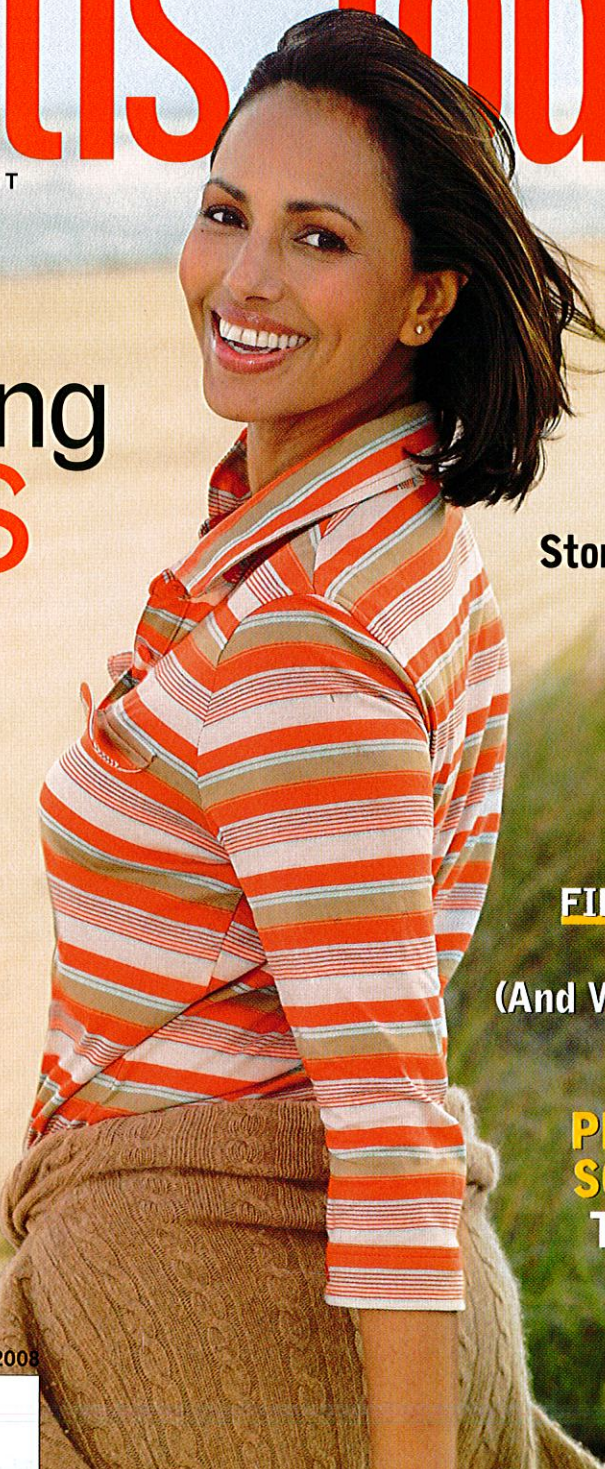


# Arthritis Today



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MARCH-APRIL 2008

# The Gift of a Lifetime

When lupus ravaged his kidneys, she gave him one of hers.

It was the summer of 2005, and Dr. Stefania Gallucci was faced with an impossible decision. Her husband, Dr. Roberto Caricchio, just 39 years old at the time, was experiencing a medical crisis. After 20 years of kidney deterioration brought on by lupus, Roberto was in renal failure. He was on the kidney transplant list, but the typical wait is two to five years, and his health was failing fast. Out of desperation, Stefania decided to see if she possibly could be the donor. Unbelievably, she was found to be a near-perfect match.

Although she wanted more than anything to give Roberto the kidney he needed, she couldn't help but worry when she saw the sweet face of their then 3-year-old son, Tiberio. How would she feel, Stefania wondered, if she gave a kidney to her husband, but then one day their child developed lupus and needed a kidney, too?

Roberto and Stefania were not naive; they knew all too well the potential devastation of lupus – both personally and professionally. As assistant professors in the rheumatology division at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in Philadelphia, they are experts in immunology and lupus. As a couple, they've been living with lupus since they began dating, on Roberto's 19th birthday.

It was that year that Roberto first developed symptoms – fever, fatigue, a rash, hair loss, joint pain and kidney problems. His doctor in his hometown of Velletri, Italy, a small town just south of Rome, was perplexed by his condition. Roberto's uncle, a physician, sent him to the University of Rome, where he was properly diagnosed with lupus and promptly hospitalized for treatment.

It was a point, notes Roberto with lingering amazement, at



ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION  
RESEARCHERS ROBERTO  
CARICCHIO, MD, AND  
STEFANIA GALLUCCI, MD

for our future,” says Stefania. “All I knew was that we loved each other and had our whole lives in front of us.”

Each always had dreamed of becoming a physician. Roberto’s experience with lupus drew him to the field, and Stefania’s interest in autoimmunity eventually brought her to lupus research, too. The two came to the U.S. in 1996 and, shortly after, Roberto received funding from the Arthritis Foundation for a postdoctoral fellowship to study lupus.

Throughout the years, medication enabled him to keep his symptoms under control, with the occasional flare. But Roberto never went into full remission, and lupus took a toll on his kidneys. By June 2005, extraordinarily weakened, he went on the transplant waiting list.

“In many ways, I was just melting away,” Roberto recalls.

Stefania wrestled with the decision for two months. Eventually, she realized that giving her husband one of her kidneys was the best choice for the whole family. “Had I not helped Roberto, I would have denied my son a healthy father,” she says.

The surgeries took place that December, and both spouses recovered well. Roberto, however, doesn’t take the gift from his wife for granted: “I had to go through what I had to go through, but she didn’t. Her decision was based on extraordinary generosity and love.”

Roberto now has returned – with full energy – to his family and his passion for research. “From a scientific point of view, lupus is a fascinating disease and very challenging to treat,” he says.

For her part, Stefania has no regrets: “The fact that Roberto feels well and is strong gives him the chance to be the best husband and father he can be.”

—FRAN M. PUTNEY

# Jacob & Me

“Fibromyalgia and postpartum depression stopped me in my tracks. But discovering that my son, Jacob, had autism brought me to my knees.”

“I told myself, ‘You either can run and hide, or embrace your challenges and learn from them.’ I didn’t have time to feel sorry for myself and knew that it was critical to be prepared for anything.

Realizing that I needed to become stronger, both on the inside and the outside, I developed life strategies to get healthy and fit. I call it ‘purposeful living,’ and it involves three things:

**EATING RIGHT:** When I discovered that Jacob was gluten-intolerant, I went gluten-free, too. But I wanted to do more for myself, so I began adding flaxseed and cod liver oil to my food. Soon, I began craving food that was good for me! Plus, I had a huge boost in energy and have lost 20 pounds.

**EXERCISING:** Tapping my newfound energy, I became a certified instructor for the Arthritis Foundation’s Aquatic, Exercise and Self-Help Programs, as well as a Pilates instructor and trainer. Pilates made me stronger and taught me how to align my body correctly. It’s a tremendous help when Jacob has violent tantrums. Now I have



**REFLECTING:** Each day I take time out to sit quietly and think about my life and Jacob’s. I believe life is a spiritual journey, and my success is built upon the foundation of pausing to reflect