

Leslie A. Ebert Legacy of Life Scholarship - Kiersten Williams

Two years ago, before one of my friends took her driving test, she randomly asked me if I was going to be an organ donor. I was in a rush making my way to biology, and without thinking, I ignorantly responded, "Yes, but only because I want the little heart on my license," and then simply moved on with my day. We were clearly in a rush, and she wanted to ask me questions that in my mind, didn't truly matter. I had bigger things to worry about.

It's such a simple question. "Are you an organ donor?" A question you can answer in passing, without a thought in your head. I bet if you go outside and ask a couple of people on the street if they are organ donors, occasionally you'd have someone speak passionately about the subject. The rest would probably roll their eyes, annoyed, brushing you off. They would say, "Excuse me, I'm running late," and then rush off to school, work, or other responsibilities. What a privilege it is to have the ability to rush. To feel your heart working to beat rapidly as you realize you set your alarm for 6:30 this morning instead of your usual 5:30. To feel your lungs filling with air as you gasp at the clock on your nightstand. To have your organs functioning in harmony to get you to where you're going. We too often forget how fortunate we are to experience that.

It took me a long time to realize this. My mother was a transplant coordinator and an OR transplant nurse for many years, but we never talked about organ donation at home. After my friend asked what I believed to be a simple question, I came home to my mother and asked her the same. She responded with "Of course I'm an organ donor! That's a given!" *A given? Am I missing something?* I mean, I always hear people at school downplay the title, saying they don't care to be a donor, and that it's not that serious. So what's so important about it?

This is when I opened my eyes. My mom began to tell me stories of how people made a difference as organ donors, and I did some research myself. Through my research, I found that 17 people per day die awaiting an organ transplant, and more than 100,000 men, children, and women are on the national waiting list. Every 8 minutes, a person is added to that list. Some medical centers are forced to take extreme measures. Due to a lack of donors, China resorted

to phase out organ transplants from executed prisoners. So many of these issues could be alleviated with more donors, and it starts with you. It's time to change the statistic.

The title "organ donor" is not small. It is not just a simple question. It is not just a heart on your license. It's lungs that may allow a new mother to see her child grow up. It's a heart that may allow a parent to live to become a grandparent one day. It's a kidney that may allow a young man many more decades with his childhood best friend. It's an honor that could allow you to assist in lives across the nation, and all it takes is for you to register. So, next time you wake up late for work, stop for a second. Take a breath. Feel your lungs fill, feel your heart beating, and remember how lucky you are to have the ability to rush.

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