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Finding a Kidney Donor on Facebook

When Cathy Schroeder saw on Facebook that a friend of a friend — a woman she had never met — needed a kidney, she didn't immediately think that she'd be the one who would donate it.



But the fact that the woman's plight was important to a mutual friend prompted Ms. Schroeder to read more about her. And a few months later, in late 2008, Ms. Schroeder donated her kidney to a New York woman named Beth Abramowitz.

Ms. Schroeder is profiled in "[Facebook Fairytales](#)," a new book by Emily Liebert. The book and Ms. Schroeder's story in particular show how social networking is changing the way people interact.

"Even if you're not directly connected to the person, you feel connected to them through someone else," said Ms. Liebert, whose book also details stories from people who found a child to adopt through Facebook and a father who continued posting messages on his daughter's Facebook page after her death.

Ms. Liebert also said she found that people view Facebook as a safe space because of the way they use the site. "For a lot of people, it's a place that they go to kind of take time out for the stressors of the day," she said. "I guess for that reason maybe they're in a better mood. They're on there connecting with friends and seeing photos."

Giving a kidney to an acquaintance or even a stranger isn't unheard of. There were 141 anonymous kidney donations and 1,311 donations to non-relatives in 2009, and the numbers are increasing, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

And Ms. Abramowitz isn't the only person to find a kidney donor through social networking. A man named John Burge in Iowa got a kidney in December after his son posted a note on Facebook and got a response from a friend, the [local ABC station reported](#). A 71-year-old woman in Ohio heard from her eventual kidney donor 20 minutes after her daughter posted a request on Facebook, according to [the Dayton Daily News](#). And [Scott Pakudaitis donated a kidney](#) to what he calls a "distant" acquaintance after seeing the man's posts on Twitter.

Social networks provide cues that can make people more likely to consider donating. In addition to finding people more trustworthy because they've been vouched for by mutual friends, people using social networks tend to see the experience as very personal even if the actual audience involves hundreds of people, said Judith Donath, a fellow at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society who studies social computing. "You go from thinking, 'There are tens of thousands of people who need kidneys, and I can't help them all, so I'm not going to do anything ... to something that is personalized and has meaning to you,'" she said.

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