When both her son and husband were diagnosed with kidney failure, Mdm Ong Kim Kee, 59, thought that it was the end of the world. But she managed to find inner strength to forge on for the sake of her loved ones.

In celebration of Mother’s Day, we pay tribute to all mothers by sharing with you a story of a woman who sacrificed everything for her sick husband and son.

*Story on page 2*
On Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings, Mdm Ong Kim Kee wheels her 39-year old son, Mr Chia Peng Hong, to the dialysis centre together with her husband, Mr Chia Choon Hua, 65. While father and son undergo dialysis for the next five hours, she returns home to do the chores and cook lunch before trudging back to the dialysis centre to take them home.

On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, she sends her son to the polyclinic to clean and dress his amputation wounds. Two of his toes have been amputated due to diabetes, and he has difficulty walking.

This is the sort of life that Mdm Ong has come to know ever since both her husband and son were struck with kidney failure.

Double Blow
Both Chias were diagnosed with end-stage renal disease in mid-2008 and started dialysis only a month apart from each other. Both had suffered from diabetes and high blood pressure from an early age, but the elder Mr Chia had managed to stave off the worst of it by controlling his diet strictly. Unfortunately, his son Peng Hong was not as disciplined. He indulged in soft drinks and durians – his favourite foods – despite stern warnings from Mdm Ong.

The imprudent eating habits took a heavy toll on his body. Five years ago, Peng Hong lost the use of his right eye, most of the vision in his left, and also his last job as a warehouse assistant. His wife divorced him, and he moved back to live with his parents. He lost everything he had in an instant.

Darkest Moments
“One day, I called home from the coffeeshop where I worked, but there was no answer. I knew immediately that something was wrong, so I rushed home and found him lying unconscious in the toilet. I rushed him to the hospital”.

Peng Hong’s doctor had to perform an emergency procedure to start peritoneal dialysis on him, or he would have died. After that, he had to start dialysis immediately at a private clinic.

This was just a month after his father had gone to the doctor’s, complaining about severe, debilitating back pains, and was diagnosed with kidney failure.

For the first two months, they dialysed at a private dialysis clinic. The dialysis fees, surgery and cost of medication were exorbitant, Mdm Ong recalled, “In just over two months, I used up almost $20,000. My savings were gone. I pawned my dowry, my jewellery, everything. There was nothing left.”

Receiving Affordable Dialysis
NKF stepped in to help. Father and son now receive full dialysis and medication subsidies from NKF. They also receive rice, beehoon, cooking oil and $120 worth of supermarket vouchers every two months, delivered by NKF volunteers under the NKF’s Grains of Hope programme.

“If NKF had not helped me, no matter how strong I am, I would not have been able to go on like this,” said Mdm Ong.

Mdm Ong makes $800 a month as a dishwasher at a coffeeshop. She also goes around the neighbourhood collecting empty drink cans to sell to earn a few extra dollars a week.

Unforeseeable Future
The pressure she feels is, understandably, immense. When asked what would happen to Mr Chia and Peng Hong if she were no longer around one day, she refused to consider the possibility.

“I can’t think about that. I try to be strong for them, and I tell them that they have to learn to be independent somehow. They are unable to take care of themselves at this point. Even when I am sick, I don’t go to see the doctor. I don’t have the money to waste. I have to make myself go on so I can take care of them.”

Mdm Ong is a mother who has given everything for her family, yet continues to unflaggingly give more. She is an example of the unconditional love that, perhaps, only a mother can give, selflessly, instinctively and forever.
Donors Rally to Contribute to NKF Charity Dinner

Receiving strong support from various individuals and organisations, the NKF Charity Dinner raised $1 million in aid of needy kidney patients. This “no frills” event, held at the Orchard Country Club on 15 April, was graced by President S R Nathan and the First Lady.

The funds were raised through the sale of 100 tables, outright donations and the auction of President Nathan’s calligraphy piece and personal brush set during the event. All table sales were sold out one month before the event.

This is by far the clearest indication that NKF’s continuous efforts to be cost-efficient in operations, as well as, be transparent and accountable to its donors and the public, have borne fruit. This is the first time that the new NKF had organised a major fundraising event.

President Nathan showed his support by doing a Chinese calligraphy piece on stage during the charity dinner. He wrote the words “仁爱”, which means ‘Benevolence’, to symbolise the love, compassion, charity and humanity that donors, volunteers and supporters have shown to kidney patients over the years.

The calligraphy piece was auctioned together with the President’s personal brush set, which he has been using for calligraphy writing. This is the first time President Nathan had offered his personal brush set, together with his calligraphy, to be auctioned for charity.

Five Chinese temples – Loyang Tua Pek Kong, The Singapore Buddhist Lodge, Lorong Koo Chye Sheng Siong Temple Association, Amitabha Buddhist Society (Singapore) and Thong Teck Sian Tong Lim Sin Sia – joined hands to successfully bid $110,000 for President Nathan’s calligraphy piece and personal brush set. The five temples then topped up the donations received through this event with another $80,000 to achieve $1 million. As a further act of compassion, they donated these precious items back to the NKF.

President Nathan was presented with a picture called “The Tree of Hope” by NKF, which symbolises the love and support of the community for kidney patients. The tree trunk is in the shape of two hands supporting 24 heart-shaped thumbprints of patients, which represent NKF’s 24 dialysis centres.

Besides donations, other organisations offered their services. The WuDang Sheng Hong Health Preservation Centre staged a Tai Chi performance, while Paya Lebar Methodist Girls’ School (Secondary) put up a collection of cultural performances.

NKF needs around $53 million a year to support various highly subsidised programmes for kidney patients, while patient numbers and operating costs continue to rise every year as more and more patients join the NKF.

The ageing patient population is yet another pressing concern as older kidney patients tend to have medical complications or other chronic diseases such as heart problems. This results in the need for highly specialised care for these elderly patients, further contributing to the increasing costs.

Said NKF’s CEO Mrs Eunice Tay, “We hope that the public will continue to show more support for these kidney patients. We are doing our best to provide them, not just with dialysis care, but also with the hope to carry on through our psycho-social support programmes.”

Our appreciation to the following sponsors:

LEE FOUNDATION
A midst rising inflation, the National Kidney Foundation, with the support of Singapore Buddhist Lodge, has extended more help to the neediest kidney patients by providing a total of $200,000 worth of basic food necessities yearly.

386 NKF patients are each currently receiving a $60 food voucher, 5 kg of rice, 3 kg of bee hoon and 2 litres of cooking oil once in two months. Of these, 320 patients or about 83% of them have zero per capita income. 148 patients are 60 years old and above with about 42% of these elderly patients having no children to support them.

NKF announced this new programme called Grains of Hope on 5 April in conjunction with its 42nd anniversary celebration.

Rice has a lot of nutrients and is the staple food of Asians. Much of our population consumes rice at every meal. It is the most important commodity in our daily lives. Every grain counts. Hence, the name Grains of Hope because it is in line with NKF’s mission of giving life and hope to poor patients.

Said NKF’s chairman Gerard Ee, “Providing medical subsidies for these patients may not be enough. They need help with basic food provisions for their nutritional needs which is just as important as getting good dialysis. The holistic approach in meeting their medical, psycho-social and economic needs is an integral part of NKF’s treatment programme to ensure optimal rehabilitation.”

Apart from this, NKF also provides transport subsidies for patients such as amputees who have to travel to and from the dialysis centres by taxi or ambulance. Singapore Buddhist Lodge has also been donating to NKF to help defray the bus and train expenses of poor patients when they travel to the dialysis centres for treatment.

That is why NKF continuously seeks out the poorest of the poor and steps up its efforts to help them cope with rising inflationary costs by looking into their overall welfare.

NKF mobilised some 400 volunteers to work in pairs to help distribute the bulky food items to the patients’ homes. While visiting patients’ homes, it is also an opportunity for these volunteers to build friendships with patients and their families and to bring hope and encouragement to them.
High Blood Pressure and Kidney Failure

The kidneys play a key role in keeping a person’s blood pressure in a healthy range, and blood pressure, in turn, can affect the health of the kidneys. High blood pressure, also called hypertension, can damage the kidneys.

How does high blood pressure hurt the kidneys?

High blood pressure makes the heart work harder and, over time, can damage blood vessels throughout the body. If the blood vessels in the kidneys are damaged, they may stop removing waste and extra fluid from the body. The extra fluid in the blood vessels may then raise blood pressure even more. It’s a dangerous cycle. High blood pressure is one of the leading causes of kidney failure, also called end stage renal disease (ESRD). People with kidney failure must either receive a kidney transplant or have regular blood-cleansing treatments called dialysis.

How can blood pressure be controlled?

People with prehypertension or high blood pressure should:

- maintain their weight at a level close to normal.
- eat fresh fruits and vegetables, grains, and low-fat dairy foods.
- limit their daily salt or sodium intake to 2,000 milligrams.

They should limit frozen foods and trips to fast food restaurants. They should read nutrition labels on packaged foods to learn how much sodium is in one serving. Keeping a sodium diary can help monitor sodium intake.

- get plenty of exercise – at least 30 minutes of moderate activity such as walking, cycling, or swimming daily.
- avoid consuming too much alcohol. Men should have no more than two drinks—two 350ml servings of beer or two 150ml servings of wine or two 45ml servings of hard liquor—a day. Women should have no more than a single serving a day because differences in the way foods are broken down in the body make women more sensitive to the effects of alcohol.

Facts in Singapore

Incidence of Kidney Failure
- The number of new kidney failure patients has nearly doubled from 680 in 1999 to 1,212 in 2008.

Hypertension
- 500,000 people suffering from hypertension
- 38.5% of Singaporeans who had hypertension had not been previously diagnosed
- It can lead to kidney failure, stroke and heart failure

Source: National Health Survey 2004 and Renal Registry 2006
Early detection is the key to better treatment results for kidney diseases, as well as, reducing the growing number of these diseases globally and in Singapore.

In conjunction with World Kidney Day 2011, NKF, Singapore Society of Nephrology and Singapore Nurses Association co-organised a symposium with the theme, “Protect Your Kidneys, Save Your Heart”.

Held specially for non-renal nurses on 13 March 2011 at the NKF Centre, the symposium helped them to better manage the condition of their patients. It covered topics on kidney diseases and how they can lead to heart disease.

A total of 234 nurses from NKF, the Restructured Hospitals and other healthcare institutions attended the symposium.

How often have you heard someone say, “I'm not free to cook for my family as I don’t have the time!” or “I know I need to eat healthier but I just can’t cook up a healthy dish as it is too much work!”

The NKF is embarking on a project, the 4-ingredients recipe calendar 2012, aimed at providing “at-home chefs” with tips on preparing quick, delicious and nutritious meals without hassle.

Currently, surveys have shown that Singaporeans are eating out more often than ever, and the bad news is that even so called healthier hawker food is not really that healthy. From yong tau foo to soup noodles, many quick meals have too much salt, or are high in calories and low in fibre.

As such, these recipes aim to encourage people to cook easy-to-prepare and affordable meals that are healthy and nutritious. Not only that, these 4-ingredients meals usually cost less than eating out, enabling people to save money. They can also share these simple, yet healthy recipes with their family and friends.

We invite you to share your 4-ingredients recipes with us. Preparation time for a recipe should not be more than 20 minutes. Readers whose recipes are selected will be featured in the NKF Recipe Calendar 2012 and you will be given a token of appreciation. Recipes should be authentically yours or one that has been handed down by a family member, relative or friend.

Kindly submit your recipes using the form on the left and send by post to:

NKF (Corporate Affairs Department),
81 Kim Keat Road, S (328836) or email to: comms@nkfs.org by 15 July 2011.

Please note that condiments (sauces, seasonings and herbs) are NOT considered as an ingredient.
Your Views Matter

To serve you better, we invite you to complete this Feedback Form on our newsletter and send it back in the enclosed Business Reply Envelope. Thank you for your support.

Name: _________________________________  NRIC/FIN/UEN: ______________________________

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1) After reading the newsletter, do you think that your donations to the NKF have made an impact?

□ Yes  □ No

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□ Entertainment  □ Arts and Design

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Your Views Matter

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