

## Making the Decision to Write

If you are reading this, your life has probably been saved or enhanced by the amazing gift of donation from someone you've never met. Undoubtedly, you are aware that sadness and loss accompanied the gift you received. As are many recipients, you may be confused about what to say or do; you may want to express your gratitude, but are concerned that you will intrude or add to the donor family's grief. This guide is meant to address your concerns and provide you with instructions for corresponding with your donor family.



## A Simple “Thank You” Means So Much...

“Thank you” can say so much to your donor family. It can say this gift has been worthwhile. It can say someone's life has been saved and that many people are grateful.

It's not uncommon that donor families want to know their loved one's gift has been received and that it made a difference in someone's life. A letter from you can validate the gift of donation and may help them work through their loss.

## Correspondence Guidelines

*When writing to your donor family, you may:*

- Acknowledge and express sympathy for the death of their loved one.
- Thank the donor family.
- Share general information about your life, occupation, family and friends, hobbies and interests.
- Write about the transplant experience and how it has affected your life.
- **Keep identities anonymous and confidential.** Do not include any last names, street addresses, city or county names, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, Web sites, specific dates, or the names of hospitals or doctors.
- Place your completed letter in an unsealed envelope.
- Include a separate sheet of paper with your full name and your date of transplant.
- Mail or give to your transplant coordinator or social worker. They will then mail your card or letter to Pacific Northwest Transplant Bank, and will forward it to the donor family.
- This same process applies to any return correspondence from the donor family: we receive it and forward it to you through your transplant coordinator or social worker.

## Will the Donor Family Write Back?

Just as you had to make the decision to write your donor family, the donor family also needs to decide whether they feel comfortable reading your correspondence and writing back. Some donor families say that writing about their loved one and their decision to donate helped them in their grieving process, while others choose not – or not yet – to write to recipients.

Families are always given the option of not reading the letters written by recipients. Sometimes families move and cannot be contacted. If your letter cannot be forwarded for any reason, your transplant coordinator will be notified.

Unselfish and noble actions  
are the most radiant pages  
in the biography of souls.  
– David Thomas

*Donate Life*

## Letters from Recipients

*“We welcomed your letter with open arms. We could only imagine the pain your family went through during your terrible loss. We are very sorry for the loss that you endured. It saddened us even more because our daughter was the same age.”*

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*“My husband’s biggest goal was to see his only child married. Our daughter was married last Mother’s Day and my husband was in his glory walking her down the aisle. I don’t think there was a dry eye in the room when he danced with her. Thank you doesn’t seem to say enough, but ‘thank you’ for raising a son who knew what his gift would mean to others.”*

## From Donor Families

*“I want to thank you for your letter regarding the donation of my husband’s organs and tissues. I’ve shared the information with my son, my husband’s family, and our friends. It has given us ALL great pleasure to hear that four different lives were affected as a result of our gift. Although that was one of the hardest moments in my life and one of the toughest decisions I’ve ever made, I can tell you that I am so thankful today for making the RIGHT choice. I wish there was a way to advocate this to the world.”*

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*“After saying yes to the question of donating my daughter’s organs, months afterwards I really had reservations. The pain of our loss was more than the joy of sharing. I wondered, was the gift of life given in vain? Until this past week, the question was still in our minds. A beautiful letter which meant so much was sent to us. Pains eased, the joy of sharing became very vivid in our minds. In death as in life, our daughter is helping others. If the same situation happens again, we would not hesitate to share.”*



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# Giving Thanks for Life

## A Guide for Writing to Your Donor Family



Quilt square contributed to Donate Life Northwest Threads of Life Donor Family/Recipient Quilts in honor of MariAnne Chavez-Ross (recipient).  
Designed and submitted by Preston Ross (husband).