

A full-page photograph of Harold Baines, a bald Black man with a mustache, smiling. He is wearing a white polo shirt with thin horizontal stripes and dark trousers. He is holding a golf club in his right hand. The background is a lush green golf course with trees in the distance under a clear sky.

HAROLD BAINES

“HUMBLE HERO TO HUMBLE RECIPIENT”

by: Delaney Cha

Harold Baines has been called many things: Athlete, Hall-of-Fame Baseball Superstar, Hero, Golfer, Friend, Husband, Dad, and Grandpa. But a new set of words can be used to describe him: Organ Donor Recipient.

Born in Easton in 1959, Harold grew up in St. Michaels on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Throughout his childhood, he was very involved with sports, specifically baseball. He was eventually selected as a first-round draft pick for the 1977 Amateur draft to play for the Chicago White Sox.

Harold played 22 years in the MLB scoring multiple home runs and had multiple knee surgeries throughout his career. He was voted into the MLB Hall of Fame in 2019 and was inducted later that year. He has also been an avid supporter of the Tour on the Shore Golf Tournaments and hosted many tournaments himself to support charities and scholarships he started.

About seven years ago, Harold was tested for Amyloidosis, a rare disease that occurs when the protein amyloid builds up in organs. His father had the disease and Harold inherited it from him.

“I was diagnosed with Amyloidosis, a disease that my father had. He found out he had it when he was 78. I got tested about five years before my surgery and I had low dosages of amyloids so I wasn’t concerned. In 2019, I started to develop some swelling so I had vein surgery thinking that it was my veins. The doctors told me it wasn’t my veins and that it was my heart.”

“So I went to see Dr. Jeff (Etherton) [a cardiologist in Easton]. He recommended that I go to the University of Maryland to get some tests. They ran tests and it came back that I had higher dosages this time. I still did day-to-day stuff, like it was normal.



"In January 2020, I went to Chicago to do a White Sox fan meet up and I saw one of the team doctors and he referred me to another doctor who did more tests. He found that I had about ten pounds of fluid on me at the time that I didn't know I had. I came back and Dr. Jeff kept treating me and then referred me to someone at Johns Hopkins who continued to keep an eye on me.

"Over time my creatinine kept going up. I went on a trip with my wife and the doctor called me. I needed to be in the hospital by Sunday. I was in the hospital for three and a half months. It was really tough. Only my wife could visit me. I couldn't see my kids. It was a long drive back and forth every day from Baltimore to Easton, but she did it every day. We made the best of it. It was out of my control so I trusted the process."

"My wife brought pictures of all of my grandchildren and put them on the wall I stared at to brighten up the wall. There were dark moments, but I think my baseball background helped me with the mentality to just trust the process. I trusted my doctors."

In May 2021, Harold underwent a heart transplant surgery and a kidney transplant surgery. The organs came from the same person.

"My doctors were waiting for the right donor to come along and it did. It was a longer process than they were expecting but it happened. I am very thankful and very blessed."

Before going into the hospital, Harold said his symptoms were quite mild.

"It was mainly when I was working out. Sometimes my legs would feel heavy and that would be from the excess fluid buildup. I had no breathing issues. The amyloidosis added a buildup of proteins to the walls of my heart and it thickened and slowed it down over time. I think the stress of that put stress on my kidneys as well."

While kidney recipients can receive a kidney from a living donor, every other organ (with the exception of the liver) must come from a deceased person who is listed as a donor.

"It was difficult to find a donor to match me because of my size and my O-positive blood. The doctors also said that because of Covid, people aren't doing crazy things like they used to do. I couldn't complain though. Every day they would say 'You're on a list'. I think I got up to eight which was the highest I ever got. The doctors then told me that I needed to be put on a machine to help my heart. I was on that machine for six days. I couldn't move out of the bed."

"I got my heart and kidney after six days on the machine. The procedures were done five hours apart. Technically they were different days. I went it at 9 or 10 pm for the heart then they waited to make sure the heart was good. Five hours later, they did the kidney."

"I ended up staying in the hospital for another few weeks so the doctors could keep an eye on me. I was discharged from the hospital on Father's Day. All of my kids and grandkids were waiting for me outside."

"The two-year anniversary is May 20th. I'm very thankful to my donor and their family."

Harold has been a legend in the Eastern Shore Community for years, often giving back to high school students with scholarships. Known as the "Humble Hero", Harold needed a hero himself, one that came at great cost and sacrifice, to help save him.