

# DADS: WHAT I DID FOR LOVE

Here are four selfless fathers who stepped up for their children



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Provider, playmate, protector. A father is all this and so much more.

Daddy is a child's first hero. The one who always has your back, the one who teaches you to take risks, the one who believes you can reach for the stars.

When his children need him, a father who might describe himself as ordinary rises to the occasion with extraordinary acts of bravery. His labour of love requires no reward, save for a smile, a kiss, a hug.

Meet four fathers whose selfless deeds have made a huge impact on their children's lives.

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## Afraid of needles, but he donated kidney to his daughter

Talk about needles and Mr Sam Foo, 50, winces. Yet he did not hesitate to donate his kidney to his daughter Celest in June 2020.

She was just four years old in 2005 when, without warning, her face became puffy and her urine had bubbles in it. Tests showed she had focal segmental glomerulosclerosis (FSGS), which meant the filters in her kidneys were scarred and could not filter blood.

While no local figures are available, there are 0.2 to 1.8 cases per 100,000 people worldwide, says head and emeritus consultant Yap Hui Kim from the division of paediatric nephrology, dialysis and renal transplantation in the department of paediatrics at Khoo Teck Puat - National University Children's Medical Institute within National University Hospital (NUH). She has been seeing Celest, now 22, since she was about five years old.

FSGS is a leading cause of nephrotic syndrome, in which one's kidneys are not functioning well. About 30 per cent of child patients reach end-stage kidney failure in five years and end up needing dialysis or a transplant like Celest, explains Professor Yap, who is also medical director and emeritus consultant of the paediatric kidney transplantation programme at NUH's National University Centre for Organ Transplantation. The centre is the only one in



Mr Sam Foo, 50, overcame his fear of needles and pain to donate his kidney to his daughter Celest, 22. The transplant was done in 2020 (left). PHOTOS: ONG WEE JIN, SAM FOO

Singapore that provides both adult and paediatric organ transplant services.

Celest's diagnosis meant the Foes had to change their lifestyle. Instead of heading to the mall on Saturdays, they hung around NUH for her check-ups.

The immunosuppressant medication she took left her prone to illnesses. She would fall sick frequently with fever, migraine and, once, shingles. In Primary 3, she

was hospitalised for over 20 days because of pneumonia, Mr Foo recalls.

Sometimes, she reacted to a new medication and would have to be admitted again.

"I think we've visited NUH close to 1000 times - it's that kind of mileage," he says.

With so much ferrying to do, his job as a real estate agent proved to be a boon as he had flexible hours.

His wife Elaine Ting, 50, a former

headhunter who now works at her brother's beauty salon, says: "Whenever Celest had a bad migraine, she would call him. Daddy's always on standby for her."

For 15 years, Celest fought the disease, her bravery in the face of bleak odds a beacon of inspiration to her parents and her elder brother Ryan, 26, a development engineer.

She even learnt to administer her own injections from a young age,

says Ms Ting.

"It's a blessing to have her. She's very strong. That's how the three of us have learnt from her."

At the same time, her parents prepared themselves for the day her kidneys would fail and she would need a donor. Their time with her was so precious, they took her on a tour to Europe, her dream destination, in December 2009.

Celest's kidneys failed a month later, in January 2020. She was just

39 years old.

Doctors removed her left kidney because of a cyst and she went on haemodialysis twice to thrice a week. But that took a toll on her.

"Dialysis was tiring. I felt weak and couldn't sleep at night because I was restless. It was quite obstructive to my lifestyle because I couldn't go out with friends too," Celest recalls.

Ms Ting jokes that her husband is a "scaredy cat" when it comes to pain, but he volunteered to donate his kidney.

In December 2019, he started a rigorous series of medical procedures to qualify as a kidney donor, a journey that took about four months of hospital visits, which was prolonged by the circuit breaker in April 2020.

"Frankly speaking, the transplant thing is no joke. If you put a needle in me to take blood, I'm scared," he admits.

"But every time they took blood, I thought of my Celest and how I did it for her. Then, there was no more pain. This is nothing compared with her dialysis, her kidney failure."

Her road to recovery was a bumpy one. She faced organ rejection issues and developed diabetes, which she conquered with a strict diet.

Three years on, Celest, now 22, still visits Prof Yap once a month. She works in marketing at her uncle's salon and will be starting a diploma in design and communications at Lasalle College of the Arts soon. A fan of wildlife, she hopes to one day work with a zoo to design its collaterals.

"I'm super grateful," she says, glancing at her father. "Because of him, I can lead a normal life."