



Pictured, Kathy Schmelzle

In 2005, Kathy Schmelzle died tragically at age 18 in a motorcycle/tractor crash just a half-mile from her home. She became a hero as a tissue donor, enhancing the lives of many others through her gifts.

Two years earlier, as a high school sophomore, Kathy had an assignment to write and deliver a persuasive speech. Her first act of persuasion was convincing her teacher to allow her speech to focus on the topic of organ and tissue donation, which the teacher initially thought was too controversial. Kathy wanted to talk about donation, which became important to her following her Uncle Wally's death earlier in 2003. Below is a copy of Kathy's speech in its entirety.

Written by Kathy Schmelzle April 2003

Be a Donor

Recently, my uncle Wally died very unexpectedly. He was the type of person that never showed emotion to something negative that bothered him. My mom has said several times, "He was the wealthiest man with friends, but he just didn't know it." I have heard this numerous times within the past month and a half. His death made my family and I understand what is meant by the expression, "It took my breath away." With his death, over 50 different people were helped. How was this possible you may ask? It was possible because my mother made the decision of donating Wally's organs. She donated everything she could so that something good could come out of the tragedy. Among the organs she had donated were, bone and connective tissue, blood vessels, skin, and the corneas of both eyes.

People die every day, sometimes very unexpectedly. Have you ever thought about being an organ donor? Personally, I have thought of this quite a bit, lately. There are so many people; parents, grandparents, and children who wait on a list for months, maybe years, to receive a donated organ so that they can live. According to the State Government News, more than 56,000 people are waiting on this list for a healthy lung, heart, kidney, or other organs. Also, according to the same source, each year 4,000 people waiting on these lists die because there are not enough organs donated. This figure was given in 1998 and the list keeps getting larger and larger. According to the National Kidney Foundation, nearly 3,000 people are added to the list each month!

According to the National Kidney Foundation, 10,000 to 14,000 people die each year who would have met the criteria for an organ donor. The sad thing is that less than half of these people are willing to donate, or haven't taken the time to think of it. Throughout this speech, I plan to persuade you to, at least, think about becoming an organ donor. I will explain the benefits of becoming a donor, how the organs are used to help others, and how you can become a donor.

First of all, there are benefits of becoming an organ or tissue donor. The strongest benefit of being an organ donor is the fact that people's lives can be saved with the donations. Just think, you could help over 50 people like my uncle did. Yes, his death was unexpected, but in my opinion everyone should have the chance to live like everyone else. No matter if they are sick. Some children are born with an illness and never have the chance to live a normal life because of the shortage of organ donors. These children may not be able to experience going on their first date, playing football or basketball for school, or even enjoying the simple everyday life with friends.

Each organ has a use in donating. The corneas of the eyes help restore vision of nearly everyone who has reduced eyesight. Usually, if both of the corneas of the eyes are donated, they will go to two separate people. According to the Heartland Lions Eye Banks, over 50,000 individuals worldwide restore their vision after undergoing corneal transplant surgery. My grandpa can see today, because of a transplanted cornea. The sclera, which is the white part of the eye, is also used to rebuild eardrums in surgeries that restores up to 90% of hearing.

The skin tissue is used to help burned victims. Bones donated are used for bones damaged by tumors, traumas, and infections. This would save limbs from being amputated. The organs transplanted are the heart, lungs, liver, pancreas, kidneys, and small intestines. There are also the donation of heart valves, and blood vessels.

With the transplant of the heart, anyone can receive another human's heart by meeting two major criteria. The blood type has to match, and the size of the heart needs to be similar from donor to receiver. For example, Gene Schraad got sick in 1989 and was told his heart was deteriorating. In 1996 he went into cardiac arrest while in a field. He was taken to the hospital, and his heart was beating 300 beats per minutes. He wasn't expected to live. He was life started to Topeka and they put a defibrillator in his heart which shocked him each time his heart was beating too fast, or too slow. Within 4 years, he had 50 shocks. In January of 2000, a doctor told him he needed a heart transplant.

Gene was in the hospital for 4 and a half months waiting for a heart. On May 7th, 2000 three nurses entered his hospital room and told him he had a heart waiting for him. He said he was happy and glad, but yet scared not for the operation, but worried that his body would reject the heart. He said "My life was in the Good Lord's Hand's."

After a heart transplant, the normal time for a person to stay in the hospital is a week. However, Gene stayed two weeks because the heart he received was smaller than the one they removed. The empty space that the heart didn't occupy filled up with fluid. They removed 2 liters of fluid from around his heart. Since then he has had very few rejection problems. On May 7th, it will be 3 years since Gene received his heart. Today Gene lives a normal life because someone was willing to give the gift of life.

Once a person decides to be an organ donor, there are many ways to accomplish this. You can sign the donor card when you receive your driver's license, and the "donor" sticker will be placed on the back. Some of you may have already done this. I know I have. It is really pointless though, unless you talk to your family. Your driver's license doesn't add you to any kind of registry. Kansas has a donor registry list, and you can be added to this list by contacting the Midwest Transplant Network, Kansas Donor Registry. If you haven't added it to your driver's license, now is the time to think about it. Even though you do this, your family has the last say in whether you are a donor or not. So, it is very important to let your family know what your wishes are so they can be carried out. It's an important thing to be thinking of, even while in high school. Children should talk to their parents about this. Donors are greatly needed, especially for teenagers.

Telling your family that you would like to be an organ donor might not be easy. It may seem that talking of death is morbid, but it's really about giving life. Some families might not believe in it or don't take the time to think about it. You should explain to them that you will be giving over 50 people a second chance at living. No donations are taken until the next of kin or immediate family signs a release or consent form. They can choose certain organs or all that can be used. For instance, they can donate only your eyes if they desire. Also, donations can help people suffering from organ failures, blindness, burns, bone and heart defects. Another good idea is to have your family learn more about organ and tissue donations. You could visit the Midwest Transplant Network website at www.mwtn.org or you can contact your local hospital for more information.

In conclusion, I really hope I have persuaded you how important it is in becoming an organ donor by explaining the benefits of becoming one, how the organs are used, and also how you can become a donor. I also hope that I have persuaded you to talk to your parents or loved ones and let them know what your wishes are. The wishes that I want fulfilled are told in this poem by Robert N. Test titled To Remember Me.

Give my sight to the man who has never seen a sunrise, a baby's face or love in the eyes of a woman.

Give my heart to a person whose own heart has caused nothing but endless days of pain.

Give my blood to the teenager who was pulled from the wreckage of his car, so that he might live to see his grandchildren play.

Give my kidneys to one who depends on a machine to exist week to week.

Take my bones, every muscle, every fiber and nerve in my body and find a way to make a cripple child walk.

Explore every corner of my brain. Take my cells, if necessary, and let them grow so that, someday, a speechless boy will shout at the crack of a bat and a deaf girl will hear the sound of rain on her window.

Burn what is left of me and scatter the ashes to the winds to help flowers grow.

If you must bury something, let it be my faults, my weaknesses and all prejudice against my fellow man.

Give my soul to God.

If, by chance you wish to remember me, do it with a kind deed or a word to someone who needs you.

If you do all I ask, I will live forever.