Happy New Year Everyone and welcome to the 4th edition and 1st newsletter of the decade! This edition wraps up the last quarter of 2009 and will cover such topics as the reunion, alumni updates, and various other topics. However, the feature of this edition is on the story of an alumnus we all know and consider a friend.

Overcoming PKD – My Journey Thus Far
by Greg Russell

This is a topic that I have shared with a limited number of people in the recent past, but there are many more with whom I have not talked directly. I would like to share some information (for the first time for many) about what is going on in my and Laurie’s lives. To set the backdrop for what is to follow here: In the late 1970s my father was diagnosed with an incurable form of kidney disease called polycystic kidney disease (commonly referred to as PKD; if you would like to read more about the disease, there is an excellent website at www.pkdeure.org). PKD affects about 1 in 500 people, from newborns to adults, with rates similar among sexes, races, and ethnicities. Basically the disease causes cysts to form on the kidneys; over time, the cysts grow and reduce the function of the nephrons on the kidneys (kidneys are complex reprocessing devices – each day, they process about 200 quarts of blood, sifting out about 2 quarts of waste products and extra water), increasing the kidneys in size from the normal size of a fist-sized organ of about half a pound to 10 inches in length and 10 to 20 pounds in weight range. The disease eventually causes the kidney to cease functioning; the timeline for this is highly variable, but the end result of kidney failure is a constant.

How does this affect me? Unfortunately, I learned many years ago that I was a carrier for the disease. PKD is autosomal dominant, meaning that if a person receives the abnormal gene from the parent, he/she will inherit the disease. Shortly after my arrival at the Medical Center in 1990, I was experiencing some lower back pain that would not subside. After several different tests, the urologist saw that I had cysts on both kidneys; the cysts can be painful. At that time, the only therapy (and still the only therapy today) was to attempt to control blood pressure, with the thought being that blood pressure control might preserve kidney function over the long term. That may be true in some cases, but it did not seem to do so for me. Less than 2 years ago, I was told by my nephrologist that dialysis or a transplant was not far away. This was consistent with what he had been telling me over the past 15 years, but the idea of either dialysis or transplant seemed foreign. The best predictor of how long your kidneys will function is to look at your parent with the disease, so I certainly thought at that time that I had, at a minimum, smooth sailing into my 50s. Taking into account how long my father had been able to wait, plus factoring in blood pressure control, I mistakenly thought I had 10 more years before real problems would begin to arrive.

Well, after realizing 2 years ago that time was not on my side, at least not in the short term, I started the process of preparing for a {hopefully} transplant. The first step was a day spent in the Day Hospital wing in May 2008, where way too much blood (16 vials – way too much for a guy who has a hard time with 1 vial) was drawn, with several other tests completed that day. There was an EKG, an ultrasound of the kidneys, a visit with a social worker (to evaluate levels of depression, among other things), a brain MRI (PKD has an increased risk of brain aneurysms, so the MRI checks the blood vessels in the brain to make sure that everything appears normal), and several other tests to evaluate my overall health. This workup was completed in anticipation of going on a transplant list, although I couldn’t be actively listed until my kidney function fell below 20%. Last January, a little over a year ago, my kidney function went below 20%. The next month, the kidney transplant team met and I was placed on the ‘active’ list. Typically, you would think that being younger (at least by transplant standards), healthy (no other health problems), and
a common blood type (O) would work to your advantage, but in this case, it’s exactly the opposite. The combination of all those things creates, most likely, a longer transplant waiting time than normal (median wait time is slightly more than 3 years for a cadaveric transplant; the number of kidneys transplanted each year is roughly 20,000, while there are 80,000 on the list of subjects waiting for an organ). As I write this, my function is down to 12%; it was 18% a year ago. Typically, dialysis starts in the 10% range.

Physically, I feel good overall; I am thankful that I have experienced few episodes of the intense pain and/or cyst infection that are common with PKD. I have had the good fortune to be able to continue, for the most part, living a life very similar to the one I would have with no disease. There are certain foods I should avoid (specifically anything high in potassium or phosphorus), and a few more medicines added in the past year, but overall, I have no complaints.

I have had some friends volunteer to be tested; for that, I am more grateful than I can possibly express in words. Some had the wrong blood type, another had a bout with kidney stones (that rules a person out as a possible donor). I really appreciate the goodness of the people who offered of themselves. At this moment, Laurie is a possible match, but as the donor program director told us, it would be preferable to go with another donor, if one is found, and “keep Laurie’s in the bank” (those are her words, not mine) for use later in life, if needed. In December, another good friend (who asked to remain anonymous) started the testing process, and looks to be a good donor match. As of today (January 26), the tentative plan is a transplant in early to mid-March. The anticipated recovery time would be 3 to 7 days in the hospital, with another 2 months out of work (there are at least 2 days of clinic visits for the first month, as the new organ is closely monitored in the short term, and regularly monitored in the long term).

As I have talked with Laurie about this, my steadfast belief is that something good will come of this experience. In the short time in which I have told people what is going on, I have been touched by the genuine kindness and caring expressed towards me and my family. I am very appreciative of the support given thus far, whether the gesture was something as grand as being tested to be a possible donor or something simpler, such as keeping me in someone’s thoughts or on their church’s prayer list. The upcoming months are sure to be filled with anxiety. We have yet to talk to our children (Alexa, 8, and Aaralyn, who will turn 5 in February) about what is going on and what will happen in the future. Children are certainly resilient; I have full faith that both of them will handle everything well in the long term, but Alexa is a very gentle soul who does not handle well seeing anyone in distress or discomfort. We anticipate this being a very potentially difficult time for her. I truly appreciate those who have offered to help us with the children; be warned that we may very well take advantage of your offer.

I feel I can speak on behalf of the Alumni in saying that our best wishes and prayers for complete recovery go out to Russell Family!
There is really no smooth segue from the previous topic, so we will just touch upon the remaining topics starting with the Bios reunion in October.

It was a beautiful sunny Sunday afternoon on October the 25th 2009 at Judy Bahnson’s house, which served as the date and location for the second ever Bios reunion (first in 2005). Although we did not have the crowd of the original, we still had a great time. The food was great from Leora’s brownies, BBQ, Brunswick stew, and did I mention Leora’s brownies! The highlight (outside the company of course!) was the exclusive behind the scenes look at Judy’s home which has to be a featured property of Southern Living. The scenic forest setting, large cozy fireplace complete with a hidden stone compartment, and spacious open living areas look like something out of a magazine or HGTV. Who could forget the outdoor dining room complete with chandelier and setting for 8 nestled in a perfect natural surrounding accompanied by the soothing sounds of flowing water from the adjoining creek. Needless to say, it was a fun time for all who were able to attend.

Some pictures from the event:

The guest of honor Miss Cassandra Lee Verrill a.k.a Sassy Cassy w/ mom Cynthia & some other people.

FULL CIRCLE: Laurie w/ Caden at the PHS reunion 2009 & Karen w/ Aaralyn at the 2005 reunion…can’t you see the resemblance? (‘Who Am I’ substitute - Do you know who is in the background of both pictures (answers below)?)

I had more pictures of the whole group and cake but could not find them anywhere…all the more reason to have another one and to not let me be in charge of the pictures or anything really. Hopefully we will not have to wait 4 more years to have it and by then cars will be road ready (Allison), arrivals will happen while people are still around (Sherrard), and fear of H1N1 will be a thing of the past (Dan)!
- Many may remember Dr. H. Bradley Wells who served in the department for 18 years. He passed away in Davidson NC on October, 28 2009 after a long illness. He was 82 and is survived by his wife of 62 years Tressie Zorn Wells and several kids and grandkids.

- Completing the circle of life, there has been an addition to the Morgan family as Tim’s daughter-in-law gave birth to his first grandchild, Katelyn Marie Morgan at 4:05pm Sunday December 29th. He pointed out she was 9 days early and weighted 6lbs 10.5 oz. and measured 20.25 inches long.

- Love is in the air as Bob and Renu Annechiario…need I say more??? They announce the engagement of their son, Rob to Danielle Mooza of Newport News, VA. They met while in undergrad at UNCW. Rob is currently in his final year at the Charlotte School of Law. Danielle is currently employed with the Vanguard Group in Charlotte and a student at Queens University. They plan to marry in the Newport News area on August 21st.

- Dan reports he is keeping busy working on a H1N1 study for NIAID, and Elin is a master on-line shipper for her employer the Toy Company. Warren is 17 and has started to drive and has begun his own novel. Kevin, 14 is becoming quite the artist, writer, and “googler.” Dan finishes with the note or cry for help that he will be consumed w/ season 6 of LOST in February and will need a new obsession once it ends.

**WHO AM I ???**

Has been substituted for brevity but the original will return next edition!

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**LOL FUNNY!**

If pictures are worth 1000 words surely some of them have to be funny in these Halloween gems

- ‘YEAH BABY’
  Tee Bahnson and friend…Judy must be proud.

- The store sold out of the hero costume, this was the *udder* one!

BTW Caden is in a baby contest. If you would like to support him you can buy a ticket or a bunch. It’s tax deductible and tickets are only $1 each. Contact crdavis@wfubmc.edu for details if interested.

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Thanks for reading and please forgive any spelling, grammar, or info mistakes. The info contained is accurate to the best of the writer’s knowledge. BTW we are still looking for volunteers to help with future newsletters. Contact Cralen Davis (crdavis@wfubmc.edu) if interested.