Bell Maddux

(Bell Mad-Ducks)

I was first diagnosed with MPGN in 1996, at 15 years old, after months of symptoms, multiple doctors and attempts at holistic remedies. I spent about a month in the hospital, and missed a full semester of school, but eventually got back to normal and moved on. When I was 25 and had started my career and had my own health insurance, I noticed swelling in my legs and decided to have my kidney function tested. I was married at that point and went through three different doctors before the fourth doctor told me that if I ever wanted children, it would be an option for me to get a kidney transplant, once my kidney function had deteriorated enough.

In 2008, my father donated his kidney to me, and three years later, my daughter was born. Shortly after that, my husband's kidneys failed after several years of ignoring out of control blood pressure and developing diabetes. I'm often asked if we met through our kidney adventures, and the answer is no, it was entirely a coincidence. But with a toddler, and my career to manage, I also became a caregiver and helped him manage his peritoneal dialysis journey for 9 months before he received a kidney from his older brother.

I was under a lot of pressure as he went through his recovery, but eventually we were able to course correct, and I had a second baby. In utero, the doctors warned that my son had a blockage in his ureter tubes, but so far, he has been completely healthy. I, on the other hand, started to lose function of my dad's kidney when my son was about two years old. I have now been on dialysis since February 2019, and although I started in-clinic (three different ones to be precise) I was finally able to transition to home hemodialysis.

I’m currently a solo patient, because even though my husband is around, his work schedule keeps him out of the house for long hours. I like to say that I am my own nurse, technician, and technical support. I make it a point to reach out when I learn about anyone starting dialysis to speak to them and give them what I know I never had, which usually is just an ear, but also a
sense of hope and optimism. However, I know that I can do more, to raise awareness and ultimately increase the number of living kidney donors out there.