

**Advance Directives:
Making Your Wishes Known – Organ/Tissue
Donation**

Mary Nachreiner, Mother of an Organ Donor

Our family's always been advocates for organ and tissue donation. But it became very personal when our 16-year-old daughter Kelly was involved in a car accident. And six days later she lost her life to that accident.

And what was so incredibly important to us was the fact that she made that decision four weeks prior to her accident at the DMV. And when that question came up she looked at me and I looked at her and I said 'Well what do you think?' Then she said very simply, 'Well, Mom of course. Why wouldn't I?'

Narrator

Today, as Mary Nachreiner plays with her grandsons, children of her two older daughters, the legacy of Kelly's gift seems ever more personal. That decision to place an organ donor sticker on her very first driver's license saved the lives of three other people.

Mary Nachreiner, Mother of an Organ Donor

One ray of sunshine at some really, really, dark time of our life. Rather than simply being consumed with loss and grief, it gave us the opportunity to focus on life and life for others. And the fact that Kelly's memory lives on.

Dr. Michael Zimmerman, Transplant Surgeon

On average about 22 people a day will die waiting for a transplant. So, it literally is a life and death situation for many, many people.

Narrator

Dr. Michael Zimmerman has been performing heart transplants for years. He has shared families' euphoria after a successful transplant, as well as the heartbreak of waiting for an organ donation that never comes.

Dr. Michael Zimmerman, Transplant Surgeon

These people are in the hospital many times for an extended period of time. We get to know them and their families very well. So, it can be very difficult.

Narrator

Mark Curran was one of the lucky ones. A heart attack so badly damaged his heart that transplant was his only real option. When he and his wife, Lynn got the call that a donor had been found, they raced to the hospital.

Lynn Curran, Spouse of Transplant Recipient

Literally in the car I looked at him and said we are driving to get you a new heart. It was surreal. You just until you're looking at it you can't imagine it but it was the most wonderful, scary thing ever.

Mark Curran, Heart Transplant Recipient

It's something I do think about every day. You know you would think at some point it would just become part of you. But there's not a day goes by that I don't think about it and talk to people about it.

Narrator

Mark's donor was a young man who died suddenly. In their grief, the donor's family gave Mark and his family, as well as 4 others, a second chance at life.

Mark Curran, Heart Transplant Recipient

There were five people that were beneficiaries of his generosity. And it was surreal to be able to meet the family as well.

Narrator

A few months after donor Mikey's death, his family agreed to meet the recipients of his organs. The meeting included one particularly moving moment.

Mark Curran, Heart Transplant Recipient

We've got a picture of his sister and his mother listening to Mikey's heart in my chest with a stethoscope and it's like I almost broke into tears when, when we did that. It was, it was, I can't even describe. It's not describable.

Narrator

Mark's donor had not designated himself as an organ donor. Estate planners say making those wishes known, in writing, can save your family a lot of grief at a very difficult time.

Eido Walny, Estate Planning Attorney

The health care powers of attorney or advanced directives will give you an opportunity to give a lot more guidance to name the person within your family or friendships circle that's going to be the ultimate decision maker for those organ donations.

Narrator

Attorney Eido Walny says how to sign up as an organ, eye or tissue donor can vary state by state. He recommends starting with a simple internet search, to see what your state offers or visiting the national Donate Life registration site.

Dr. Michael Zimmerman, Transplant Surgeon

I think if you're interested in organ donation please educate yourself. There are many, many health professionals and institutions that will also help educate you as well. But anybody can potentially be an organ donor.

Narrator

Mary Nachreiner is grateful that her Kelly made that choice.

Mary Nachreiner, Mother of an Organ Donor

It was very much her gift to her grieving family that she had made that decision, and we didn't need to.

Mark Curran, Heart Transplant Recipient

I think people don't realize how important it is and how much of an impact it can have. So, to get them to think about it more actively I guess is the right word. And to be part of it.

Lynn Curran, Spouse of Transplant Recipient

Give. Give. Give. It is the greatest gift the absolute greatest gift to know that you can live on for many, many, many, many, many years.