## unt of a lifetime

## Sisters bound by transplant

By Gary Bass

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After the early Christmus present Pauls Swope gave her sister.

Karen Dumber, on Noc 3, 1986, the
presents under the tree this year
inight be a little anti-climactic.

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A little wore a year gap, Paula,

40, donated one of her kidneys to
Karen—who was diagnosed with

a hereditary disorder called polycystic kidney disorate (PKD).

Befare the successful transplant

operation, Karen's kidneys had
been operating at 10-10 percent capacity.

Thanks to her sinter's selfless

gift, Karen's kidneys are now oporating at full capacity once again.

"No master what (Paula) seys.

"I divays be indebted to her.' said

Karen, 46, in a rare serious momonent during an interview at her
home in Shady Oaks. "There's

nothing you can really do to repay
someone for that kind of gift."

"I think she felt better right

way," said Paula, a resident of

Cross Baads, with a glance at her

siste: "The doctors said her color

come back with a glance at her

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come back with side was still on

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Time is much more precious for sisters Paula Swope of Cross Roads (left) and Karen Dunbar of Shady Oaks, Last year, Swope gave her sister an early Christmus present, Swope donated a kid-

ney to Dunber — who has been diagnosed with polycystic kidney disease — on Nov. 3, 1998. Both women are doing well following the transplant.

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the table.

"On the other hand, I woke upsick as a dog and I hurt in places I didn't know existed," added Paula. "After the operation, (Karen) came into my room with a big gr!n on her face. The first thing she said to me was. I'm hungry."

With Christmas lights blinking, merrily in the living room and a stack of brightly wrapped presents under the tree. The two seasons and like typical close knil siblings as they sat around Karen's duning room table discussing the last year of their lives.

Laughter filled the room as Paula and Karen teased and joked with each other During the interview, the sisters' husbands—Richard Ratley Sr. and Dave Dunbar, along with Karen's two children, Megan and Will—wandered through on their way to the back yard or the kitchen, occasionally putting their two-cents in or laughing at the sisters' antics.

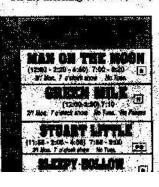
One might even say Karen has been given a new lease on life since the transplant. The vivacious and petite mother of two, sitting at the table trading good-natured harbs with her older alster, is almost as different as night and day from the Karen who went under the knife in November 1998.

Before the operation, the cysts formed on Karen's kidneys as a result of PKD were causing waste products to build up in her blood-

That build-up of waste products led to a condition called urante polsoning, which left Karen feeling chronically fatigued and worn out. Paula said during the eight-weeks prior to the operation, her sister had not made it through a single week of work at Argon Medical.

"PKD patients feel tired and lefhargic. It also makes them anemic," said then-transplant coordinator Beth Martin just prior to the operation. "I don't see how she managed working full-time and taising two kids."

On the morning of Nov 3, 1998,



Paula — who was almost a perfect match as an organ donor — went into the operating room at East Texas Medical Center Tyler about an hour ahead of her younger sister.

A surgeon made an incision in her side and removed her left kidney. Following the removal of the organ, the doctor tied off blood vessels and stitched her back up.

"Before the operation, I almost left," said Paula. "I was scared out of my mind, I mean, I was suing to go into surgery healthy and come out unhealthy — that's normally not the way the supposed to work.

"After the operation, the doctor told me the procedure was comparable to open-heart surgery," she added with a rueful grin. "I told him that I wished he'd told me that before the operation."

Paula explained the doctor told her that, in some cases, the surgeon was forced to remove one of the patient's lower ribs to get at the kidney

"Boy, am I glad he didn't have to take that rib out," she said.

"Going into it, my biggest fear was that it wouldn't work," said Karen. "If it hadn't worked, we would have gone through it all for nothing."

Each of the two women had their own team of doctors and nurses. While Paula's operation lasted three hours, Karen's transplant was completed within two hours and was considerably less involved.

Because the plan called for Karen's existing set of kidneys to be left in place, the doctor placed the transplanted kidney at the front of her lower abdomen.

In addition to the fact their immediate family members were at the hospital to give their love and support, Paula and Karen agreed that one of the most memorable things about their stay was the fact that their morn and dad made the long trip from Indiana.

The sisters' mother also suffers from PKD and has been on dialysis for the past 17 years.

"She stayed in my room all night

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and here seen, where an interest.

that first night," said Karen. "And she's not really healthy enough to be doing that."

Both women said they had friends in several area churches praying for them while they were undergoing the operation.

"It was really wonderful to see how several churches worked together on our behalf," said Karen.

"It had to have helped," put in

The initial hurdle after the operotion reset to first 34 hours. During watched Karen closely during that period to make sure her body didn't

reject the new kidney

Both women were released from
the hospital within three days of
the operation—which doctors said
was a new record for a kidney
transplant.

Jokingly, Paula said her sister was so swoilen that she looked five months pregnant for weeks after the operation.

During the interview, Paula pulled up her sweater slightly to proudly display her badge of honor—a 5- or 6-inch scar on her left side. She then teasingly made reference to her little sister's "itty bifty scar" which they said was about an inch long.

"Well, I had a better doctor," shot back Karen with a grin. "And I can still wear a bikini. Ha ha ha."

According to Paula, the transplant operation is much tougher on the donor than the recipient. She added that she was on pain medication for weeks after the procedure. For her part, Karen said afte took one and a half pain pills when she

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Beginning Thursday, J. Athens Daily Review Calendar each issue, continuous election on Mar be listed for respective a schey sign up. The transfer.

d got home from the hospital and that was it.

Karen said to avoid possible indifections, she were a surgical mask s for the two month period after the

operation. While she was back be hind the wheel of her car within a month, Karen didn't return to work

at Argon for two months.

Conversely, it took Paula three months to get back to her normal routine. She added she couldn't walk, drive her car or ride her hors-

"What really made me mad was when the doctor told Karen she could ride horses before I could," said the older sister with a mock-frown.

During the interview, the women explained transplanted kidneys normally last 10 to 20 years before the donor's body finally rejects the organ. Even so, Paula said there is a chance Karen will keep the kidney for the rest of her natural life.

While the operation didn't really strengthen the already strong bond between the two sisters. Paula did say her sister is more outgoing and talkative these days. They also said there wasn't much truth to the urban myths the recipient often picks up character traits associated with the donor.

"I take that back," said Paula with a teasing grin. "She did get mouthler and I know she got that from me.

"Before the operation, she just didn't care — she was too iterd," added Paula. "Now, it's not any funto mess with her, because she messes back."