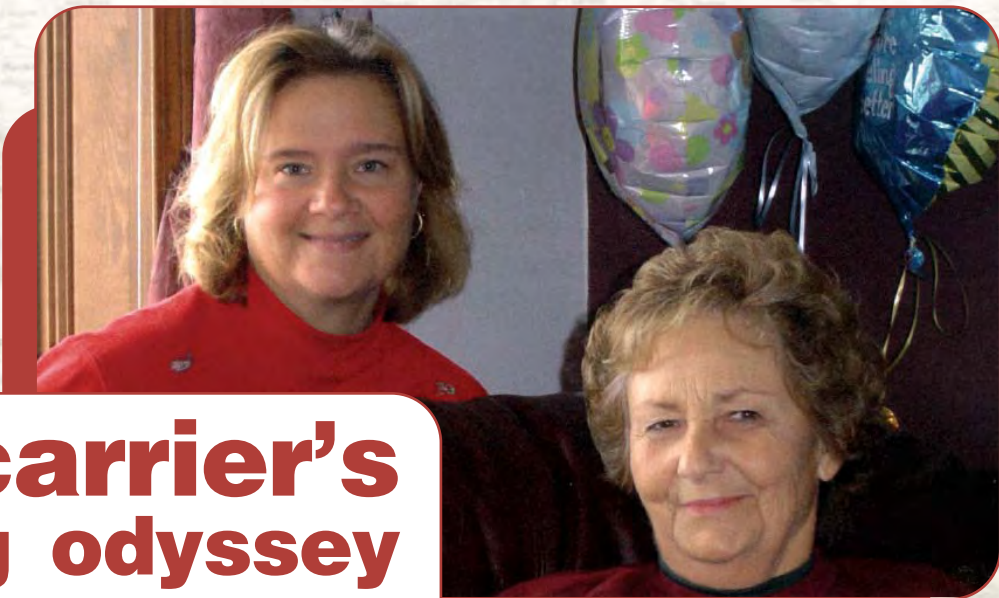


# Letter carrier's life-saving odyssey

## From the Florida Keys to Iowa's corn fields



Fort Dodge, Iowa Branch 645 member Kelli Knudson-Polk (l) transferred from Florida to donate a kidney to her mother, Pam (r).

**L**en Polk and Kelli Knudson-Polk were husband-and-wife carriers who delivered mail for several years in the warm climes of Marathon, Florida, about an hour east of Key West.

One day, though, Kelli received a call that was the beginning of a life-altering odyssey for her and her husband. "Kelli found out her mother was sick and in need of a kidney transplant," Len recalled.

After talking it over, the two members of Key West Branch 818 decided on a plan of action: Kelli would immediately request a transfer to Fort Dodge, Iowa, in order to be closer to her mother, Pam. Meanwhile, Len, who was fast approaching retirement time, would remain in Marathon until he hung up his satchel for good, and then move the 1,700 miles to the Hawkeye State as well.

But Kelli's motivation to move was not just to provide her mother some much-needed moral support and assistance. Realizing that relatives often make the best donors, she put herself forward as a potential organ source.

"After a good year of testing and waiting, Kelli was finally approved to be her mom's kidney donor," said Len.

So, just two days after Christmas last December, with Len by her side, Kelli gave her mother a somewhat belated present—a successful kidney transplant at Iowa Methodist Medical Center in Des Moines.

It was an amazing, modern operation, Len remarked. "The doctors performed

an arthroscopic surgery," he said. "The only sign of a surgery is one incision and four small holes."

The transition from Marathon to northwestern Iowa, where Kelli became a member of Fort Dodge Branch 645, was almost more traumatic than the transplant operation, Len said with a laugh.

"That was a culture shock," he said, "going from the Florida Keys to sometimes 35-below wind-chills."

But for Pam and Kelli, "everything turned out fine," he reported. "Both are recuperating nicely, and Pam's new kidney is taking."

While mother and daughter recuperated at Pam's house, Len volunteered to live there as well, often playing the role of chauffeur and go-fer.

It was the least he could do, he said. "When we moved to Iowa, we bought a house 20 miles away from Pam," he said. "Staying at Kelli's mom's was a lot easier than driving through 20 miles of snow each way."

By mid-February, however, Kelli was ready to go back to work. "Light duty, at first," said Len, "limited to lifting five pounds."

And for her sacrifice, besides the gratitude of her mother, Kelli gets a gift she hopes she will never use. "If she ever needs a kidney herself," said Len, "Kelli goes right to the top of the list." ✉

For information on becoming an organ donor, visit [www.organdonor.gov](http://www.organdonor.gov).

## Becoming an organ donor

- Register with your state donor registry. Most, but not all, states have registries.
- Designate your decision on your driver's license when you obtain or renew your license.
- Download a donor card now from [www.organdonor.gov](http://www.organdonor.gov), and carry the card until you can designate your donation decision on your driver's license or join a donor registry.
- Talk to your family now about your donation decision. Help them understand your wish to be an organ and tissue donor before a crisis occurs. That way, they will be prepared to serve as your advocate for donation.

