

Stephanie Riggs Speaks Candidly with **Steven Farber**

No one is that powerful, influential or rich, when it comes right down to it. You might say Denver's top power broker, attorney Steve Farber, wrote the book on the subject. He has been on the "A" list for as long as anyone in this town can remember, the man behind the deals involving the Denver Nuggets, Colorado Avalanche and so much more. But none of that really mattered when he found himself on a list no one wants to be on. It's the genesis of his best-seller, *On The List: Fixing America's Failing Health Care System*. Farber describes a roller coaster ride that only his family and closest friends knew, until now. This is the private side of Steve Farber, and as he shared his heartache and victory with Stephanie Riggs and explained why he wrote *On The List*; he said he didn't have a choice, it was a matter of life and death.



Riggs: Full disclosure as you attorneys like to say, I've known you for years and your wife has always been so gracious and loving to me. I heard you were sick, but until I read your book, I had no idea just how sick you really were and how close to death you came because of your kidney failure.

Farber: This really does bring you to reality. Most people don't know, I had a kidney disease when I was 18 months old. And it was miracle I survived it. My mother brought me to the Mayo Clinic, and after a couple months the Mayo Clinic sent a letter to Children's Hospital in Denver, explaining why there was very little hope for me. There was one experimental treatment that they thought would work and they tried it. It was 1946, and they had put a baby in a measles ward and the baby got measles and it kicked the kidneys into functioning. So they put me in the measles ward at 18 months old and my mother dropped me off and just said, take care of him. Three weeks later I got the measles, I swallowed food chewed by kids with measles and it worked, my kidneys started working. I will never forget when my mother told me that there was a reason God let you live and you better figure it out and make this world a better place.

Riggs: Have you figured it out?

Farber: (Laughs) No, I am still trying to figure it out. I am still thinking of all the things I should be doing.

Riggs: So the treatment worked, because you ended up living a really active, full, healthy life until when?

Farber: I did, played basketball and tennis all the time and never really thought about it. When I tried to get insurance starting out as a young lawyer, the insurance people denied me because they believed I only had 10 to 15 years to live. They were wrong and I never felt badly at all. But I went for a physical when I turned 60. After the test the doctors said we have some real problems. They

told me my kidneys were only functioning at about 25 percent. They explained how I needed dialysis, a transplant or both. It was a rude awakening but I have always had deep-rooted thoughts that this would come back. But it was 58 years ago, I was a baby and kind of forgot about it. Now I was faced with it again as a man.

Riggs: So what did you do?

Farber: I took my three sons to Vegas and I told them I have some problems. I am going to need a kidney and I am going on dialysis or both, not yet sure what I am going to do. But I want you three to know about this situation because I haven't told anyone about it, including your mother. My wife had been through so much with the loss of her mother. But I told them take care of her, if I don't make it. They were very encouraging and told me I would make it. We had a great time. Got back and about three weeks later, my oldest son called and said, "guess what Dad, I went and got checked and I am a perfect match." They test for a match by antigens, first blood, then they do it by antigens, Greg's six antigens were identical to mine.

Riggs: You were so relieved?

Farber: No, because I didn't want my son to go through it. But after I explored all my alternatives, which is why I wrote the book, I ended up taking one of my son's kidney's. And I urge everyone reading this to be a donor. It's as easy as checking it off on your driver's license. The alternatives are scarier than the illness. Read the book! This whole journey inspired me to start the American Transplant Foundation with Heidi Heltze and Dr. Laurence Chan. It's unique, because it does not just focus on particular organs like kidneys or hearts or livers. My hope is this foundation will go beyond organ donor awareness to tackle the tough policy issues that must be solved to eliminate the gap between the need for organs and their supply. We have our third-annual Team Transplant, The Foundation's charity cycling team that rides in the Subaru Elephant Rock Ride in Castle Rock on June 5 of this year. Go to www.americantransplantfoundation.org to learn more.

Riggs: How long as it been since your son saved your life?

Farber: Seven years.

Riggs: How did Greg do?

Farber: Great.

Riggs: And did you feel better right away?

Farber: I started walking about a quarter of a mile every day right when I got home from the hospital. But I had worked out every day prior to the transplant, I played tennis twice a week, rode a bike four miles a day. So it was easy to continue to walk and then a couple of months later, I was going back to the office for a few hours a day.

Riggs: Would you share one piece of advice from your extraordinary life and experience?

Farber: Everything is a possibility in your life, people just give up too easy. They didn't get the job, so they give up. I have had an interesting road. I grew up on the other side of the tracks, so I learned to take the things that happen as a challenge and never give up. Successes are just failures that refused to quit. I'm not going anywhere until I do what my mother said and figure out how to leave this world a better place. ☺

Stephanie Riggs is a veteran, award-winning journalist, has contributed to CBS Sunday Morning, and 48 Hours. She hosts Denver's Movers and Shakers on Vista TV Denver, a local lifestyle TV show on Comcast's Channel 19 M-F at 7 p.m. Sat/Sun at 9:30 a.m. or watch online at www.vistatvdenver.com. She also hosts her own call-in radio show M-F at 2 p.m. on 94.7 FM KRKS or listen online at www.krks.com or Divine Calling with Stephanie Riggs Facebook for podcasts. Stephanie is also a regular contributor to ColoradoView Magazine. She also blogs for CBS4 News about the best of Denver.