

— IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH —

# Soulmate gives wife 'the best gift ever'

► **KIDNEY**, from Living 1

and Joel is a lifer with Lockheed Martin. They've made a life in the Bay Area, in a modest ranch-style home in a Fremont cul-de-sac.

And all this time, they've never once had to cash in on those vows.

Until a year ago, that is, when Karen's kidney began to fail.

Karen, 49, didn't know her one working kidney would fail. Though she received a kidney transplant at age 16, no one ever told her it would eventually run out of gas. But after squeezing 35 years of use out of the thing, probably 29 more years than the typical 1972 kidney transplant, failing it was.

And Karen was looking at a six-year wait for a donor kidney, most likely from a cadaver. In the meantime, Karen would return to the painful and tedious dialysis of her teen years — the scars of which are still visible on her arms today — just to stay alive.

**Statistics aren't kind**

Would Karen last long enough on dialysis to get a kidney? Probably. Maybe. No one could say. But statistics aren't kind to someone in her predicament. Each day, 18 people die while waiting for a transplant of a vital organ, such as a heart, liver, kidney, pancreas, lung or bone marrow. And in 2005, 3,198 kidney patients died waiting for a transplant.

That wasn't how Joel and Karen wanted their love story to end. So Joel suggested to Karen that he find out if he could give her one of his kidneys.

"Once I was sure nothing was going to happen to me, I had no problem donating my kidney to Karen," says Joel, 46. "If I had any more organs to donate and someone I loved really needed it, I would do it in an instant."

In January, after months of testing at Stanford Hospital and Clinics, doctors finally gave Joel and Karen their approval. Their surgeries — to remove one of Joel's kidneys and place it in Karen — was scheduled for Feb. 14.

"For Valentine's Day, my soulmate is giving me the best gift ever — the gift of life," says

Karen. "I mean, how do you thank someone for something like this?"

**A husband's gift**

No one ever knows what dominoes will fall after one fateful glance across a bar. It's chaos theory. The butterfly effect.

A butterfly flaps its wings in the rain forest and sometime later a tornado tears through Texas. A guy gives a girl the eye on a Friday night at the Fremont Black Angus in 1982 and 24 years later he's in the pre-anesthesia room saying a final goodbye to life with two kidneys.

Please see **KIDNEY**, Living 5



**A PICTURE AND A HUG:** Joel Weddick takes a picture of his wife Karen (left) shortly after being admitted to Stanford Hospital. The couple embraces (below) before Joel gets taken to surgery to donate a kidney to Karen. Note the couple's lucky No. 14 on the wall behind them.



**BEFORE AND AFTER:** Joel is taken by medical personnel to surgery (above). A recuperating Karen (right) sits in her hospital room the day after her husband donated a kidney to her.



# 'The Riches' live own version of the American dream, one con at a time

► **YOUNG**, from Living 1

outspoken wife Dahlia (Driver), whose harshness hides a person who lives for her family above all else.

Their children are the pragmatic Cael, 17, (Noel Fisher), whose computer skills serve the con; clever beauty Dehliah, 16, (Shannon Woodward) and young cross-dresser Sam (Aidan Mitchell).

This cast has considerable skills, with Izzard absolutely mesmerizing as the ultimate con artist. From the first moment we meet Wayne, we know that he's not your average traveller. He's taken on airs, already living an upscale life in his mind even though he's trapped in a motor home with barely enough cash to keep the gas tank filled.

It's a testament to Driver that we never second-guess why Wayne is

smitten by a character who could be a harridan in the hands of a less skillful actress. Dahlia's an unwieldy storm, ready to bring down pain on those who cross her. She's also completely happy with her life as a traveller, a woman the extended family calls a queen and celebrates as royalty.

She made her own match with Wayne, an outsider the extended family barely tolerates.

No one is better than Wayne when it comes to conning and swindling, and the traveller's clan benefits financially from his considerable skills.

But Wayne is tired of abiding by the rules of the clan, which include a fellow traveller's marriage claim on his 16-year-old daughter. Dahlia's fresh out of prison and just wants the comfort of what she knows back. The last thing she wants is to leave again.

That notion gets tossed out the window when Wayne fights the elders and swipes the clan's fortune. On the lam, with the ruthless would-be clan leader Dale Malloy hot on his trail, opportunity crashes on Wayne's family.

On a blind curve, the family's RV swerves over the line. Doug and Chier Rich are driven off the road and killed when their car crashes. While Dahlia feels only guilt, Wayne senses an opportunity.

After learning that the Riches were moving to a new community where no one knows them, the Malloys decide to take over their lives. Now, they have to convince the neighbors, classmates and all those suburban folks that they are one of them.

It's not going to be easy. Still, suburbia is nothing if not

quirky. Their neighbors Nina (Tony nominee Margo Martindale) and Jim (Bruce French) help them out. Jim used to be an engineer who now raises alpacas and avoids physical contact with Nina, who copes by popping pills.

Wayne even gets a job doing what he does best: conning people. He hooks up with multi-millionaire Hugh (Gregg Henry), who knows there's something not right with Wayne, but doesn't care as long as Wayne can help him with his own scams.

"The Riches" promises a good return on your time investment.

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**INCOGNITO COUPLE:** Eddie Izzard plays Wayne Malloy and Minnie Driver is his wife, Dahlia, in "The Riches."