

Rocky Mountain Threads of Life

The Rocky Mountain Threads of Life quilts commemorate individuals who have given the gift of life through the donation of organs and/or tissue. Each square of the quilt is created to represent the thoughts and feelings a family has about their loved one. The squares are then sewn together by a professional quilter to form a beautiful, memorable tribute. The quilts are displayed at special community outreach events throughout Colorado and Wyoming to celebrate those who gave the gift of life. Many families find comfort in working together to create a square commemorating their loved one.

The holidays may be the perfect opportunity to come together, tell stories, and choose what to put on a quilt square that would best memorialize your loved one.



To learn more about Rocky Mountain Threads of Life please visit;
<http://www.donoralliance.org/donor-families/the-family-quilt/>

Please send your quilt square along with your consent card to;
Aftercare
Donor Alliance
720 South Colorado Blvd, Suite 800N,
Denver, CO 80246



Reflections and Hope Newsletter

A Quarterly Newsletter Honoring Organ and Tissue Donors and their Families
Winter 2013



-Emperor penguins endure one of the most difficult winters in the world in Antarctica. While other wildlife head to milder climates, the Emperors remain and endure -22 degree weather. Their resilience is truly amazing!

Resilience

Coloradoans have been through a great deal of adversity over the past year. James Taylor sings "I've seen fire and I've seen rain"; lyrics which may resonate with many residents throughout the state. This year has been proven to be a difficult one, particularly if you have had to face the loss of a loved one in addition to Colorado's ongoing natural disasters. You may feel like the emperor penguin, enduring storm after storm, loss after loss. These losses can take many forms, the loss of a loved one, the loss of mental or physical health, the loss of a home, the loss of possessions, the loss of a sense of safety, the loss of a world view, or the loss resources. In the midst of all of these losses, how do we find the strength to move forward?

Continually I am amazed and honored to speak with families who display immense amounts of resilience, even when they themselves do not realize it. Emperor penguins, even when they are unable to see a few feet in front of them due to the wind and snow, know that

eventually the spring will come to provide relief. As someone who has recently experienced a loss, it may be difficult now to imagine that relief will someday come. Please know that you are resilient and one day will come when you can again experience happiness and a "spring" of your own.

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. Please submit your input by mail or email to the address listed below.

Donor Alliance
Aftercare
720 South Colorado Blvd
Suite 800N
Denver, CO 80246
303-370-2737

familysupport@donoralliance.org

Thank you for your participation. Your thoughts may play a vital role in another family's grief journey.

“When we are no longer able to change a situation- we are challenged to change ourselves.”

Viktor E. Frankl

Recommended Readings

- ❖ *Saving Graces*
Elizabeth Edwards
- ❖ *Man's Search for Meaning*
Victor E. Frankl
- ❖ *The Other Side of Sadness*
George Bonanno
- ❖ *The Power of Resilience*
Robert Brooks
- ❖ *Resilience*
Elizabeth Edwards
- ❖ *Night*
Elie Wiesel

We are Resilient

We as humans are innately resilient. When faced with adversity, we are more likely to persevere than to succumb to defeat by the events we are facing. Recently, many have been impacted directly or indirectly by natural disasters in Colorado; flooding, fires, rock slides, the list goes on. In the midst of these unprecedented calamities, we undoubtedly have been witness to stories of strength, perseverance, communities coming together, and incredible acts of selflessness and bravery. We seldom hear of individuals giving up or claiming defeat. It is more common that following adversity, we become stronger individuals, more united families and communities, and ultimately better equipped to face future hardships.

Having lost a loved one, it may not feel like you have become stronger or even feel like you are displaying resilience, but you are. Simply getting out of bed is an incredible act of bravery. Jane Barton, an educational speaker surrounding grief and loss, states that resilience is not a trait we are born with. Rather, it is a process of adaptation we learn throughout our life. Thinking back to all the adversities you have faced throughout your life may offer some needed proof that you are resilient and can preserve.

An amazing example of resilience and the ability of the human spirit to survive when all is lost is described by Victor Frankl in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. His words convey that despite the horrific conditions he experienced in the concentration camps and the resulting depression and hopelessness, he was still able to see the beauty of



life. He states that one winter morning a fellow camp mate called all of the men from their bunks out into the cold yard of the camp. He called them out to witness a beautiful sunrise coming up over the fields in the distant. The sunrise was reflecting in the pools of mud on the ground in the yard of the camp, creating a beautiful scene. Despite the circumstances, Frankl and his campmates were able to recognize the beauty of the moment, a testament of how truly resilient we are and how we are able to see small glimmers of light in the deepest darkness.

Each day try to acknowledge something that is beautiful, something that you are grateful for, or a positive experience you had that day and write it down. Each day try to write something new down. Eventually we learn to focus on what is good in our life, however minor it may be. We can then endure adversity much more effectively because we live day to day with the positives in life and when loss occurs, we can be assured that those little glimmers of hope are hiding in the shadows and will once again return, as long as we look.



“Our Story”

Children, Grief, and Art

Young children who have experienced a loss may not have the vocabulary to articulately express their grief, understand an adult’s attempt to console, or be able to vocalize their needs. Caregivers can encourage children to express their feelings through art. Art can be a means by which a child can identify, name, and convey their feelings related to the death of a love one. Sometimes simply putting art supplies in a child’s hand can allow a child to express themselves. Art can help a child to “name” and “claim” painful feelings so they can move towards helping themselves cope and helping adults understand their needs.

Creating a memorial quilt square, as described on the first page of the newsletter, with children could be an activity that encourages dialogue and expression of feelings while facilitating the telling of stories, encouraging memories, and creating laughter surrounding the memory of their loved one.



Our grandson was born in 2006 with a defective heart; he was born with one pumping heart chamber instead of two, we were told it was a birth defect and not hereditary. His spirit developed just fine but he did not have the ability to keep up with children his age. By the time he was three he had already gone through three open heart surgeries and by three and a half he was in heart failure.

I remember the night my daughter in-law called to tell us he needed a new heart, she was just about hysterical. All I could do was try to calm her over the phone. I called my Pastor and asked if he could stop by and pray with them.

Our family met with the transplant team and they explained how he would never survive another surgery, so he was placed on the transplant list on April 28th, 2010. I remember after the meeting, going outside to wait as our grandson was still having some testing done. My son walked over to the wall, leaned against it, and slid down to his knees. He put his face in his hands and cried. I just wanted to hold him, being a mom you just want to fix things, but this time I could not. I could not ask God to take another child so ours could live; in our case we knew it had to be a small child. I had a lot of issues with this as I hated the thought that if our grandson were to receive a heart it would likely be at the expense of another.

Our grandson and his parents would spend almost a month in the hospital getting him ready for his transplant. He went home with an IV line and a backpack to hold his medicine; he wore a defibrillator vest 24/7 to monitor his heart. He could ride his tricycle and play with his dogs. His parents would not allow other kids around him for fear of catching a virus; he was around adults as long as they were feeling good.

I remember the night we got the call; it was Monday and I was at a meeting. My son called and told me that a heart had

become available. I stopped, said a prayer, and took off for home. I called my Pastor and said to him “they have a heart”; please pray for the doctor’s and nurse’s hands to be steady, for everything to go well and pray for the family who lost their loved one.

My grandson received his gift of life on his mom’s birthday at about the same time she was born 24 years earlier. What a precious miracle! The days for worrying and wondering if his heart would give out were gone.

We are no longer sitting on the floor playing with cars anymore. Instead, my grandson can now run and loves to roll down hills. He can keep up with all the kids. He has the energy to play for hours and does not have to sit on the couch! It has been amazing! When he received his gift of life at three and half years old, he weighed 29 pounds, he is now seven years old and weighs 75 pounds and is 4 ft. 3 inches tall. I love now that he is in school and tells me he has 23 new friends.

We have recently made contact with the donor family and I do not know if they realize the enormous amount of gratitude and love we feel for their family, they have become part of our family.

When you go through something like this it changes you. The little things that used to upset me no longer do. I look forward to sun rises, sunsets and a rainbow after a storm. I have become more involved in our church; I volunteer more and it makes me feel better to know I am helping others.

I tell anyone willing to listen about our story of our little donor and her name. How she helped to create a better life for so many. Not a day goes by that I do not think of her and her family. To every donor family, thank you for creating miracles for us and becoming our angles. God Bless each and every one of you.

-A grateful heart recipient grandmother