

* Woman donates kidney to her younger brother

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after the death of Keith, they became a lot closer.

"Then when Roman got sick, we became even closer," she adds. "We always try to get together at least once a month or more at Mom and Dad's. Sometimes we invent reasons to get together. To us, family is the most important of everything."

When Roman was not yet 2, his mom noticed a rash all over his body.

"He looked like he had been burned," said Gina. "The rash was really bad."

She took Roman to the doctor, who told her it was just a virus that was working through his system. But the rash didn't get any better, so she went to another doctor.

This doctor ran blood tests again and told her to bring him back in four days.

So in four days she took him back, they ran the blood tests again and told her to bring him back on Monday, after the weekend. Roman's white count was high.

On Monday, she took him back again, and they ran more blood tests. This time, they told Madge they were going to send Roman to the oncology unit at Children's Hospital in Denver.

"My mom and dad didn't realize what 'oncology' even was until they got to Children's," said Gina.

She was working and living in Colby at that time, but she can remember the day her mom called at work to tell her they thought Roman had cancer.

"I just hung up the phone after she told me, and I started to cry," said Gina. "My thought was, 'I lost one brother. Am I to lose another?'"

On Aug. 7, 1986, just a month before Roman turned two, he was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia, or ALL.

"This is a very quick-spreading cancer," said Gina. "The doctors told Mom and Dad if they had waited just two more weeks, Roman could have died by Christmas."

But detected early, it is a treatable cancer, so at the age of 2 Roman started chemotherapy, the beginning of his fight.

The cancer seemed to go into remission for about a year, and then in June 1987 they discovered it was back, and in November, they learned it had invaded his spine. He was 3, but he had already proven himself a fighter. At that time, he had to endure what he called the "big poke" treatment.

"This was very hard for my mom," said Gina. "The treatments were like spinal taps, very painful. Mom said you could just see the pain in his eyes. She would have done anything to take his place, anything so that he wouldn't have that look of pain."

Roman was also on a lot of medicines at that time. Some altered his moods.

"It was very hard for us to see this little boy have to go through this," said Gina, "but Roman is a fighter — always has been."

Gina and Ron Montgomery had just married in August 1987. In September of that year, all the siblings were called to Denver for testing. The cancer had invaded Roman's bone marrow, the liquid middle part of the bone. Roman needed a transplant. All of his brothers and sister were tested, and two of them were perfect matches — Rodney and

Gina. Rodney was not yet 18, so he would have to get written permission in front of a judge to give the bone marrow. After discussing things with the doctors who would perform the transplant, they decided to go with Gina.

"There would be less testing and expense involved," she recalled.

The bone marrow transplant was Roman's only hope.

"They could not go back to square one of starting chemo all over again," said Gina. "His little body and organs could not stand that again."

"My husband, Ron, was really supportive through the whole ordeal," said Gina. "He knew it was the only hope for Roman."

So it was off to the University of Iowa in Iowa City. In April of 1988, Roman and Gina prepared for surgery. Doctors gave Gina an epidural, which numbed the lower half of her body.

"Then with really long needles, they extracted bone marrow from the back part of my hip bones on both sides," said Gina. "It was just a little bit more extensive than giving blood."

Roman had to have high blasts of radiation and chemotherapy to kill all of the cells growing in him. His counts had to be zero.

After Gina's bone marrow was gathered, it had to be tested to make sure it was safe to give to Roman. When that process was finished, an IV was hooked to Roman's shunt so he could receive Gina's bone marrow. And his fight continued.

"I remember shortly after I came to from surgery, Roman brought me roses and a teddy bear to thank me. He was still receiving my bone marrow through the IV. It was so sweet. Here was this little child of 3 1/2 giving me flowers and a teddy bear."

The surgery was a success. Roman was cancer free.

"It was hard for a while," she recalls, "because with his counts so low, his immune system was not good, so if we even had a sniffle, we could not be around him."

After Roman's white blood counts came up and his immune system was back to normal, he lived pretty normally, as normal as they all could make it.

"Roman is the baby of the family. He was always treated special," said Gina. "If one of the other kids was sick or running a fever, it was no big deal, but if it was Roman, our first thoughts were 'Oh, no, is the cancer coming back? What's going on?' And off to the doctor he went."

Roman grew up around a lot of sports with all those older brothers. "You cannot be a Carroll and not like sports," said Gina. "It's just not right."

He watched his brother Chris play football for Atwood.

"I remember Chris's senior year," Gina said. "Atwood went to state in football at Wichita, and all of us kids went down to see him."

Roman was able to play T-ball and baseball, and like his older brothers, he also played football for Atwood.

"I always knew which one he was," said Gina. "I'd look at the Atwood sidelines, and he was the shortest kid on the squad, but that didn't stop him."

Remember, he's a fighter.

In spite of the cancer, Roman is a pretty typical 20-year-old.

"He loves his big black Chevy



HIGH SCHOOL SECRETARY Gina Montgomery planned to donate one of her kidneys to her younger brother on Tuesday.

pickup," said Gina, "and he loves his German shorthair dogs, Angel and Jasmine. He also loves to hunt."

Roman finished high school in 2003 and has completed a year of college. He also works at Wal-Mart in Colby. He plans to start school again next semester and live with Gina's son, Shane, who is also going to college in Colby. Right now, Roman is living with his mom and dad.

Roman would be halfway through his third semester at college, but he has had to take some time off. He has suffered side effects from the bone marrow surgery, called graft versus host disease.

"This is where my graft bone marrow and cells were being very aggressive and fighting his," said Gina. This resulted in some hospital stays and a lot of scarring in his body and organs. His mouth, for instance, is scarred, as well as part of his lungs, arm muscles, and now his kidneys.

Last December, Roman suffered from severe headaches and was seeing double. His parents took him to a doctor and after some testing, they found that he had a stroke. In fact, it was his second.

After running more tests, they discovered his kidneys were not functioning correctly and one was not working at all.

"How long this had been going on, we don't know," said Gina.

Roman saw a specialist in June who recommended that he have a transplant.

Shortly after that, all of Roman's siblings received a box in the mail.

"In this box were test tubes. We took them to the lab with the letter that came with it, and had our blood drawn and sent off to Wichita," said Gina.

In a short while, Gina received a letter from the transplant unit with information about kidney transplants.

"They said they wanted to do more testing on me," she said.

Madge and Pat had planned to take Roman to Wichita on July 22 for tests, so Gina called the transplant center in Wichita and set up tests for herself the same day.

They put Gina through a battery of tests: blood, tuberculosis and iodine/urine.

"They had me drink iodine and water every so many minutes, and then they shot iodine into my arm,

and I drank more water," she said. "This test lasted 90 minutes. I also had to have an EKG and x-rays. After all of the testing, they told me I could give Roman a kidney."

"The transplant should be like an identical twin giving the other twin a kidney. That is how closely we match."

After talking it over with her husband, surgery was set for Oct. 5, this Tuesday. Roman's counts were good enough to last until Christmas.

Last week, Gina went to Wichita for the last tests before the transplant. She had an MRI, a physical, and a psychological profile. Roman had some pre-op tests as well.

During the psychological profile, she was asked how she would feel if Roman's body rejected her kidney.

"The thought hadn't really even

crossed my mind," she said. "I'm that confident this will work."

The kidney transplant will take from four to six hours for Gina and two to four hours for Roman. Doctors will take one of Gina's kidneys out using laparoscopy.

This means they will put Gina under anesthesia, and fill her body with gas, then make an incision about three inches along the top part of her left hip and remove the kidney from there.

For Gina, the risks involved are like those of any other surgery, but she isn't expecting any side effects.

"The kidney I have remaining will enlarge to compensate for the one that is gone," she said. "The recovery time will be six weeks. I'm hoping three to four for me."

For Roman, it will be a waiting game to see if his body accepts

Gina's kidney. "Mom thinks they can possibly know in a few days to two weeks if Roman's body accepts my kidney," said Gina. "I'm very nervous about this. I have a husband and two kids to think about, but I leave this all in the hands of God, so I know He will make things all right. He has pointed me in this direction for some time now."

Gina and Ron's daughter, Alyssa, is a freshman at Decatur Community High.

"I think it's cool what my mom is doing for Uncle Roman," she said. Alyssa admitted that she is nervous for her mom, but she is confident everything will be fine.

"There would be no one that could talk me out of this," said Gina. "If I can help my brother and give him a more normal life, I will do it. He's my brother."

In these last days before the surgery, Gina said, Roman is very tired.

"It's really hard to see how tired he looks, and I think 'Let's just go do this now.'"

Gina said that her mom and dad are worried about having two children in surgery at the same time and the complications from surgery, "but they leave it all in the hands of God."

"My sister-in-law Tina summed it up really well," she said. "I was able to give the gift of life not only to my two beautiful children, but also to my brother, twice; once with my bone marrow and now with my kidney."

"I want everyone to know that Roman is a fighter — he always has been. I love him very much, but then I love all my brothers very much. All we do is hope in the Lord and leave it to Him."

Gina and Roman will be in Via Christi Hospital-St. Francis in Wichita.

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Council to meet

The Oberlin City Council will hold its first meeting of the month at 6:30 p.m. Thursday.

The meeting will be held at The Gateway. City Administrator Gary Shike was unavailable Monday to get agenda information.

President to be replaced

Jerry Michaud has been named to succeed Jim Blume as president of Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas effective in July.

Mr. Michaudm director of quality improvement, has been with the organization for 13 years.

He will oversee a network of services for approximately 500 adults and children who are developmentally disabled, ensuring the fiscal integrity of the organization while managing a \$15.5 million budget and directing the work of more than 500 employees.

Mr. Blume's retirement in June will end 30 years of service. He and his wife Rose will be moving to Denver, where he will be working with the poor as a deacon.

Lunch will be served by Maverick 4-H Club

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