



Teacher's selfless act delivers a brighter future

By Melissa Fletcher Stoeltje | December 23, 2015 | Updated: December 23, 2015 9:10pm



Photo: Josh Bachman /For The San Antonio Express-News

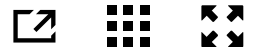


IMAGE 1 OF 5

Matthew Parker sits next to his first-grade teacher Lindsey Painter, who donated a kidney to him. On Christmas Eve 2014, she learned she was a perfect match. The transplant surgery was performed the following ... [more](#)

NEW BRAUNFELS — Watching second-grader Matthew Parker, 7, zoom around the playroom inside Hoffman Lane Elementary School, all you can see are the high-energy exploits of a healthy little boy full of impish good cheer.

It's hard to believe that one year ago, Matthew was tired and increasingly sick, in desperate need of a new kidney and tethered to a dialysis machine three times a week.

What came next seems the stuff of miracles.

When doctors at University Hospital in San Antonio put out a national call for a kidney donor — with the chance of a perfect match hovering at only about 1 percent — Matthew's own first-grade teacher was the very first person out of almost 80 to step up and be tested. And she was a match.

“The call came on Christmas Eve,” said Lindsey Painter, 35, smiling as she watched Matthew pull an action figure off a shelf. “How perfect is that?”

Painter's decision to give one of her kidneys to Matthew drew national media attention, but it's the aftermath of that choice that has proven even more amazing, she and others say — nothing less than watching a child being given the chance for a normal life.

In a holiday season where the focus so often seems to be on acquiring things — so many things — the story of how one teacher came to one student's rescue seems to illuminate the true spirit of giving, and the myriad blessings it can bring.

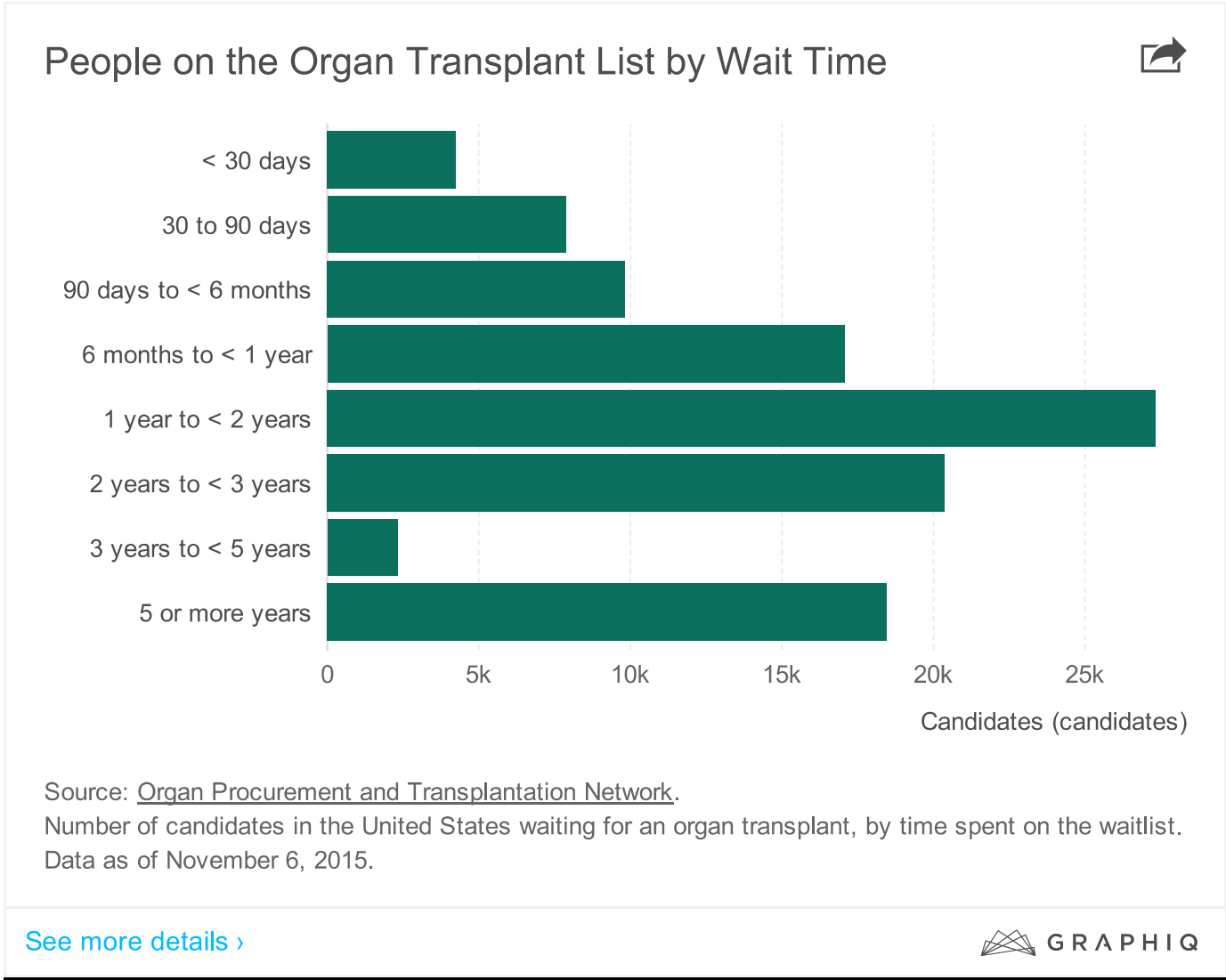
It was watching Matthew struggle that prompted Painter to make her selfless decision.

“I saw him going through something no child should have to go through,” she said. “I don't know if it was the teacher in me or the mother in me, but I knew I had to act.”



Matthew was one in a set of triplets born almost five months premature. When he was 3 weeks old, he developed a blood infection that caused kidney failure, requiring dialysis. Matthew received a donor kidney when he was 2 years old, but his body rejected it. Back on dialysis he went; Matthew’s name went on the transplant list, where it languished.

Last December, with the boy growing sicker, his doctors created a website to find a donor. (His brothers Mark and Samuel couldn’t donate because of their young age.) After finding out she was a perfect match, Painter, who was in her first year at Hoffman, underwent a battery of tests, both physical and psychological, to ensure she was a suitable donor.



People on the Organ Transplant List by Wait Time | HealthGrove

A mother of two boys ages 10 and 7, Painter had to reassure her husband, who understandably was concerned over his wife’s decision to give away one of her organs. After a visit to University Hospital, where the operation was to take place — and after

meeting Matthew — his fears were allayed, she said.

In March, doctors removed her kidney laparoscopically. She was in the hospital four days — Matthew, whose surgery was more complicated, stayed in much longer — and then spent two weeks convalescing at home.

This month, Painter received the 2015 “Spirit of Health” award from Baptist Health Foundation of San Antonio for her kidney donation. Being in the spotlight, media and otherwise, takes Painter, a self-described “private person,” out of her comfort zone. But it’s all been worth it.

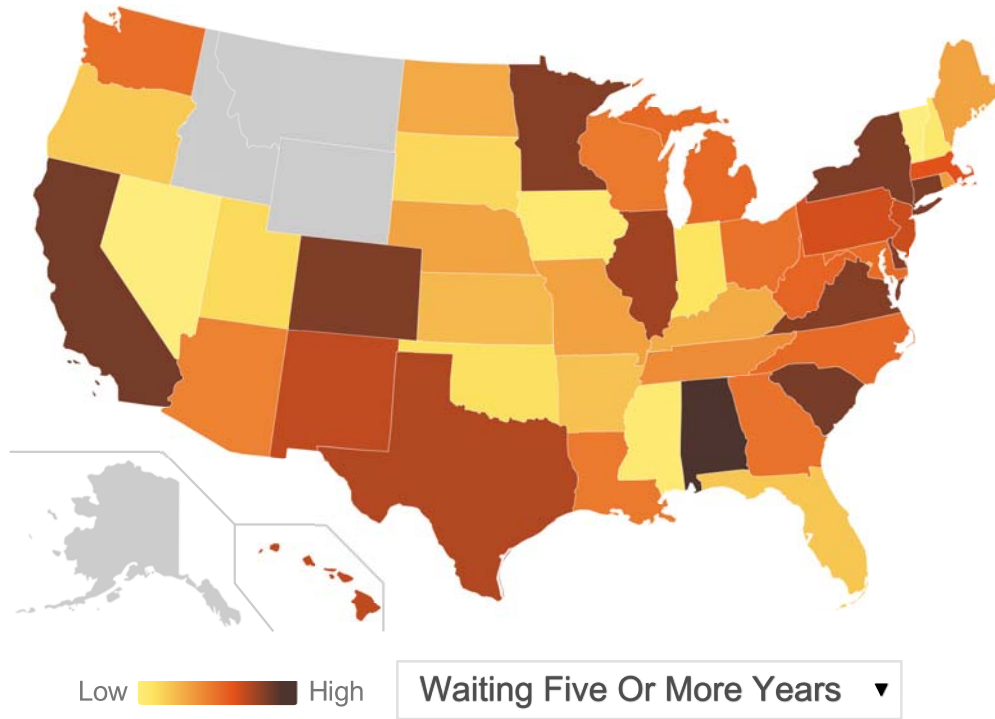
“It was incredible, to be part of something so amazing,” she said. “I just feel so lucky that I was a match, and now to be able to see Matthew change, to become healthier, more energetic. And to see the whole school and community come together as one.”

Painter is now devoted to raising awareness about the importance of organ donation. The website the hospital created to find a match for Matthew — www.universitytransplantcenter.com/matts-wish — is still up and running.

Lisa Parker, Matthew’s mother, said the change in her son’s life is like “night and day.”

“Before, he spent so much time in the hospital, with the dialysis, he missed so much school,” she said. “Now he can run and play with the other kids. He can eat what he wants. He can drink water.”

Percent of People on the Organ Transplant Waitlist Waiting Five or More Years for an Organ Donor



Source: [Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network](#).

Percent of all registrants on the organ transplant waiting list in each state who have spent five or more years waiting for an organ transplant. Data as of November 6, 2015.

[See more details >](#)

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Percent of People on the Organ Transplant Waitlist Waiting Five or More Years for an Organ Donor | HealthGrove

Before the surgery, when Matthew had to restrict his liquids because of dialysis, he had to watch as his classmates lined up at the water fountain after recess, gulping the cold liquid when he could have only a sip, Painter said. He couldn't go swimming in the summer because of his dialysis port. On the playground, he was often carted around in a wagon because of his fatigue. In the afternoons, he'd have to sleep on a mat behind Painter's desk.

Those days are clearly over.

"I want to be a boat pilot," Matthew proclaimed, after he'd finally tired of zooming around the room and flopped down into a rocking chair. His favorite superhero?

Superman. His favorite class? Math. And what do you think about that new kidney of yours?

“I like it,” he said, his hand fluttering briefly to his shirt front, over the scar that is the only remnant of his prior struggle, aside from the anti-rejection medicine he’ll take for the rest of his life.

Mostly, it seems, Matthew just likes being a little boy. A little boy with a newly bright future.

“I love chocolate,” he said, flashing an irresistible toothy grin. “Chocolate cocoa. On Christmas night.”

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