

## Leslie A Ebert Legacy of Life Scholarship Essay – Elizabeth St. Pierre

Every day as I enter and leave my house in Alexandria, I see the lavender ribbon tied to our front porch rail. It's long faded, and the bow has gone limp, but we can't bring ourselves to take it down. Like somehow if we take it down, we might forget Abbie and the impact her death had on her family and the world. She was my younger brother's age—they went to pre-school together, and one of her brothers is in my grade. In addition to going to school together, we grew up swimming and socializing with her and her family at our neighborhood pool. Sadly, in 2021 at age 12, Abbie died from acute onset Diabetic Keto Acidosis from undiagnosed type 1 diabetes. Her sudden and unexpected death sent shockwaves through the community. Lavender was her favorite color, and lavender bows went up all over the area to remember her and show support for her parents and three brothers. We know they will never fully recover from losing their child and sister. However, in the midst of their shock, pain, and grief, her parents made a life-giving decision. They decided to donate Abbie's organs. Her mother, Beth described in an [online article](#) that donation of Abbie's organs was "a bright light in this painful experience." "I feel at peace knowing the holidays will be very different (in a good way) for the four people Abbie saved through her lifesaving organ donations," she said. According to Beth, a dad in his 30s received a kidney. The other kidney went to a woman in her 20s who was very ill and who planned to become a nurse (like me!). A woman in her 60s received Abbie's lungs and got a second chance at life. And, finally, a teenage boy received Abbie's liver so he could live to graduate high school.

My mom had a friend named Wendy in college who died when she was 19 from a brain tumor. I understand that at her funeral, her parents talked about the donation of her organs. Similar to Abbie's parents, Wendy's parents took some comfort in knowing that their daughter's beautiful brown eyes gave the gift of sight to someone and were still in this world even though their daughter wasn't.

While Wendy's story inspired my mom to register to become an organ donor, and Abbie's story inspired me to register, it shouldn't take personally knowing someone who was a donor to understand the powerful impact organ donation can make. According to the [Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles](#), "You can save eight lives through organ donation and improve the lives of more than 75 others through eye and tissue donation."

Despite the clear impact you can make, a lot of people have misconceptions or are afraid to register. "What if I'm not really dead?" or "What if the hospital staff doesn't work as hard to save my life so they can harvest my organs?" Or "Organ donation is against my faith." You can see responses to these and other concerns in this Mayo Clinic [article](#).

According to UNOS, or the United Network for Organ Sharing, as of March 12, 2024, at 8am EST, there were 103,846 people in need of a lifesaving organ transplant (total waiting list candidates) in the United States. Of those, 58,811 people were active waiting list candidates. You can check the numbers which are updated daily [here](#). And, according to Donate Life

America, another person is added to the waiting list every eight minutes, and 16 people die each day while waiting for an organ transplant.

Each number above represents a real person who is fighting for their life. Imagine what it's like to be on that waiting list or have a loved one on that waiting list and to not know whether you will be one of those 16 who won't live to see another day – and receiving the news that someone is a donation match. Abbie's gift that day brought that news and life-saving organs to four people and their loved ones. Those recipients will be forever grateful to a 12-year old girl and her family who in their pain chose to give the gift of life. We don't know what tomorrow holds, but we do know that we all have the power today to register to become an organ, eye, and tissue donor and potentially save lives too. It's extremely easy to do when you get your driver's license or when you renew it. But you don't have a driver's license or even to be old enough to drive to register as a donor. Anyone can do it -- you can sign up now at the National Donate Life Registry managed by [Donate Life America](https://donatelife.net/). I hope you will join me in becoming a donor today and help in educating others and encouraging them to register!

### Sources

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