

Kidney transplant recipient shares inspiring story, launches book in Novartis patient forum

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- *Thirty-three years ago, Marilou “Tootsie” Labuguen Lazo underwent a kidney transplant. Her sister Maribel Lazo-Newton was the organ donor.*
- *Tootsie and Maribel are living proofs of the nobility and life-saving benefits of kidney transplantation.*

On May 18, 1986 Ms. Marilou “Tootsie” Labuguen Lazo was diagnosed with end-stage renal disease (ESRD) —her kidneys were failing. In order to survive, she had two choices: undergo periodic dialysis or have a kidney transplant. Her nephrologist informed her that kidney transplantation is considered the treatment of choice for many ESRD patients. Quality of life and survival are better in kidney transplant recipients than in patients who are treated with dialysis. However, getting a kidney donor remains a challenge in the Philippines.

“Each kidney transplant patient has his or her unique story to tell. Tootsie’s story is a great inspiration to patients afflicted with kidney disease. Her more than 30 years of extended life after kidney transplantation is a miracle of life! Something that would never have been possible without the gift of life through organ donation.” said Dr. Rosemarie R. Lique, Executive Director of the National Kidney and Transplant Institute (NKTi).

Fortunately, Ms. Maribel Lazo-Newton decided to give the gift of life by donating one of her kidneys to her sister Tootsie. On November 18, 1986, Tootsie underwent a kidney transplant. Thirty-three years later, Tootsie stood before fellow kidney transplant recipients and advocates to share her inspiring story and launch her book “Infrangible”, which is a testimony to her courage, strength, perseverance, hope, love and faith in the Almighty.

“After my kidney transplant, each day has been a blessing. When people ask me what my secret is that enabled me to survive and thrive as a kidney transplant patient for more than 30 years, I tell them there is no secret formula,” said Tootsie. “The key to success is to be a compliant patient, *huwag matigas ang ulo* [don’t be stubborn]. Follow your doctors’ orders regarding maintenance medications, diet and lifestyle, and do everything in moderation.”

In her brief but heartfelt talk, Maribel said, “Deciding to be an organ donor makes your life meaningful. What is life without giving and sharing? I encourage all Filipinos to share the gift of life by becoming organ donors.”

The two sisters spoke during the “One to Care, One to Share” Patient Testimonial & Book Launch Roadshow organized by Novartis Healthcare Philippines in line with the celebration of World Kidney Day 2019. The One to Care, One to Share Roadshow involved a series of patient forums and book launches held last week at the Novartis office in Makati City, NKTi in Quezon City, Cebu City and Davao City.

“It took me almost 33 years to write *Infrangible*, because every time I started to write a chapter I would break down in tears,” Tootsie said. “It is my fervent hope that the book will provide encouragement and inspiration to others who are in a state of limbo because of seemingly insurmountable health crises and learn to hold on even if the going gets rough.”

Through the One to Care, One to Share advocacy, Novartis aims to foster a culture of caring and sharing among Filipinos in order to encourage them to become organ donors, according to Ms. Christine Fajardo,

Corporate Affairs Head of Novartis Healthcare Philippines. “As Christians observe the Lenten season, let us remember that all major organized religions support organ donation, typically considering it a generous act that is the individual's choice. If you donate your organs after you die, you could save and improve the lives of many Filipinos, especially those with kidney failure.”

Tootsie is a passionate and accomplished kidney transplant advocate. In the U.S., she worked as Clinical Research Coordinator for the Academic Medical Research Institute and Peer Educator of the St. Vincent Medical Center Dialysis Unit, both facilities located in Los Angeles. In the Philippines, she served as NKTl Transplant Coordinator for 15 years. She is one of the pioneers of the Kidney Transplant Association of the Philippines, where she served as President of the organization for four consecutive years and spearheaded projects and advocacies on organ donation and transplantation.

Tootsie was among the first Filipino participants and medalists in the World Transplant Games and National Games held in the US, UK, Canada, Australia, Japan, Singapore, and Thailand. Her story was featured in Magpakailanman, and she has been interviewed by both local and international media outfits. A history buff, she worked as a Museum Guide at the National Museum of the Philippines for seven years. Tootsie is a loving mother of three children, and a doting grandmother to six grandchildren.



Novartis Healthcare Philippines organized THE “One to Care, One to Share” Patient Testimonial & Book Launch Roadshow in line with the celebration of World Kidney Day 2019. Photo shows from left: Maribel Lazo-Newton, Tootsie’s sister and organ donor; Dr. Rosemarie R. Lique, Executive Director of the National Kidney and Transplant Institute (NKTl); and Marilou “Tootsie” Labuguen Lazo, kidney recipient and accomplished kidney transplant advocate.



Novartis Healthcare Philippines organized THE "One to Care, One to Share" Patient Testimonial & Book Launch Roadshow in line with the celebration of World Kidney Day 2019. Photo shows from left Marilou "Tootsie" Labuguen Lazo, kidney recipient and accomplished kidney transplant advocate, Remedios Alloza, Novartis Healthcare Philippines and Maribel Lazo-Newton, Tootsie's sister and organ donor.



Novartis Healthcare Philippines organized THE "One to Care, One to Share" Patient Testimonial & Book Launch Roadshow in line with the celebration of World Kidney Day 2019. Photo shows kidney

recipient and accomplished kidney transplant advocate Marilou “Tootsie” Labuguen Lazo signing the book.

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