

Becoming an Organ Donor Giving the "Gift of Life"



At the end of November, **Lowell Fishman** passed away. Lowell and his wife Eileen are members of AJ and dear personal friends of Cindy's and mine. Lowell was an unusual man, a man of great spirit, irrepressible humor, and robust life. For me, personally, he was a cherished confidant, whose insightful counsel always offered me good guidance, and whose humor brought laughter to my soul.

Over the past ten years, Lowell faced multiple health issues with optimism and resolve. Nothing kept him back. Nothing got him down for long. Even during the last six weeks in the hospital, his spirit continued to will him to live, even as his exhausted body seemed to be struggling to die.

About five years ago, Lowell received a kidney transplant that transformed his life. After a period of being dependent on dialysis, this new "gift of life" enabled him to resume unfettered living, travel, and enjoyment. It was truly a blessing.

In Lowell's memory, I am writing this article to urge every one of you, if you have not already done so, to elect to become an organ donor.

Over the past several decades transplant technology has advanced at an incredibly fast pace. But our will lags behind. It is estimated that almost 50% of eligible donors have not indicated their desire to be donors, or their families refuse to give consent. In Philadelphia alone, as of December 1, over 5,000 people are on lists waiting for organ donation. Over 4,000 are waiting for a kidney. Some people do not indicate a desire to be a donor because they do not want to contemplate their own death. Some families refuse to give consent because, overcome by the loss of a loved one, they cannot bear the thought of invading the body of their dear one. But the result of our squeamishness or reluctance is that many, many people linger in ill health when they could be healed by our forthright generosity.

Whereas once there was controversy in Judaism about the permissibility of organ donation, there is none today. Rabbi Elliot Dorff, of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly, has written that "The overriding principles of honoring the dead and saving lives work in tandem. That is, saving a person's life is so sacred a value in Judaism that if a person's organ can be used to save someone else's life, it is actually an honor to the deceased." We honor ourselves and our loved ones, and do a great *mitzvah* when we elect to be an organ donor.

Remember, too, that a kidney can be donated in one's lifetime. A recent news article related how a school principal in New Jersey is donating a kidney to one of his students. When asked why, he simply answered that he wanted to be involved in making someone else's life better!

The easiest way to enroll in the organ donor program is by electing to have it listed on your driver's license. It is that simple. If your license is not yet up for renewal, you can carry an official enrollment card that lists your intention to be a donor. Beyond that, do not be afraid to discuss the issue with members of your family. Let them know your wishes. And if loved ones do not raise the issue, raise it with them.

What can be a better or more lasting gift than giving life to someone else? To do it after we die is truly to live on. To get more information on organ donation, contact the Gift of Life Donor Program at 1-800-DONORS-1, or log on to www.donors1.org.

Do it for Lowell. Do it for fellow human beings you do not know. Do it for yourself and your family. No one ever knows which one of us will be a potential recipient, and which will be a potential donor. That is why each of us must act with courage and conviction.

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