

"I consider my situation unique because God chose me to go through it to show others you can get through something."

- Kayla Bundy

Giving *Life*

Donors and recipients of organ transplant share the heart and importance behind choosing to donate

*Written by Lorrie Crow Kimble
Select photography by Sara Isola*

Morton Ranch High School graduate Kayla Bundy with her mom Cambre, only months after receiving the liver transplant that saved her life

The miracle of organ donation involves many emotions. Both those on the giving and receiving end know that one thing is for sure - they are never the same. Those who receive donations say their second chance at life is never taken for granted. Many in the Katy community have been a part of organ donation, or are still waiting for a match. We visited with several Katyites who have been forever touched by generosity of others, as well as with those who are still holding out hope that there is someone who will save their lives with the gift of organ donation.

Kayla Bundy: Given Life

Kayla Bundy noticed her feet were swelling after a pedicure and thought she might be allergic to latex. The next morning, both of her legs were badly swollen so she went to the doctor who rushed her to Texas Children's Hospital. A week later, after many tests, the 17-year-old former competitive cheerleader and gymnast was told that an autoimmune disease had attacked her liver, and she needed a transplant.

"Apparently, she has had this autoimmune disease since birth. It had been attacking her liver the whole time," says Kayla's mother, Cambre Bundy. "It went undetected, and we don't know why. Kayla is strong. She was raising a 1,400-pound steer for FFA less than a year ago, and we had no idea her liver was deteriorating."

After obtaining a coordinator and filling out all the insurance paperwork, Kayla was put on the National Transplant List in April 2013. Her score was 11 in a range from 2 to 35 with the highest number meaning the most critical need for a transplant. "She was moved to the adult list when she turned 18," says Cambre. "Because she was listed at Texas Children's, there was a chance to have a splittable liver transplant - with a small part of the liver going to an infant and the larger part to an adult."

Waiting for a Donor

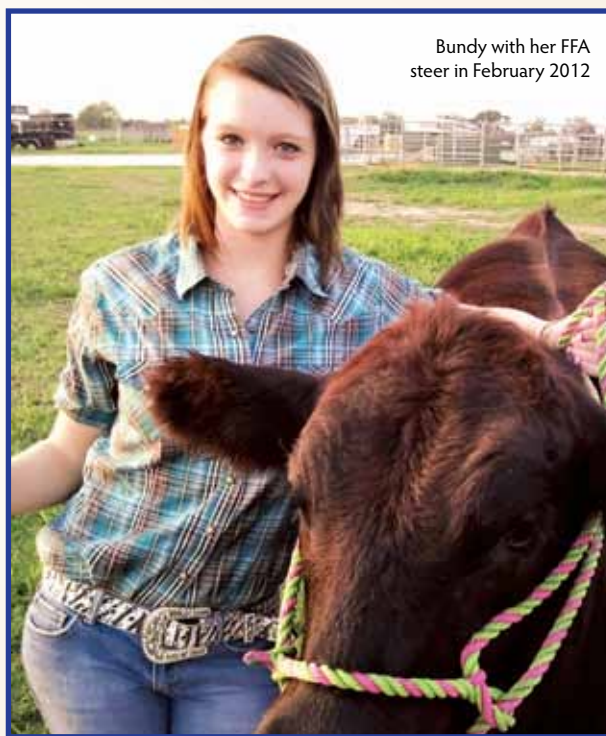
Kayla was on a roller coaster ride with her hopes and emotions - as opportunities for a liver transplant came and went. "The first time was in July, but the liver was too fatty," says Cambre. "The Monday before Thanksgiving, we got another call, but the liver split was too big for the infant so the whole liver went to an older child higher on the list."

Kayla got her third call the day of her brother's birthday in December 2013, with the news there was a splittable liver available. "I had three hours to get to the hospital, and everything was ready for me when I got there," says Kayla. "They completed the blood work, and the next day was my surgery. I woke up afterward, and it was like I couldn't remember anything."

Sadly, the infant who received the other part of the liver passed away. Despite this, Kayla believes everyone should be organ donors because it saves lives. "There are so many people who need a transplant and not enough people who have perfectly nice organs to give someone a chance of life," she says.

Second Chance at Life

Kayla plans to attend college after she recovers. Her journey was hard, but she had the strength to get through it. "It was hectic, but I was glad it was me who was going through this and not my brother or my sister. My mindset was that I would get through it to the end," she says. "I believe in God and prayed every day and asked for help to get better and stronger." Kayla advises others to keep their heads up and stay positive. "I consider my situation unique because God chose me to go through it to show others you can get through something, even at a young age."



Bundy with her FFA steer in February 2012

Gabby Neely-Smith: Chance of Surviving

Gabby Neely-Smith, now 19, has been fighting a rare pre-leukemia syndrome, Kostmann's Neutropenia, since she was 17. Every year she must have a bone marrow biopsy because of her underlining condition. She received a stem

cell transplant in August 2013. Although Neely-Smith had no symptoms, her test results last year showed that she had not responded to treatment.

"My doctors said they wanted to treat me before my condition turned into full-blown leukemia," says Neely-Smith. She was told that if that happened, there was no chance of her surviving.

Her wait for a donor match was not that long. "I had two potential donors," she says. Gabby adds that the recovery is rough, but she knows it will be worth enduring it. "There are a lot of things I wish I could do right now, but I have to wait."

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After being diagnosed with a rare pre-leukemia syndrome, Kostmann's Neutopenia, Gabby Neely-Smith required a stem cell transplant in order to survive



"Never, never give up."

- Gabby Neely-Smith

Meeting Her Hero

Neely-Smith does not know the identity of her donor. She says at her one-year mark this August, "I will have the chance to meet my donor if he will allow it. The only thing I know is that he's a 20-year-old male, and he's my hero."

Neely-Smith says having a positive and "good kind of stubborn" attitude helps. "Also, having true friends I could count on who were there to support me in whatever I did made it easier," she says. "It's a good thing to have a support system so you don't have to go through this alone. Have friends, family, caretakers, and the community help you any way they can."

Reminding others of the importance of organ donation or any donation that helps save someone's life, Neely-Smith shares, "You can make a difference in someone else's life and give them the second chance they are wishing for."

Neely-Smith says she almost lost hope when she went through chemotherapy. "I just grabbed onto [hope] and never let go. I know if I hadn't had that little piece of hope, I would have given up, and most likely died," she says. Neely-Smith

is currently leukemia-free and considers herself a cancer survivor, adding, "Never, never give up."

Chad Jones: Donating Life

After Chad Jones and his sister Jessica watched the Will Smith movie, *Seven Pounds* that included the impact of organ donation, they told each other that if anything happened to them, they wanted to be organ donors. Tragically, a week later on June 6, 2009, 21-year-old Chad was involved in a motorcycle accident which left him in a coma for nine days. He passed away June 15.

"We received a call from the hospital that Chad's condition had changed," says his mother Sheree Jones. "We had no inkling he was going to die, but the doctors told us there was nothing more that could be done," she remembers. "When Life Gift came in to talk about organ donations, Jessica remembered the movie and told us Chad's wishes."

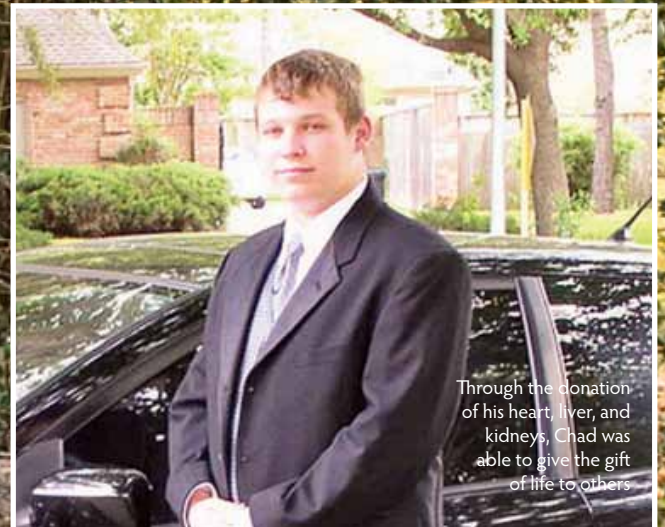
Giving Life and Hope

Chad's heart, liver, and both kidneys were donated to separate recipients, two of whom later wanted to meet his family. "We have a relationship with two of his recipients,

After Sheree Jones' son Chad was killed in a motorcycle accident, she made the decision to honor his wishes and donate his organs to save other people's lives

*"My son saved lives -
he is a hero."*

- Sheree Jones



Through the donation of his heart, liver, and kidneys, Chad was able to give the gift of life to others

and it's been very rewarding," says Jones. "They are part of the family, and we get together once or twice a year and have frequent contact each month."

Chad's heart recipient, Larry, was in his fifties and had been in the hospital for 30 days. A heart had been lined up the week before, but it fell through. When he received Chad's heart, his wife said Larry sat up after his operation and said, "Wow!" When she was told, Jones adds, "I also said, 'Wow! My son did that.'"

Gloria, Chad's kidney recipient, is a small Columbian woman who doesn't speak English very well. She developed kidney disease six months after her father died from it and had already had a kidney from her brother, but needed another

kidney after 10 years. After receiving Chad's kidney, Gloria pointed to herself and told Jones, "Chad is right here."

Gloria was asked what she liked to do now that she couldn't do before. "I like to drive really fast," she replied. Jones was stunned. "Those were my son's words coming right out of her mouth," she smiles. "I didn't think she understood what she was saying." The other two recipients have chosen not to contact the Jones family. "I write them every six months through Life Gift, and they send the letters to the recipients," says Jones.

Donate 4 Life

After her son became an organ donor, Jones went online and found that Texas had just 399,950 donors registered compared to Michigan's 3.5 million. That was when she and

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After the death of her son, Jones started Donate 4 Life, a non-profit organization dedicated to spreading awareness about organ donation



her family decided to start a non-profit organization, Donate 4 Life, named as a tribute to the four organs Chad donated, to raise awareness and to register donors.

"The mayor of Katy proclaimed Chad Jones Organ Registration Day on Chad's birthday," says Sheree. "We went to hospitals, malls, and high schools - and got 225 people to register." However, Jones points out, each donor can save eight lives. "I figured we saved up to 1,800 lives that day." Sheree registered the one millionth donor two summers later. Currently, the Texas registry is up to 4.5 million. Chad was also honored at the 2011 Donate Life Rose Parade float with his image portrayed on a floragraph.

On the second anniversary of Chad's death, Jones and her family started the Organ Donor Hall of Fame to honor those who are organ donors. "Donate 4 Life has chosen this way to honor all organ, eye, and tissue donors," Jones says. "Our two oldest donors were 84 and 86 years old; they donated their daughter's organs and then when they died, they donated their own organs."

In July, the Transplant Games of America will be in Houston. The games make up Olympic-style events for people who have had transplants. She adds, "They even have a 25-year club for recipients who have had their transplants for at least 25 years."

Jones says she and her family are content knowing what a difference Chad made. "He was the greatest son you could ask for and being a donor was his wish. My son saved lives - he is a hero." **KM**



LORRIE CROW KIMBLE signed up to be a donor when she was 18. She is in awe of the strength shown by the people in this story.

Rose Parade Float Rider

Katy's own Matt Katsarelis selected as float rider on Donate Life float at Pasadena's Rose Parade



Photo by Scott Weersing

Katy Magazine publisher, Matt Katsarelis, was one of 30 float riders on the Donate Life float in Pasadena's Rose Parade. As a liver recipient and organ donor advocate, Matt was selected and sponsored by Donate 4 Life, and was one of only three Texas riders of the 30 total invitees. The float's "light up the world" message won best theme in the Rose Parade and featured a festival of colorful lanterns illuminating 30 grateful organ and tissue recipient float riders and 12 living organ donors who walked alongside the float.

A TRIBUTE TO ORGAN DONORS

Five enormous flower-covered lanterns were adorned with 81 memorial floragraph portraits, paying tribute to deceased donors whose organs and tissues helped save many lives. Matt and the rest of the float riders were seated throughout a dedication garden filled with thousands of roses bearing names and messages to donors, recipients, and families who've lost loved ones waiting for organs.

A GRATEFUL RECIPIENT

After several years struggling with end-stage liver disease, Matt was on the transplant waiting list for more than two years before receiving a life-saving liver from a 19-year-old anonymous male donor. He has become a support system to others waiting for organs and a dedicated advocate for giving the gift of life. Matt will be competing in the Transplant Games of America coming to Houston in July. To sign up to be a donor, visit donatelifeamerica.org or select the organ donor option when obtaining or renewing your driver's license.



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