

# Harrison Village Clerk Acocella on Organ Donation

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This week, I would like to write about a topic that has affected my life in more ways than one. Organ donation may seem like an uncomfortable topic for some, because in many instances, it means death. But for those on the receiving end, it means life. In my case, it means both.



You see, when I was 11-years-old, I watched as my mother's life was slowly being taken away, from complications associated with diabetes. Her kidneys shut down, and she was forced to go on dialysis three times a week. She was placed on a waiting list for a lifesaving transplant but, as she waited, her condition worsened. In June 1992, her transplant kidney came from an unexpected place — my father. He was a match for her, and the two were wheeled into surgery within days after.

Though the kidney transplant itself was a success, she unfortunately passed away the next day from heart complications. At first, I was very disillusioned about the whole organ donation process. There was my mother, a woman who waited and waited for a transplant and, when it finally came, she passed away.

Angry and confused, little did I know that just eight years later, I would be faced with the same circumstance in my personal life. It was August 1999, and I was about to begin my senior year in high school. At the time, I was working for the Harrison Recreation Department, enjoying the last few days of summer at the Brentwood pool, when I became ill. My own kidneys were shutting down and I needed a transplant of my own. I went from being at a high point in my life to all of a sudden being at my lowest. I surrounded myself with friends and family while I started dialysis three times a week and got on a waiting list for a kidney transplant — a transplant that had an estimated wait time of three years. I was a minor at the time, so the wait was a little shorter; however, not by much.

As I went through the year battling the most depressing time of my life, my community got me through. Friends and family were the ones I counted on the most, and they never let me down. In March 2000, I received news I never thought I would get: A transplant was available for me; it was a perfect match from Ohio. Unfortunately, that's all I knew about the person — "a perfect match from Ohio." I didn't know if the person was a man or a woman, nor their background, nothing. Just that he or she was a young, perfect match who had passed away.

I began imagining who the person was. I knew that a perfectly healthy organ donor walked out of their house that morning in Ohio and, now, would be giving me a kidney in New York and a heart to someone else, and so on. I imagined his or her hand signing the organ donor card, no matter if was the day before or 10 years prior — that person chose to save lives by passing his or her own life on.

Right now, there are 98,000 people across the country waiting for an organ transplant to save their lives. Each day, 77 people get a second chance at life; however, 17 to 19 of them die because they are still waiting.

April is National Donate Life Month and the need is growing. You can save up to seven lives after you pass on by becoming an organ donor. Imagine — you can give a burn victim new skin, a blind person the gift of sight or a person on dialysis their freedom back.

It starts with you. It starts with life. I am proud to offer information in my office in Town Hall on becoming an organ donor, and I hope you will pick up a copy. Or feel free to visit my Web site at [www.HarrisonClerk.com](http://www.HarrisonClerk.com) to sign up online.

I urge you to talk with your family about this lifesaving decision. After all, if organ donation didn't save lives, you wouldn't be reading this column right now.

*Joseph Acocella is the town clerk of Harrison, N.Y. He welcomes your ideas on this and all issues by encouraging you to contact him by e-mail at [jacocella@harrison-ny.gov](mailto:jacocella@harrison-ny.gov). Read his blog by going online to [www.TheClerksClorner.blogspot.com](http://www.TheClerksClorner.blogspot.com).*