

# Glenda Daggert – Power Player

When 15-year-old Glenda Daggert was diagnosed with Type I diabetes in the early 1960s, “you hid diabetes.” In spite of her illness, Glenda went on to earn degrees in physical education and instructional technology, then teach for several years. She married Ira Copperman, moved to New York, and joined IBM. After 30 years with the company, Glenda and Ira participate in organ, eye, and tissue donation education, sharing information, answering questions, and presenting at various organizations. They particularly enjoy the enthusiasm of high school students.

Once diagnosed, Glenda kept herself active and strong physically by participating in athletics and continuing to walk a few miles every day. She managed through several complications like retinopathy (vision loss), gastroparesis (stomach paralysis), and severe nose bleeds. However, eight shots a day, 12 blood tests a day, and 2 a.m. alarms to test her blood sugars had become overwhelming. Insulin pens and pumps had not yet come to market.

After almost 40 years with diabetes, she lost the ability to tell when her blood sugar was low, one criterion that made her eligible for a pancreas transplant. Both extremely high and extremely low blood sugars can lead to coma and death. Glenda had also started to lose kidney function, another complication of her diabetes, and was facing dialysis. Although life-saving, dialysis can negatively affect one’s quality of life. The anemia caused by her kidney disease was so bad at times that, unable to hold her head up, Glenda would have to lie down. The kidney diet was many times more restrictive than the diabetic diet. The two-page list excluded some of her favorite foods: bananas, tomatoes, potatoes, mushrooms, oranges, etc. Her skin itched, especially on her back, “the hardest place to reach!” Life had become a struggle. It was hard to maintain that all-important positive attitude.

As dialysis time approached, Glenda and Ira learned about simultaneous kidney-pancreas transplants. They met Dr. David Serur (Weill Cornell Medical Center) and his surgical transplant team: Dr. William Stubenbord (Weill Cornell Medical Center, since retired) for kidney, and **Dr. Milan Kinkhabwala** for pancreas (then *Surgical Director*, Liver and Pancreas Transplant Programs, New York-Presbyterian Hospital, now Head of the Transplant Center at Montefiore Hospital). They decided that transplantation was the best alternative for Glenda. After 14 months on the waiting list, she received both organs from a deceased donor on June 23, 1999.

“I’m so lucky and so grateful for all the doctors and nurses who helped me have such a positive experience. Ira and I will never be able to thank my unknown donor and donor family enough for this amazing gift of life,” says Glenda.

In preparing for surgery Glenda learned self-hypnosis for pain management. “I found someone in the Yellow Pages under ‘Body-Mind Healing Arts.’ He was wonderful and taught me how to get quickly into a calm, relaxed state.” Ira discovered a set of healing tapes, and the surgeons agreed to play them in the operating and recovery rooms. Because her surgery and recovery time were faster than average, she reports, “I was back to work full-time in four weeks—I really believe the mind can help the body heal!”

Post-transplant, Glenda has perfectly normal blood sugars, signaling no diabetes. She has no dietary restrictions except for grapefruit and pomegranate, which is the same for anyone on prescription drugs. “Ira brought me a frosted doughnut while I was in the hospital; that was my one big craving. I’m still not a chocoholic, but bring on those pastries!” She exercises regularly and still watches her diet to maintain an ideal weight.

Glenda considers herself extremely lucky to have few side effects from the [immunosuppressant medications](#) she takes. In fact, she says she gets sick less often and less severely than before the transplant. She loves walking, reading, running, and jumping with her granddaughter, Chloe, and grandson, Seth, as well as her theater dates with Ira, all of which would not have been possible before her transplant. She has passed the 18<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of her transplant and is looking forward to continuing to live a beautifully normal life.

Glenda and Ira volunteer for LiveOnNY, TRIO-Manhattan, and TSO-Westchester, where they both serve on the Board of Directors. “Our mission, our bigger game is to help eliminate that transplant waiting list.”