



Don't Forget To Say I Love You!

In memory of Jacob Shafer, written by his mother Kelly.

About two weeks before July 4, 2002 my son, Jacob, called to ask if I would host a BBQ on July 4th. He said he wanted our family to be together that day. I thought about it briefly. I told him my preference would be to wait a few days to see if any of our other family members would offer to host the BBQ. Jacob didn't argue or even try to change my mind, he just said "okay." But I could sense he was disappointed.

Several days passed. For some reason, I began to have thoughts about what if something was to happen over the 4th of July weekend. I remember how sincere and sweet Jacob had been when he asked. I believed God was sending me a message. I just didn't know what message...yet.

I called Jacob and told him I had changed my mind. It was an excellent idea to get our family together, I said, and I'm so glad you suggested it! I could hear in his voice how happy he was about my change of heart.

The morning of July 4th was warm and sunny. I was sitting at the kitchen table and had just finished my breakfast. Jacob arrived early in his white Jeep Wrangler CJ with his black Lab, "Ralphie." They were coming down the driveway with the top of the Jeep removed and both doors were off. As a mother, I felt fear...that seems risky... but I blew it off. I could hear his music playing loud.

Jacob was energetic that morning. He opened the screen door, smiled at me and said, "Mom, will you fix me an omelet with lots of cheddar cheese." Despite my house rules of no short-order meals, I agreed to fix it. I was such a pushover. It felt good to be needed and I was so glad he was home. Yet, I wasn't being consistent with my rules.

Jacob continued to live at our home for a time after he graduated from high school. And at some point, he stopped eating meals when we did. He began to randomly ask me to fix him something, whenever! I did this for a short period. But then I made a rule. If he wanted to eat, he had to eat with us at meal times. Otherwise, he would be responsible for fixing food for himself and cleaning up the mess. Coincidental or not, about that same time, Jacob decided to move to his own apartment. It wasn't long before I started missing those opportunities to cook for him. More importantly, I missed our conversations where he would be open and share with me about what was going on in his life. It seemed easier to do over a plate of food! Time and again he would say, "Mom, cook me up something good to eat." So when he would come home for a visit, I cooked for him. And, I enjoyed doing it!

The afternoon was relaxing. We had loaded up the food, lawn chairs, rafts, sand toys, and volleyball and headed to a small lake on our property. We all feasted on the delicious hamburgers and hot dogs and a variety of other food items. It felt comforting to spend time with family. We played volleyball and horse shoes. The kids even took a dip in the lake.

Evening had arrived and the family began to wind down. One by one they started to pack their belongings in preparation to leave. But several of Jacob's friends stopped by to visit. They were energetic and excited and hung around to talk. It was still very light outside. Too light for shooting off fireworks. Jacob started asking everyone to stay for his fireworks display. I remember wondering why that seemed important to him. Everyone was tired. My parents don't like driving after dark. My one brother and his family had another family event to attend. Even Greg, Jacob's stepfather, said he was tired. I was feeling tired too.

I knew there were still so much food and picnic items to put away. I noticed Jacob's friends were still there. I told Jacob that I decided to go up to the house. Again, he tried to get me to stay to watch his fireworks display. I recall saying "You still have friends here that can watch." Then I turned and walked away. I remember, as I walked away, how I wanted to go back and hug him. But I didn't want to embarrass him in front of his friends, so I didn't do it. I started having those "what if" thoughts again.

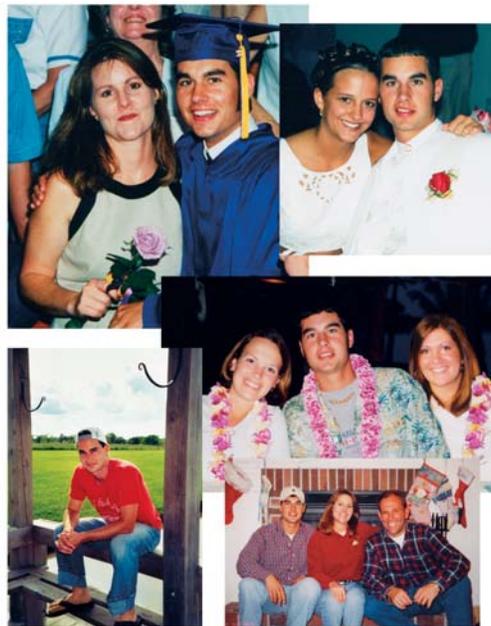
Jacob's choices and decisions for his life were not always my choices and decisions for his life. At that moment I wished he was still a little boy so that I could go pick him up, carry him to the house and tuck him safely into bed for the night.

I went on up to the house. I finished cleaning up and putting away items from our picnic. I felt tired and wanted to go to bed. I also felt an urgency to see him again before he left for the night. I was worried that something bad could happen because

lately he seemed to be living his life on the edge. I went back outside and stood in our driveway. I could see the end of the fireworks display from where I stood.

Soon I could see the white Jeep coming up our winding road from the lake. I noticed his friends were following in their vehicles. Jacob parked his Jeep, got out and walked straight toward me. He reached for me, put his arm around me and affectionately said, "Mom, I love you."

Those would be our last words. My life would forever change when a nurse from Northeast Regional Medical Center in Kirksville, MO called me. She said, "I'm sorry to have to call you like this, but your son



This collage of candid photos contains images of Jacob with his mother Kelly at graduation (top left), girlfriend Lena at prom (top right), stepsisters Aimee and Jessica in Hawaii (middle right), and his mother and stepfather Greg at Christmas time (bottom right).



has been in an accident." "He has been flown to the University of Missouri. He is on life support."

Greg and I arrived at the hospital in Columbia within an hour. We were informed Jacob had been riding as a passenger in the back seat of his Jeep. The driver had lost control and Jacob had been ejected. Immediately, I was more afraid. I was scared to go in and see him. I feared he would look horrible.

In the Neuro Intensive Care Unit, Jacob looked amazingly normal. Except for the ventilator tube, he looked as if he were sleeping. I also noticed his left eyelid was bruised. To me, he looked pretty okay! He was a strong and healthy man. His arms and legs were all tanned from jet skiing at Mark Twain Lake.

My brother-in-law, Jim, arrived at the hospital shortly after us. He is a physician. He also saw Jacob and it wasn't long before he looked at me and said, "You need to think about donating his organs." I remember gasping for air. I said, "I'm trying to think about how I can keep him alive." I was overwhelmed with shock and disbelief. How could this handsome kid with so much potential to do great things with his life be near death? Even though I kept touching Jacob's arm and putting my hand on his forehead, he didn't seem to know that I was there.

I felt numb inside and angry...angry with him because he had made the poor choice of allowing an acquaintance to get behind the wheel of his Jeep. He knew she had been drinking, as had everyone else.

The nurse and health care workers continued to share information with us about his condition. They graciously allowed my family to be in his room, three at a time. It was a huge comfort to have access to Jacob whenever we wanted to be with him.

As the hours went by, Jacob's brain continued to swell. I struggled to understand there was less and less hope that he could survive. I remember how I kept thinking and saying, "I just can't believe this." I thought about how I had consistently prayed for him over the years. I felt certain God would spare his life.

My brother-in-law, Dr. Jim, again asked if I was interested in donating his organs. Dr. Jim had planted a seed in my mind. When the situation felt hopeless, I would think about the idea. But when the situation felt hopeful, I pushed the thought away. Back and forth, back and forth...as the minutes ticked away.

The doctor talked with me about doing a blood flow study of his brain. After it was done, the doctor said there was a "faint" amount of

brain activity. I felt hope in my heart! However, several hours later another blood flow study was done. There was NO brain activity. Jacob was brain dead. My hope was gone.

Unfortunately, Jacob and I had never discussed organ and tissue donation. I knew I wanted to be a donor. I had no idea what Jacob wanted. I wanted to carry out his wishes, but I didn't know what they were. Oh, how I wished we would of had that conversation.

We agreed to meet with the transplant coordinator, Gigi. What a gift of comfort she was. I was feeling so very overwhelmed by this tragic situation. She was so gentle with me. I could sense her compassion. She talked softly and slowly. She kept eye contact with me. I felt my situation mattered to her.

Gigi handed me a slip of paper. She had accessed the donor registry. On record, Jacob had indicated he wanted to be an organ donor when he had renewed his driver's license. Wow! What a comfort to see that piece of paper! That was my confirmation. I said, "Yes."

Donating Jacob's organs has truly been a comfort. Parts of my son are still alive and well in other people! Knowing that his gifts made a difference to so many others has helped me in my grieving.

Jacob's heart made a difference to a gentleman in St. Louis. His kidney and pancreas made a difference to a lady in Garden City. A woman in New York has one cornea. A precious little girl, who had his same blood characteristics, received his other kidney. She lives in Maryland. A grateful man in New Mexico has his liver. Numerous others have benefited from his eyes, bones, skin, and veins.

Jacob's organ recipients have said they believe they have each been given a second chance on life. Each one seems filled with gratitude. Their second chance with life has also helped me with the grief. Jacob's gift has touched all our lives.

The Missouri Organ Donor Registry was so very important to reinforce Jacob's wishes, since our conversation never took place. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to the person who asked Jacob the question when he renewed his driver's license. And, for those of you reading my story...I encourage you. If you have not already, have that conversation with your family. Give them the gift of knowing, and don't forget to say, "I love you!"



Lives Saved By Jacob's Donations

(Far left) Rick Calvert attending his graduation after his liver transplant; (2nd from left) Nelson Thomas Jr. on his wedding day, one year after his heart transplant, (insert) Nelson with Jacob's mother, Kelly DeLine; (2nd from right) Cara Panuska, now age 9, was a perfect match for Jacob's kidney. She is also pictured with her family; (Far right) Jennifer and her husband after her kidney-pancreas transplant. She is no longer dependent on daily insulin. Not pictured are the many tissue recipients who received corneal, bone, and vein transplants.