some setbacks with everything,” Moore said. “When Joey told me he was a match, I was happy. But it also broke my heart that somebody cared about me that much to be willing to donate an organ to me.

How do you say thanks?

“How do you say thanks to a guy who is giving you an organ? Joey is an amazing individual who I have looked up to all my life. Anybody who is willing to give freely a piece of themselves to save another’s life is amazing. I hope what Joey is doing will inspire others to have the knowledge to be able to do this as well.”

Both had fears going into surgery—particularly that Moore’s body would reject the kidney.

“My brother asked me, ‘What if my other kidney fails after six months?’” Sutton said. “Really, there are no guarantees about anything in life. Driving to work every day or just getting up in the morning, anything could happen to you. I have tried not to allow that to dictate why I should do this or why I should not do this.”

Moore agreed, saying, "I know if we lived in fear, we would never cross a street or get behind the wheel of a car." He quoted a line from *The Shawshank Redemption*, a movie he and Sutton enjoyed watching together, "Get busy living, or get busy dying."

Real fears, real faith

Sutton and Moore acknowledge their fears are real, but they look toward hope because of their faith in Christ. They have dreamed about how they might celebrate next year, if all goes well.

"I have had many physical limitations because of the dialysis. So, I am looking forward to being able to exercise," Moore said. "We talked about doing a mud run or something like that."