

Healing goes on for two families

The widow of fallen Middletown Detective Chris Jones and transplant recipient Ron Crawford are dealing with the gift of life and loss of a loved one.

By **MATT COUGHLIN**
STAFF WRITER

The same day Ron Crawford, his wife and kids walked out of Methodist Hospital in Memphis with a newly transplanted kidney, Chris Jones' family was going to a wake for the fallen Middletown police officer.

The Crawfords had known the Joneses for 17 years dating back to when the two men served together aboard a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier. So while the potentially life-saving transplant should have been reason for celebration, Ron and Wendy Crawford said they also felt a great deal of guilt knowing their friend had died in order that they might get that gift.

"There was no joy in our car when we left the hospital the first time," Wendy Crawford recalled Saturday night.

But the Crawfords also knew that it was deeply important for the Joneses that the transplant go well. So it was difficult for them to tell Suzanne Jones when Ron Crawford took a turn for the worse a few weeks ago. After all, the news the two men were a match had electrified the two families in the days after Jones' death. Jones was killed Jan. 29 during a traffic stop on the Route 1 Superhighway.

More than 1,000 miles away in Atoka, Tenn., the Crawfords grieved at the news of their friend's death. Seventeen years ago, Ron Crawford and Chris Jones met aboard the USS Kitty Hawk. Soon — like many military families far from relatives and home — the Crawfords and Joneses considered themselves family.

Over the years, Crawford developed kidney problems, which worsened. Eventually he was diagnosed with FSGS — focal segmental glomerulosclerosis, a disease that attacks the part of the kidneys where toxins are removed from the blood.

Last year while visiting the Crawfords, Chris, Suzanne and Wendy had light-heartedly argued over whose kidney Ron Crawford would get.

In November, doctors put Ron Crawford on a transplant list to receive a kidney from a cadaver.

The day Jones died doctors spent 90 minutes trying to save him before they turned to his wife and asked her to donate his organs. Suzanne Jones did and in the process asked if Ron Crawford could be one of the kidney recipients.

That night, Ron Crawford was trying to book a flight for Wendy to get to Pennsylvania to help Suzanne Jones in her grief when doctors called and told him to get to the hospital. Doctors at St. Mary Medical Center ran preliminary tests that showed the men matched and the kidney was flown to Memphis. The kidney was delayed three hours by the weather, the Crawfords said.

At the hospital in Memphis, more tests were needed to prove the kidney was a match. The Crawfords waited. Wendy Crawford recalled that their room in the hospital was somber but electric with anticipation.

Suddenly the nurse burst into the room. The kidney matched.

Ron Crawford quickly recorded a message to Suzanne Jones, his family hugged him and the nurses started prepping him for surgery. Wendy Crawford called Suzanne Jones to let her know but didn't even finish her sentence before Suzanne screamed the good news and the scores of Jones' family and fellow officers erupted. They received hourly updates until the surgery was finished. Six days later the Crawfords were headed home.

It wasn't long before doctors saw problems developing. They ran tests that were inconclusive but decided to start treating Ron Crawford's body as if it were rejecting the kidney.

After several treatments, doctors discovered the kidney didn't have a new problem, it had been damaged in the effort to save Jones life or possibly during the transport to Memphis.

Crawford went home again. The kidney was going to have to heal itself. Crawford was on medication that kept his body from both healing the kidney and attacking infections.

He was home again. But no one was feeling better.

During the first week of March, Suzanne Jones flew to Memphis. Wendy Crawford picked up Jones at the airport and they surprised Ron when they got home. Jones put her hand near the kidney and told the Crawfords that she was OK and her kids were OK and they were glad Ron got the transplant.

In the days Suzanne Jones was visiting the Crawfords, the kidney started functioning better and better.

Saturday night, the Crawfords were in Falls. The kidney has improved enough that doctors felt comfortable letting Ron and Wendy Crawford fly north to visit the Joneses and attend the Middletown police's St. Patrick's Day celebration. The couple was welcomed heartily as Jones' friends and co-workers got a chance to meet them.

As she watched Ron and Wendy Crawford enjoy the company of so many friends, Suzanne Jones said she believes that hearing and seeing her say that Chris Jones' family was OK somehow allowed Ron to concentrate on his own recovery.

Wendy Crawford said Suzanne Jones' touch was just miraculous. She said all the guilt over benefiting from Chris Jones' death dissolved when Suzanne came to visit.

"That's when we felt the celebration, that no matter how bad it was we are all going to heal and Chris is going to be with us," Wendy Crawford said.

Matt Coughlin can be reached at 215-949-4172 or .



Officer Chris Jones