

# Giving... Even When It Hurts

*On* June 24, 2010, Sara Ratliff's worst nightmare came true. Her wonderful husband, John, was dead of a heart attack at 39 years old. "That night, the organ transplant office called me at 2 am," Sara recalled. "They asked if I would consider donating John's organs – he hadn't designated it on his driver's license. Right then, I answered, 'Yes'."

Sara is a member of the staff at Heartland Tan's Lee's Summit, MO facility. I've known her for years, as she is the greeter for everyone coming to the company's large headquarters. She and John were married for six years, and he was dad to Sara's three young kids, as well as her two rescue dogs – he was a bighearted guy. There were no signs of health problems; he was young and healthy ... and all of a sudden, he was gone.

But, somehow, giving when it hurts can be part of the healing process. On the day of my November visit, Sara shared with me a handwritten letter she had just received.

*To the Donor Family,*

*Thank you so much for the wonderful gift of the cornea transplant – it has been like a miracle to me!*

*The eye doctor told me Tuesday that it has healed in the right position and that I can now get new glasses. Then I will be qualified for the vision requirements for a driver's license and hopefully soon regain that license. That is very important to me as I am an 84-year-old widow, living alone in a small, rural community. Not only do I need to be able to read and write, but to drive to maintain my lifestyle. So, this has been a lifesaver for me!*

*I'm so sorry that you lost a loved one in order to make this gift possible, but I hope you will be blessed and comforted to actually know how much good it has accomplished.*

*Again, sincerest heartfelt thanks from a very grateful recipient.*

Although every day is tough for Sara, she and her children take comfort in knowing that over 50 people will benefit from John's donated bone and tissue alone. She has learned that both his corneas have already been transplanted,

and that they will be able to use a couple of his heart valves, also. Sara does not know the names of the recipients as they are withheld, but she can write to them and they can write to her through the Organ Donor organization.

If you'd like to donate your organs, make sure your loved ones know. Even if it is on your driver's license, the next of kin can override this decision. Go to [OrganDonor.gov](http://OrganDonor.gov) to get started and learn how you can make a difference for the 108,000 waiting today for organ transplants. Luckily, that number is a little smaller due to the life of John Ratliff and the selflessness of his wife, Sara. May he live on – having given as much in his passing as he did in his life. ■



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Tanning industry veteran Brenda Fishbaugh is president of Eye Pro, Inc., makers of disposable eyewear. She travels extensively training salons on the effects of UV light on vision.

