

Ann McCarthy-Linehan
3 Wyoming Heights
Melrose, MA 02176
781 665 3980

It is a fact that people generally do not think about organ donation unless they are connected to it in some way, shape or form. Did you know that you are eight times more likely to need an organ transplant rather than be able to be a donor? It is a fact that people are more likely to become a registered donor after hearing someone's personal story.

The story of my daughter Laura is a long one so here is a brief version.

September 11, 1987, my life changed forever. My third daughter was born, my lovely Laura, and life was practically perfect. She slid into her spot as our third daughter, same clothes, toys, activities. I knew how to do this. What was different? Liver disease, I did not know how to do liver disease. Laura was nine months old and on a routine doctor's visit it was discovered that she had a much enlarged liver and kidneys. After being admitted to Children's Hospital she was diagnosed with Tyrosenemia. The only option for her was a liver transplant. We were so grateful because pediatric liver transplants were very new. On my ninth wedding anniversary, November 15, 1989, we received the call and Laura had a successful liver transplant. We had won the lottery and life was practically perfect once again.

Life continued. Lots of doctor's appointments, lots of medicine but life was good. Laura became friends with other kids in the transplant clinic, transplant buddies. One girl in particular, Jenna, was Laura's best buddy spending school vacations together, chatting on the phone and being there for each other when illness and health issues took over.

So, one summer day, two days after school was dismissed for the year, the door bell rang. It was a registered letter from Children's Hospital. We are sorry to inform you but we gave your daughter blood infected with Hepatitis C during her surgery in 1989. Please have her tested. Yes, Laura had Hep C.

Skip ahead. Jenna was having trouble with her liver as well and was listed for a second transplant. She became sicker and sicker yet no donor. December 22, 2006, Jenna passed away, waiting. The impact of Jenna's death on Laura can not be described. Her best friend, her confidant was gone. Laura was getting sicker and was listed for a second at this time. She was number 108 on the O blood type list at Mass General Hospital. They were doing approximately 40 transplants per year across all blood types. I knew we needed a miracle. And then we thought we found it. We read an article written by Allen Zembo "Life or Death, it depends where you live". The Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville was doing 5 times the number of transplants as any hospital in New England. So we packed our bags and moved to Florida. I closed my business, we left all of Laura's doctors, our family and all our friends. We arrived in Florida to meet all our new friends from New England, waiting for livers. We waited; we stayed awake at night listing to med flights waiting for the phone to ring. It did not. Laura got sicker and sicker. March 16, 2008

Laura entered the hospital for the last time. In the emergency room they told her about something that was going to happen in three weeks. She looked at me and said, "Mom, I won't be alive in three weeks." She died 18 days later. During that time we felt emotions of fear and desperation. Laura asked every doctor who entered her room "can you get me a liver, I'm desperate. I think I am going to die." They responded that it was out of their control. April 3, 2008 we were on TV making a plea for a donor. We woke to the phone ringing at five am to the joyous news, we have a donor. Laura's father and I ran to the hospital to the ICU. The helicopter landed, the cooler was brought in with the donor liver. We kissed our unconscious Laura and said our prayers and went to the waiting room. Within an hour we were told it was too late. Laura could not survive the surgery. She died at 6pm.

Why am I doing this? The Boston Globe said I was a mother who will talk to anyone who will listen. I hope no parent ever has to watch their child die when there is something that can save them but you can not put your hands on it.

Please, make your wishes known and register to become an organ donor.