



Reflections & Hope

A quarterly newsletter honoring organ and tissue donors and their families.

Fall 2014

Donor Family Quilt Project

The Donor Family Quilt Project at Donor Alliance is also known as *Rocky Mountain Threads of Life*. These quilts commemorate those who have given the gift of life through their donation of organs and/or tissue. Each square is created by the family members of donors to represent their feelings about their loved one. The quilt squares are then sewn together by talented volunteer quilters to form a beautiful, memorable quilt. The quilts are displayed at special events in Colorado and Wyoming to honor those who gave the gift of life and to encourage people to register to be organ and tissue donors.



Donor families view quilts, and submit a quilt square at the 2014 Donor Family Tribute



Quilt square for donor Jack Pine, submitted by his wife

The quilt pieces are 8" square, a 7" design with a 1/2" margin on all sides, and they can be made by sewing decorative stitches, appliqué, computer art, silk screen, paint, drawing, or a variety of other methods.

There is no time limit to the quilt project. If you would like to submit a quilt square to be sewn into a future quilt, please send the square along with your name and the name of your loved one on a separate sheet of paper to the address at the end of this newsletter. Upon receipt of your quilt square, we will send you a release form indicating your consent to have the quilt displayed in public.

To view other quilt squares, please visit our virtual quilt: donoralliance.org/donor-families/the-family-quilt



Three-Sport Athlete Gets Back in the Game after Tissue Transplant



Jake's life was never without sport: as one season ended, another began. Soccer became basketball, basketball became track, and he enjoyed the athletic challenge of each sport. However, constant knee pain threatened to put Jake on the bench.

Jake's knee pain started three years ago and doctors suggested he try stretching and physical therapy to remedy the problem, but the pain persisted. When running or playing soccer, his knee would sometimes give out and it became clear to Jake and his parents that more medical attention was necessary.

"I didn't feel that I was able to compete to my full potential," said Jake. "I had an obvious limp when running, but I didn't know what was causing it."

After an MRI, Jake's doctor diagnosed him with Osteochondritis dissecans, a joint condition in which cartilage and bone in the knee become loose. Though he was in the midst of a basketball season and looking forward to track, Jake's diagnosis forced him to stop playing.

Jake and his family sought a second opinion after his diagnosis and they met Dr. John Polousky of HealthONE Rocky Mountain Hospital for Children in Denver. After weighing his options, Jake and his doctor moved forward with surgery. During the procedure, Dr. Polousky used bone and cartilage allografts to replace the damaged tissue and realigned the weight-bearing line in Jake's leg.

Jake understood prior to his surgery that a deceased tissue donor made the bone and cartilage allografts possible.

"My immediate reaction was sadness. Today I am very appreciative that the person chose to be a donor and wanted to help someone beyond their own life."

Part of Jake's recovery included the use of an external fixator with metal pins anchored into entry points in his leg.

"After the surgery I noticed all of the attention I received from strangers. I don't think they had ever seen an external fixator, and it did look strange," he said.

Jake recently had the external fixator removed and has started his exercise regimen again. He rides his bike 12 miles per day and does not have any pain.

Receiving donated tissue affirmed Jake's belief in donation. He registered as a donor when he got his driver's license and hopes that others will consider registering too.

"I have felt the impact of what it really means to receive something from someone you don't know. I would be interested in knowing about my donor's life because they are a part of me now. He or she made it possible for me to be healthy, so that I can do the things I like to do."

This story was originally posted on *Allograft Possibilities*. For more recipient stories and donation news, please visit allograftpossibilities.org.



Will I Grieve Or Will I Mourn?

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

"We need to acknowledge that this experience of grief and mourning is part of the soul's life."

-Thomas Moore

There is no love without loss. And there is not integration of loss without the experience of mourning. In other words...

Your capacity to love requires the necessity to mourn.

To deny the significance of mourning would be to believe that there is something wrong about loving. Yet, I truly believe our greatest gift from God is our capacity to give and receive love. Likewise, it is a great gift that we can openly mourn our life losses.

You may have noticed that people tend to use the words "grieving" and "mourning" interchangeably. There is a critical distinction, however. We as humans move toward integrating loss into our lives not just by grieving, but by mourning. You will move toward "reconciliation" not just by grieving, but through active and intentional mourning. So, what is the distinction?

Grief is the constellation of internal thoughts and feelings we have when someone we love dies.

Think of grief as the container. It holds your thoughts, feelings, and images of your experience when someone you love dies. In other words, grief is the internal meaning given to the experience of loss.

Mourning is when you take the grief you have on the inside and express it outside of yourself.

Another way of defining mourning is "grief gone public" or "the outward expression of grief."

There is no one right or only way to mourn. Talking about the person who died, crying, expressing your thoughts and feelings through art or music, journaling, praying, and celebrating special anniversary dates that held meaning for the person who died are just a few examples of mourning.

Bereavement: originates from the word "reave," meaning "to be dispossessed" or "to be robbed." It also means "to be torn apart" and "to have special needs." When you experience the death of someone loved, you are dispossessed of something very precious to you. Bereavement initiates grief, and grief tries to instinctively convert to mourning. The experiences of grief and mourning alert compassionate people around you that you have special needs that call for support and comfort.

Making the choice to not just grieve but authentically mourn provides you the courage and confidence to integrate the death of someone loved into your life. I have come to believe that to heal your grief, you must mourn it. To go on to ultimately "live well," you must "mourn well." By mourning well, I mean openly and honestly expressing your thoughts and feelings from the inside to the outside-no pretense, no repression, no inhibitions. Somewhere in the collision between the heart, which searches for permanency and connection, and the brain, which acknowledges separation and loss, there is a need for all of us to authentically mourn.



Will I Grieve Or Will I Mourn? (Continued)

Authentic mourning means being consciously aware of the painful emotions of grief and feeling safe to express them. This may seem odd because your initial response following loss is instinctive and organic. The loss has taken place, and you naturally feel core feelings such as helplessness, anxiety, fear, despair, protest, and sadness.

Herein lies the paradox—a wide range of instinctive responses occur, but you get to decide as your grief unfolds into mourning if you will truly experience these responses or instead inhibit, suppress, or deny them.

Actually, befriending such emotions is what makes it possible to experience, eventually, a sense of renewed meaning and purpose in your life. Yet the emotions you sometimes most want to avoid are the ones you most need to attend to.

Being consciously aware of your need to mourn does not mean you are "feeling sorry for yourself" or wallowing in your pain. However, authentic mourning is allowing yourself to accept and to experience the natural rhythms that accompany the journey. Authentic mourning is anchored in making the conscious choice to allow yourself to mourn, to recognize that darkness sometimes precedes light, and to seek healing, repair, and transformation of your very being.

Of course, there are a multitude of reasons you might choose to grieve and not mourn. Your pain may seem intolerable. Since mourning won't bring back your lost love, you may rationally try to "put it behind you." After all, you tell yourself, mourning won't bring the person back.

People around you often think they are helping when they say things like, "carry on," "keep your chin up," and "keep busy." Or, you may feel that if you don't "overcome" the loss, you are not living up to your testimony of faith that you have tried to live by. No doubt, some people—or maybe you yourself—may suggest that sufficient time has

passed and that you should be "done" or "finished" with your grief and mourning.

Perhaps as a child or teen you were taught in your family not to express grief in front of others. Or, some people have shared with me they fear they will "go crazy" if they allow themselves to encounter their grief. Or, perhaps you have decided to deny or repress your grief because you feel it interferes with your ability to function at work and/or home.

All of these potential reasons and many more are often rooted in a reluctance to feel the pain of loss and a general attitude toward grief that is present in our "mourning-avoidant" culture. There is a widespread lack of understanding about how to befriend painful grief energies and use those energies for healing and transformation.

The opposite of befriending pain and allowing ourselves to mourn is control.

**Underneath the controlling impulse is fear:
the fear that we will experience
feelings that are painful.**

As grief enters our lives, many of us have been taught that giving these feelings too much attention is a sign of weakness or breakdown. In fact, many people try to head off losses in the first place by controlling. After all, you don't have to grieve and mourn if everything comes out your way.

I believe we control because we are afraid of the emotions that grief brings our way. We don't like being overcome by the waves of grief and sorrow. We don't like "losing control." And until we come to realize there is a natural, normal mourning experience that can result in meaningful transformation, we have little awareness of the need to experience the pain we call grief.

In addition, the emotions of grief are often referred to as "negative," as if they are inherently bad feelings. This judgment feeds our culture's

Will I Grieve Or Will I Mourn? (Continued)

attitude that these emotions should be denied or overcome. Married to this observed truth is the reality that society gives us little permission to openly mourn. We realize that the better we appear to be coping, the easier it is for people to be around us. People invite you to assure them how "well" you are doing and generally encourage you to "keep busy" and "keep your chin up." Sadly, authentic mourning is often seen as a weakness, a flaw, or a self-indulgence, instead of an emotional and spiritual necessity.

So, unfortunately, there are a multitude of forces working against your organic instinct to

mourn in the face of loss. The choice to experience and express your grief to its fullest can indeed be difficult in our mourning-avoidant culture. Yet, no matter how difficult, if you do make the choice to authentically mourn in the ways that are unique to your being, you will have begun to return to life, to living, and to loving! If you come to embrace the truth that mourning is a natural extension of loving, you will come to see mourning as part of the natural order of life.

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Cropped and border added from original*

We welcome stories, poems, pictures or ideas for future editions. It is essential to us that this newsletter grows from the hearts and minds of our donor families. Thank you for your participation. Please submit your input by mail or email to the address listed below.



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Donor Alliance is a non-profit organization dedicated to saving lives through organ and tissue donation and transplantation. Register to be an organ & tissue donor and share your decision with your loved ones. Follow us on the Web: www.donoralliance.org | www.donatelifecolorado.org | www.donatelifewyoming.org