

10 (or so) questions with ... Jeff Kallis,

founder of [KidneyCouch.com](https://www.kidneycouch.com), a “a supportive and informative space for kidney cancer patients”

BY STEVE LANGE

Rochester Magazine: When I asked you to do this interview, you asked if KidneyCouch could be on the cover of the magazine, complete with the logo. Does that mindset come from your years in administration at Mayo Clinic?

Jeff Kallis [laughing]: Yes. Yes, it does.

RM: Tell me about November 24th of 2022.

JK: I was on a trip in D.C. with my wife, and I started to feel this sharp pain in the lower flank on the left side of my body. ... I ended up having a kidney stone on the left side, which is what was causing me the pain. And on the right hand side, the surprise was that they found a five centimeter mass.

RM: So the pain and the discovery of the mass weren't connected?

JK: Totally, totally unrelated.

RM: So the kidney stone saved your life?

JK: It did. And it deserves to be an issue. Part of the story, honestly. That kidney stone deserves to be in a shrine. I would have kept it, but they wouldn't let me.

RM: So the pathology for your kidney cancer was stage three, which I assume is pretty bad.

JK: It's up there. It's in the intermediate/high bad. It's one level below the worst case scenario.

RM: And you're a data guy. Did you dive into the data?

JK: I love data. I love analyzing data. And for me, it was a stress relief to know what I was dealing with. And when I was talking with my urologist, he was very open, very candid. But yet, they don't tell you everything. I just started digging into all this information, and I started to write things down. So I ended up writing a book ["One Kidney: Dealing With Kidney Cancer"].

RM: Tell me about [KidneyCouch.com](https://www.kidneycouch.com).

JK: [KidneyCouch.com](https://www.kidneycouch.com) is an online library that I founded that exists as a central location to go to learn about kidney cancer and chronic kidney disease.

RM: It's a great site, especially people sharing these unbelievably moving stories of getting that terrifying diagnosis to realizing, hey, this can be okay.

JK: It means a lot. It's very rewarding.

RM: You've written a few other books, including "Puppy Talk: Conversations Between Grandpa and His Son's Puppy."

JK: I was always having these conversations with my son's puppy, Remi. And I thought, this is borderline hysterical. I should just write a book of our conversations. That was my first Amazon book.

RM: Then, in 2023, you wrote "Twin Votes: Close But Far Apart," a "light-hearted look at whether twins share a gene that determines which political party they support." But you found that's not the case with you and your sister.

JK: My sister and I vote totally opposite.

RM: What do these people have in common? You, Kathy Erickson, Jean Fellows, Susan Ladsten, Jack Vatland ...

JK: My high school classmates.

RM: Specifically, members of the Mabel-Canton High School National Honor Society, 1979.

JK: How did you find that?

RM: This one's easier ... Jeff Tri, Jodi Miller-Hammes, Todd Cordes, Lori Mickelson, Andrew Stehr ...

JK: That was the Leadership Greater Rochester Class of 2003.



RM: Yes. Tell me about your kids.

JK: My wife Cindy and I have three sons. Caleb is at home with us. He's our special needs boy. He's our oldest. Works at Anytime Fitness. Christopher's our middle son and works at Mayo Clinic. Matthew, our youngest, is finishing school for Active PT.

RM: Is Cindy retired as well?

JK: Not yet, probably in a couple of years.

RM: How is that, with only one of you retired?

JK: It's wonderful. Not just for me. She says the same thing.

RM: And you golf?

JK: I love to golf. I'm not a great golfer, but I love to golf with my boys. We usually go to Hadley Creek.

RM: How did you get your start at Mayo?

JK: I started as a doorman at the Mayo Building. That was my first job after high school. I worked part time and went to school at RCTC—it was RCC then—and Winona State in the two-plus-two program.

RM: Has kidney cancer changed your mindset about life in a positive or negative way?

JK: A little bit of both. It's added a little bit of pessimism and the anger issues that come with the "I've done everything right and then why does this happen?" questions. On the other hand, you realize the old cliché about living life to the fullest is true. I mean, you've got to live your life. You've got to live in a positive way, because I can tell you one thing, negative stress is only going to make your life worse.

RM: So you can use that to go golfing as much as you want.

JK: Absolutely. And my wife agrees.