

Giving the final gift

Most people don't think much about donating their organs—or those of a loved one—after death, until they are forced to confront it.

“Organ donation is not something I or my family had thought a lot about,” Manhattan, KS Branch 1018 letter carrier **Rod Holub** said. Then he received the type of phone call that every parent dreads—his 39-year-old son, Tony, was near death in the hospital near his home in Greensburg, PA.

Tony, who had been caught up in the national epidemic of opioid addiction, had overdosed on the powerful painkiller fentanyl. After driving from their

home in Kansas to Tony's bedside, Holub and his wife, Diane, learned that Tony had no brain function and would not recover.

“We were faced with the fact that he's brain dead, but his body was being kept alive,” Holub said.

Tony had indicated on his driver's license that he wanted to donate his organs in the event of his death. Holub and his wife honored Tony's wish by giving their consent, but first they had to come to terms with his death. The organ donation process, Holub said, helped ease that pain and inspired him to write a poem that expressed that experience, brought comfort to him and his wife and

moved many other families faced with a similar choice for their loved ones.

But writing the poem wasn't easy. Searching and praying for guidance, Holub walked through the hospital's hallways. “I just sat there in the dark,” he said. “Finally, the words came to me.”

With the help of an advocate from the Center for Organ Recovery and Education (CORE), a group that facilitates organ donation and provides information and comfort to donors' families, Holub and his family prepared to say goodbye to Tony and remove him from life support.

“We squeezed his hand, kissed him on the forehead,” Holub said, “and out



Rod Holub



Many states put a designation about being an organ donor on a person's license.

we went.” The process of removing Tony’s organs began. Tony’s lungs and kidneys were transplanted to four different people, helping to extend their lives.

CORE has posted Holub’s poem in hospital bereavement rooms (at right). The letter carrier hopes his poem will help other families and encourage organ donation.

Just the facts

Even though organ donation is common (nearly 45 percent of all U.S. adults are registered as organ donors by one estimate), there are many misconceptions about the process. Here are a few common myths about organ donation.

Myth: Organ donation will leave open wounds on the body.

Fact: Surgical procedures are used and the incisions closed, just as with a living person.

Myth: Doctors will try to hasten a person’s death to harvest organs for donation.

Fact: The medical team working to save a person’s life is separate from the transplant team, so every effort is made to save someone’s life before organ donation becomes an option.

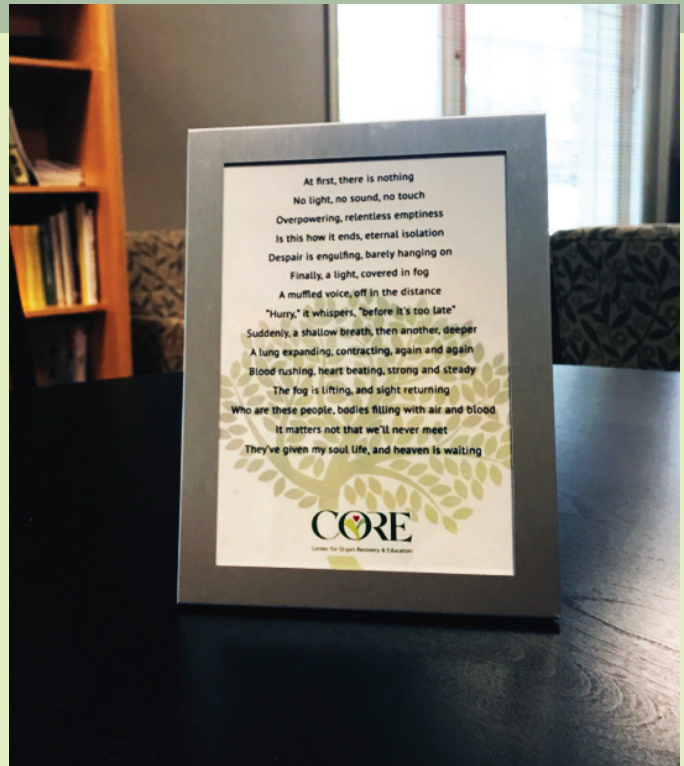
Myth: Organ donation will cost the deceased person’s family money.

Fact: The cost of donation is paid by the recipient, not the donor.

There are eight vital organs that can be transplanted: the heart, kidneys, pancreas, lungs, liver and intestines. Corneas, skin, heart valves, bone, blood vessels and connective tissue also can be transplanted, and donated bone marrow and stem cells can be used to treat disease. Some people donate their whole body, which can be used for both organ donation and medical research.

People of all ages and nearly all health conditions may donate organs. To learn more about organ donation and how to sign up, go to organdonor.gov.

“Our son’s tragic death left our family searching for answers and comfort,” Holub said. “Understanding the process of organ donation convinced us that Tony’s final gift not only saved the lives of others, but earned his own salvation as well. We hope that by sharing our family’s story, others may find answers and comfort through the miracle of organ donation.” **PR**



Heaven is Waiting

*At first, there is nothing
No light, no sound, no touch
Overpowering, relentless emptiness
Is this how it ends, eternal isolation
Despair is engulfing, barely hanging on
Finally, a light, covered in fog
A muffled voice, off in the distance
“Hurry,” it whispers, “before it’s too late”
Suddenly, a shallow breath, then another, deeper
A lung expanding, contracting, again and again
Blood rushing, heart beating, strong and steady
The fog is lifting, and sight returning
Who are they, bodies filling with air and blood
It matters not that we’ll never meet
They’ve given my soul life, and heaven is waiting*