

2011 VOLUNTEERS

Letters promote healing and hope

by Anne Kuhl, Heartland Lions Eye Banks

For many families who have lost a loved one, organ, eye and tissue donation gives them a sense of hope. And when families hear from those who received the donation, it's particularly rewarding.

In 2010, Carol Culley lost her 30-year-old son, Mark. Unbeknownst to the family, Mark had made the pledge to become an eye donor through Missouri's first-person consent registry – a move that didn't surprise Carol.

"Mark was absolutely the most loving person in our family," she said. "He cared very much about his family – about everybody. He didn't know a stranger. Mark was never judgmental, gave everybody a fair chance, and always tried to help the underdog."

As Carol and her family moved through the grieving process, they received a letter from Heartland Lions Eye Banks informing them that Mark's corneas had been provided to two recipients in California. Carol wrote the recipients, introducing them to her son. She soon received letters back from both individuals. One recipient in particular struck a chord with Carol, and the two began corresponding frequently.

The Eye Banks' correspondence program has not only helped in the healing process for Mark's immediate family, but for his church family as well. Carol read the letters she received to the church members, helping them to find hope in a desperate situation and to follow Mark's lead by pledging to become eye, organ and tissue donors.

In April 2011, Carol shared her story with the Eye Banks staff at the organization's annual skills day. She stressed how the correspondence program made a difference for her family and how other families could benefit from the service. Since then, she has volunteered to speak on behalf of the Eye Bank at events in mid-Missouri to encourage residents to join the state's first-person consent registry.



Carol Culley and her son Mark

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