

The Life of Robbie Russell
Will Benner
4/19/15

If undergoing a liver transplant at 18-months-old is not enough, try also having a kidney transplant. Robbie Russell, a 25-year-old Telecommunications major at the University of Florida has gone through both of these dangerous and life threatening surgeries in his lifetime.

Russell was born with biliary atresia, a disease that causes bile to remain in the liver, where it starts to destroy liver cells rapidly and causes scarring of the liver. Russell's parents took him to the doctor to have tests done on him. Robert Russell II, Robbie's father, said "when the doctors were done testing they called us and said Rob's liver had scarring beyond repair and that he would be put on a transplant list. We didn't know what to think or do." Russell was placed on a transplant list for two months before hearing back from doctors. Unfortunately, hearing that their son needed a transplant was not the only sad news the Russell family would hear. Russell II said, "someone else had to pass for Rob to get the liver transplant, so that is what was really difficult. For someone having to pass for this to happen was very sad." Fortunately, Russell's liver hasn't troubled him since the surgery.

After being put on several medications, Russell's liver would no longer be his only worry. These medications, specifically cyclosporine, started to damage Russell's kidneys severely. He began taking a new medication called CellCept at age 14 to hopefully stop the kidney damage, but Russell said that his kidneys had already been severely damaged. At the age of 22, Russell would undergo a kidney transplant. Russell and his father toured a dialysis physicality when finding out that he would indeed need another transplant. Russell said, "I remember walking in and seeing all the people and machines, it was just really sad and eire. I just prayed that I wouldn't have to stay there." After struggling to find a match for Russell's kidney, the only person who could donate a kidney was his father. Russell said, "I was down to 12 percent kidney function, so 12 percent from pretty much dying; I mean it really opened up my eyes to a whole new way to enjoy life."

Russell's kidney transplant was a success. Russell II said, "the surgery brought Robbie and I even closer. Not that we were that far apart anyways, but I'm glad I was there for him and if i had to do it all over again I would.

When asked about his original donor family, Russell said, "I really cherish what my donor family has done. I have part of their child inside me, so I want to be successful for them."