

Hello Public Health Committee Members and all those involved with organ eye and tissue donation.

When I was almost eight years old, I was diagnosed with diabetes. This was back when our country was learning to put man on the moon, which was also a time when not a lot was known about the disease. Five months prior to my diagnosis, my mother had died from cancer leaving my father to care for my three older brothers and me. I was eating everything in sight, but losing weight. I was thirsty all the time and constantly urinating. These were not common indicators of diabetes back then and, under the circumstances, people thought I was reacting to our terrible loss. One snowy night in January, I woke everyone up screaming. I had gone into a coma and my brothers and father took me to the hospital. (No 911 back then either.) At some point, the doctors told my father that my life would probably not be healthy and that I probably would not live to see fifty years of age.

My father was strong willed and full of love for all the right reasons. We did the best we could with what we were given. We attended classes at Joslin Clinic in Boston, MA and continued as strong as ever. We made it through my teenage years (with the help of a wonderful step-mom) and continued living with the greatest attitude. I completed college and have worked hard all my life. I bought a house and paid it off by working too many hours of overtime!

In my mid-thirties, I started not feeling well. My father's loving discipline had taught me to keep notes of all my activities...from how much insulin I injected to how much food I consumed to how much activity I did each day and how I felt. This made it easy for me to help the doctors see what was going on. I explained how exhausted I always felt. I was eating very little and gaining weight. I was wetting the bed! After several doctors and lots of tests, I was diagnosed with end stage renal disease. That put me on a waiting list for a kidney transplant AND on dialysis. Several friends and family members offered and tried to donate a kidney, but nothing was ideal. Waiting for someone to die is not pleasant.

Eventually, a kidney became available. The short part of that story is that it was not healthy enough to be transplanted. I was introduced to a pancreas transplant specialist and then listed as needing both a kidney and pancreas. With my kidneys shutting down, my diabetes was rolling out of control. I could no longer work. I remembered the awful news those doctors conveyed to my father.

At the end of summer in 2004, I received the gift of life from a 19 year old young man! I have learned anonymously from his mother that he was in the National Honor Society. He was class president. He had many, many friends. He could not return to his second year of college. He could not give his parents grandchildren. I am most certain that when he registered to have a heart on his license, he was not expecting to become a donor so soon. He saved my life and the lives of several other people. A "perfect" stranger entered my life and I am forever grateful. I am also now 53 years old!

Growing up, we were required to do acts of kindness and volunteer. The goodness behind that has not gone away but I am so dedicated to volunteer my time to help educate the public about donation so

that others may experience what I have. The donor families that I know are the most remarkable sort of people I have ever met. They honor their loved ones memory by sharing their stories and seeing their wishes being honored in saving life itself.

But volunteering isn't enough. Money to promote awareness is needed to further this quest. As many hours as we give, it will never be enough. We need people to be aware of facts instead of myths. We need staffing to follow up on every call. We need money for events to dispel myths and make the public aware of the truth behind donation.

Thank you.

Jane Andrews