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A Muslim gives the gift of life to one of her Christian students in a remarkable show of love, courage and example of what Islam, faith and religion are truly all about.

An Unparalleled Act of Love

(Left) Nadirah Muhammad and A'ja Booth (Right) embrace recently, just weeks after kidney transplant operation.

Photos: Haroon Rajae



Nadirah Muhammad and A'ja Booth embrace three days after operation. A mask was worn because A'ja's immune system was still low. Photo courtesy of A'ja Booth

'She saved my life'

In an amazing act of love and courage, a Muslim teacher donates a kidney to a Christian student

by Ashahed M. Muhammad | Assistant Editor | @AshahedM

DETROIT—Eighteen-year-old A'ja Booth suffered from nephrotic syndrome, a kidney disease in which protein leaks out of the kidneys into the body. One of the symptoms is excessive fluid retention causing pain and swelling in the face, arms legs, and feet.

For the last four years, A'ja has hated having to go in for kidney dialysis treatment every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. She would attend her morning classes at Westside Academy High School and then straight from there, navigating heavy traffic and sometimes inclement weather, get to the treatment center. Once at the treatment center, dialysis took four hours, and A'ja's mother Ramona Booth said often it drained much of her daughter's energy.

"It takes a lot out of her, she's tired after, and she can't do some things that other kids do," said Ms. Booth.

The kidneys are a pair of organs located in the abdominal cavity on the left and right side of the spine. The kidneys are a part of the human body's filtering system in removing waste products from the blood and producing urine, which moves from the kidney through the ureter to the bladder, where it remains until elimination. The



Henry Ford Hospital, where Nadirah Muhammad donated her kidney. Photo: Hâroon Rajae

kidneys also produce substances that help control blood pressure levels and regulate red blood cell formation. In dialysis, machines perform functions kidneys would perform if healthy.

A'ja had been waiting for a suitable donor kidney for a year. Her mother said earlier last year, one of her classmates agreed to give her a kidney, but later backed out. They were disappointed, but continued to pray that a suitable donor would be found.

"I guess her mother must have talked her into not doing it because she was young," said Ramona Booth.

A'ja had actually written a children's book titled "My Dialysis Journey" to help guide youth who may be nervous or fearful about the process of kidney dialysis.

"I actually just explained everything in my book for children who just started being sick and the doctor is telling them they're going to be on dialysis soon. I wrote a book for them to actually read, to inspire kids who don't know anything about dialysis that's starting and want to know what it was like, how it feels and what they do," said A'ja.

One day A'ja was at school talking about her book. She did not make a big deal about her kidney problems, however, on this particular day, she was asking her principal and some other teachers about the process of copywriting a publication.



A'ja Booth holding a copy of her unpublished book "A New Beginning."

Nadirah Muhammad, a physical education teacher and health instructor, overheard the conversation and asked if she could read the book. It turns out that Nadirah was already on a bone marrow donor's list, and she did not know that A'ja went to kidney dialysis three days a week. After reading the book, she told the young student she would not mind being tested to see if she could donate one of her kidneys.

"Prior to meeting A'ja, I had put on my license to be an organ donor," said Nadirah, a youthful 39-year-old and standing next to A'ja looks like she could be 18-years-old.

This was in May of 2014.

In order to give a kidney, blood has to match, then there are numerous other tests, urine samples and other exams to ensure that a potential donor is healthy enough to donate.

"Basically the process is to disqualify people based on their health, but all my blood work, all my lab tests came back squeaky clean. I didn't have high blood pressure, diabetes or any health issues whatsoever," said Nadirah. "After I went through the whole process, I went to the hospital about four times. And the last time was where I was there for the whole day going through testing such as psychological testing, and meeting the surgeons. And at the end they said I was an excellent match for A'ja and I should go ahead and proceed if I wanted to."

Nadirah told A'ja's mother about her plans to donate a kidney.

"I was really thankful and I was happy," said A'ja.



"When I actually saw her, we spoke about it and she was very happy and my plan was to have the whole process done and complete by the time school started but things happened and the process was delayed," said Nadirah.

Summer break arrived, and the two fell out of contact. A'ja had changed telephone numbers and Nadirah no longer had her mother's number. When school resumed in the fall, there was discussion of what was to take place in a few months since the operation was scheduled for December.

"What I found out was that due to the HIPPA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) laws, the doctors were not telling her what was going on with me and I didn't know what was going on with her, but I had assumed that they were speaking to her," said Nadirah. "I explained to her what I went through during the summer time and that I agreed to go ahead and do the surgery. She said she thought at one time that I had backed out, because I first told her that the surgery would take place sometime during the summer because that's what her representatives told me would take place."

A'ja was relieved, especially after having a previously promised donor back out.

Nadirah was only nervous one time during the full-day testing process as she spoke with surgeons and was told there was a two or three percent chance of the donor dying.

"I was like ... Wow! I never thought about death so I said should I be doing this—that I could die? So that's the only time I really hesitated when he said that. I was like, Wow! Death? Seriously?"

A'ja's body could also reject the donor kidney, which would result



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—**Nadirah Muhammad**

Photo: Haroon Rajae

in a wasted transplant, and there could also be internal bleeding and blood clotting experienced by Nadirah. The doctor shared the possibility that Nadirah could need a kidney in the future should she develop high blood pressure or diabetes.

"But he said based on my lab report and my health history, if I continue living the way that I was, the risk should be minimum if any," Nadirah said.

Surely, it was adherence to the dietary laws of the Nation of Islam and the teachings of the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad that contributed to Nadirah's clean bill of health, which enabled her to be a suitable donor.

Nadirah is the daughter of Abdullah Muhammad and Muhammad Mosque No. 7 M.G.T. & G.C.C Captain Emeritus Karriemah Muhammad, who now reside in Atlanta. Sister Karriemah assists Mother Khadijah Farrakhan. Karriemah Muhammad said Nadirah has been close to and around the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan since she was a young child. Nadirah said she always remembered seeing him when she was a small young girl in New York and her parents would host the Minister at their home.

Nadirah's surgery took place at Henry Ford Hospital and A'ja's operation took place at the Children's Hospital.

Karriemah Muhammad described a light moment during one of the discussions with the doctor. "One thing that was very comical at the conference when we finished talking to the doctor about the surgery and the doctor said to my daughter, 'you could change your mind up to the point where you are on the table. As long as we haven't given you the anesthesia,

you can change your mind.' He asked, 'Are you still going to be there?' She said, 'I will be there; will you be there?' The doctor chuckled and said she really had a good spirit about this whole thing. I said, 'Yes, she does! Her spirit is much better than mine!'"

When she went back to the school where she taught, Nadirah was overwhelmed by support.

"The teachers, the students—I thought my daughter was a rock star when I went in there!" said Karriemah Muhammad.

In addition to the full support of the members of Muhammad Mosque No.1 in Detroit, the church family at Nadirah's husband's church also provided much needed prayers not only for the kidney donor, but the recipient as well. Lomax Temple AME Zion under the direction of presiding pastor Rev. Brian Relford is the church home of Nadirah's supportive husband of 15 years Durand Shepherd. Nadirah said her 13-year-old son Tariq also showed maturity beyond his years. Rev. Relford said a marvelous prayer the day of the surgery and during visits to the hospital, they prayed and fellowshiped with members of the mosque. They also delivered get-well cards signed by all of the members of the church. Yet another outstanding example of Muslim-Christian unity and cooperation.

"My husband was concerned about my health post-surgery, but he just followed my lead on this aspect after I had told him the pros and cons and that I was confident that things were going to be okay," Nadirah said. "He was there as my support, my rock, him and my son," she added.



A'ja is still recovering after receiving the kidney and having an additional appendectomy a few weeks ago, however, she is moving around much better and is looking and sounding very strong. She is due back to school on March 16. After completing the successful kidney transplant, she also completed another book titled "My New Beginning" and she is looking for publishers. Asked to describe how she feels about her new kidney, and her donor, she quickly blurted out:

"Outstanding! Magnificent! Words cannot express my thanks for what she did," said

A'ja. "She's a nice person; she's going to be blessed for doing what she's doing. She's a kind person. She's not a typical person. She saved my life," A'ja added.

Prior to the kidney transplant, A'ja had many restrictions on what she could and could not eat or drink. She couldn't eat salt, only ate baked foods, and was only able to drink up to a liter of any fluid. This would often leave her feeling thirsty and dehydrated, but not anymore. She was never able to go on vacations or family trips, because of her dialysis schedule, but now she's free to travel and looking forward to it.



All in attendance at Mosque Maryam gave Nadirah Muhammad (far right) a standing ovation for her selfless act in donating one of her kidneys to A'ja Booth, one of her students who was in need. Min. Farrakhan assigned Final Call Assistant Editor Ashahed M. Muhammad (center) to interview Nadirah Muhammad. The Minister said her actions were an example of Muslim and Christian cooperation at a time when globally, people are fighting and killing each other over differing religious beliefs. Photo: Michael Muhammad

A'ja with her best friend Ronessa Hill. Both are heading to college in the fall and both want to become nurses.
Photo: Haroon Rajae



Abdullah Muhammad,
Nadirah Muhammad's father.

A'ja, now a high school senior with a new lease on life, is headed to college in the fall with plans of becoming a nurse.

Her 24-year-old cousin Chafone Patmon was there for the surgery and has been there for the recovery. It had been tough to see A'ja in so much pain prior to the transplant and going through all the stress, but as a Christian, she sees a "special blessing" that her cousin received a suitable kidney from a willing donor.

"I felt like she won the lottery actually," said Ms. Patmon. "It was very exciting. The person that gave her the kidney, it was very brave of her. And me seeing her receive a special blessing was awesome. I was very happy for her. In the beginning you get to thinking like nobody is going to be willing to do that for her; nobody is going to be that brave. But I thought it was an awesome experience for her," she added.

Ms. Patmon was somewhat surprised when she heard the person donating the kidney was a Muslim. Although she had not had any problems with Muslims, she kind of felt that it was somewhat unusual to see Muslims and Christians cooperating. She could see a Muslim giving a kidney to another Muslim; or maybe a Christian giving to another Christian but not necessarily a Christian donating an organ to a Muslim or vice versa. "It shows that even though everybody is not the same, everybody can come together and everybody can also be there for each other. We all shouldn't be against each other all the time because of religion," Ms. Patmon added.

On March 1 during his most recent lecture at the Nation of Islam's international headquarters at Mosque Maryam, Minister Farrakhan called Nadirah's kidney donation "an act of unparalleled love" for her Christian sister. All in attendance at Mosque Maryam gave Sister Nadirah a standing ovation for her selfless act. The Minister said her actions were an example of Muslim and Christian cooperation at a time when globally, people are fighting and killing each other over differing religious beliefs.

"You think that we kill Christians?" asked the Minister. "We love our Christian family. That's our momma, our daddy, our sister, our auntie, our uncle, our cousin, our classmates, our teammates. Did you know Prophet Muhammad never killed Christians just because they were Christians? He never killed Jews because they were Jews," the Minister said.

Nadirah is back to her normal workout regimen, has resumed all of her normal activities, and has experienced no ill effects after donating her organ.

"The magnitude of what I did, I still can't really wrap my head around it because to me it is not a big thing in my eyes. If it was my son, or another family member, I would want somebody to help. What I did was a humanitarian gesture that someone should do if they are able to do it. So the accolades and the adulation, I appreciate it, but I don't feel worthy of all of it, because it is a normal everyday thing that people should do, if they can do it," said the modest Muslim woman.

"I told her to do right with my kidney!" added Nadirah laughing.

(L-R) Nadirah Muhammad, Minister Farrakhan
and her mother Karriemah Muhammad.
Photo: Haroon Rajae

