

Luke Wallace  
Scholarship Essay

*I have been there for you.*

Four chambers, four valves, and a network of arteries, veins, and capillaries, I pump blood and deliver oxygen and nutrients to every cell in your body. I am deeply involved in your every move. But when you can no longer move, I can be there for someone else. Just say the word and sign your name.

As your heart, I have been there with you through it all, beating through life's physical and emotional highs and lows – the big win, the small flirtation, the new beginnings, and the aching endings. You will always be a part of me. But imagine if you and I can be the difference in someone else being able to experience all that life has to offer. We could increase the 5,000 heart transplants a year that offer people around the world a chance to survive and thrive.

*We have kept you balanced.*

Most of the time you don't feel us kidneys at work, removing waste and water, keeping the chemicals in your body like sodium, calcium, and potassium nice and even. But for those with diseased kidneys, the whole body is acutely aware. Itching, swelling, nausea, fatigue – a new kidney can help someone live better and live longer. But even though most people have two functioning kidneys, 12 people a day die waiting for one.

There are 123,000 Americans on the waiting list for an organ transplant and more than 101,000 of them need a kidney. But only 17,000 people receive one each year. Eventually, those dismal odds will likely impact someone you know. What a feeling to know that when your time is up, you can give someone else more time. A second chance. And that life-changing phone call that says it's their turn to turn hope into health.

*I am meant to keep people together.*

I am ligaments, tendons, cartilage, skin, and valves, holding you up, holding you together, helping you move, protecting your precious systems. But when my job is done for you, I can improve the quality of life for someone else. One tissue donor can help and heal more than 75 people. That is 75 daughters and sons, family members and friends. Both young people, and those who want to remain healthy enough to watch them grow up.

You can't control when you are done with me, but helping others is firmly in your grasp. Tissue donation must begin within 24 hours of a person's death. Burn cases, ligament repair, bone replacement – so many situations can be addressed by a tissue donor. And most people qualify to be one.

Remember that inspiring soldier you saw on the news, making a remarkable comeback from a combat injury? His mobility was possible because someone decided the end of their life would be a different kind of D-Day – one of donation and determination to leave a legacy. What a way to serve those who have served – helping them gain back some of the personal freedom they fought to protect. About 58,000 tissue donors provide lifesaving, healing tissue each year. What's holding the rest of you back?

*It's all about greater vision.*

I am the size of a dime but priceless to many. As the cornea covering the front of your eye, I have helped bring people and words and nature into focus for you every single day. That isn't the case for those whose vision has been dimmed by disease or injury. Corneal transplants don't require a tissue match, and more than 40,000 procedures are done in the U.S. each year – making corneas the most commonly transplanted tissue. Since 1961, more than a million people – from nine days old to 100 years young – have had their sight restored through a corneal transplant. But a whopping 12 million people globally suffer from corneal blindness that could be restored with a cornea transplant. These pivotal procedures require training and practice, so while some corneas are disqualified from transplantation, they can all be used for research and training.

When we look ahead to plan for helping others with organ donation, that's true vision. Organ, tissue, and eye donation can save and enhance lives and increase the capacity of modern medicine. When we have been served by our bodies, and then choose to allow them to continue to serve others after we die, we are saying thank you. That costs nothing but some introspection and a few minutes to visit your state's online organ donor registry. Decide today to give your parts a future purpose.

### Citations and Resources

American Academy of Ophthalmology, [www.aao.org/eye-health/treatments/transplantation-eye](http://www.aao.org/eye-health/treatments/transplantation-eye)

Donate Life America <https://donatelife.net>

Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network,  
[www.optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/patients/about-donation/deceased-donation/](http://www.optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/patients/about-donation/deceased-donation/)

International Society for Heart and Lung Transplantation (ISHLT), <https://ishlt.org>

National Eye Institute, [www.nei.nih.gov](http://www.nei.nih.gov)

National Kidney Foundation, <https://www.kidney.org>

Eye Bank Association of America, <http://www.restore sight.org/about-us/frequently-asked-questions/>

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Health Resources & Services Administration,  
<https://www.organdonor.gov/learn/organ-donation-statistics>