

EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER

*Not many people know more about the value of a new organ than Eurotransplant's Finance Manager, **Peter van der Loo**. And it's not just the financial cost we're talking about. He knows just how priceless a new organ can be – in terms of its impact on the life of a human being. That's because he himself underwent a kidney transplant 27 years ago. It was an operation that produced a dramatic change in his life*

"IT WAS AROUND noon on 21 December 1990 that the telephone rang. I was on the point of leaving for a pub in town, where I had arranged to meet up with a group of colleagues for a Christmas drink. My wife – we had married just two days before – picked up the phone, and found herself talking to a doctor from a hospital in Leiden. He had good news: they had a kidney for me. At long last, after four years of dialysis. Despite the tremendous sense of excitement, I was also aware that there was no guarantee the transplant would actually go ahead. After all, I had had the same telephone call 18 months ago, and what was the upshot? Transplant cancelled.

Anyway, we both headed straight for the hospital and later on the same afternoon, I became the proud owner of a new kidney. It felt like a belated wedding present. The first few weeks after the operation were touch-and-go, with three separate rejection reactions within the space of a month. But I managed to beat the reactions – at least, that's what it felt like. And all has been hunky-dory since then. For the past 27 years, that is.

A fresh start I was still a student when I first fell ill. Although I managed to complete my degree – albeit at a slower pace than normal – it soon became clear that my dialysis routine

meant there was no chance of me finding a proper job.

Thanks to my father's perseverance, I managed to get a job in a sheltered employment programme. Not exactly what I had in mind, though, armed with a degree and in my early 20s.

My transplant opened the door to a full life. No longer did I need to cart around a supply of rinsing liquid. Nor did I always need to let people know where I was or where I was going (those were the days before mobile phones). I could go out for a bike ride whenever I felt like it. And the great thing was that my concentration was much, much higher than when I was on dialysis. In short, the transplant gave me a new lease of life.

Almost two years after the operation, I started working as an assistant controller in the accounts department of a hospital. I gained experience, took courses and was promoted to head of financial accounts. Seven years later, I moved to a different hospital, still doing the same type of work. This was a time when my wife and I made two big road trips through the US, holidays that would have been unthinkable prior to my kidney transplant. We also became parents to two sons and a daughter. That was another very special feeling: you have a very different attitude to the prospect of having children when you're seriously ill. Since the operation, I have also managed to take up my favourite sport – water polo – once again and I'm now an international water polo referee.

Right place, right time I joined Eurotransplant in November 2005. Is it a coincidence? Well, yes, it is really. A former colleague of mine alerted me to the vacancy. They were looking for someone to head up the financial shared service center. Right up my alley, I remember thinking at the time.

Every day, I do my best to help Eurotransplant perform its hugely valuable work. Although I don't find myself thinking back to my own transplant on a daily basis, I do realise that I couldn't possibly lead the life I now lead without a transplant. And if I hadn't been given a new kidney, I very much doubt whether I would have been able to write this article." 🌟

