

If nothing ever Changed, there would be no Butterflies

Dear Darlene, Bill or Charles and any others.

My daughter's name is Kelly Rose. That's the first tough part... to give you her name. My son, Kyle (18), and I have tried to sit down many times over the past two months and write a letter to the organ recipients and haven't been able to – I haven't been able to. On a good day it's tough to face the thought of what I'm dealing with and on a bad day it's just not going to happen.

I received your letter a while back. It was the culmination of an extremely bad week, my son was home with me as well as a very loved friend – that was how Kelly meant me to read your letter – with loving support around. I cried of course. And then, as happens often now, I felt so much better. As you probably well know, that letter was both a true sign of rebirth and utmost anguish all at the same time – two emotions that our bodies and minds cannot simulate together.

Let me tell you about Kelly – that should make me feel better and you feel that your letter was well worth the anguish you went through as well to write it. And it was...my heart and soul are with you...literally almost.

She had just turned 16 in May and finished her sophomore year of high school. She loved everything, of course, who doesn't at that age! But most particularly she loved ketchup. Yup. Ketchup. Ketchup on everything and then some. At her memorial service we made sure a big bottle of ketchup was reserved for Kelly – and a bottle of Ranch dressing (for pizza of course – all teenagers seem to understand this). She loved spaghetti, mac –n-cheese, Spaghetti O's, bruschetta, black olive tapenade, roasted garlic, artichokes, and black olives –always black olives on her salad. Her favorite meal (in or out) was...Caesar Salad...go figure.

And Fresca...lots and lots of Fresca must be stocked in the refrigerator all summer. But she didn't like nuts, but could eat peanut butter. She wasn't keen on candy or other sweets. Tomatoes were out but spaghetti sauce or ketchup form was fine. One of her favorite shirts, "Ketchup goes good with everything" She really liked it when I made Yogurt smoothies and we always had to have ice cream in the house. And sushi...she really liked sushi and was always willing to experiment. The motto was, you have to at least try it once before saying you don't like it. And, no sweets before noon.

She was athletic and adventurous, academic and humorous – the best combination of all her family. She loved Irish step dancing (since 5), snow skiing (fast), ski jumping (really wanted to get into that more), field hockey, track, hiking, biking, backpacking (without a pack of course), and traveling. She had already been to many places in the US as well as Ireland, England, and Turkey. Her favorite place...and mine... grandparents lake house in Montana.

Kelly left us doing what she wanted to do – being adventurous, free-spirited, willing to take a chance. As I've learned to consider and reflect upon – six inches and it would've only been a story. There are so many things about that day that happened by accident...chance...some days it's hard to figure out which it is. We had 2 ½ days with Kelly at the hospital while she was on life support. We were also told that if the accident had happened right outside the hospital door nothing could have been done – the damage to her brain stem was too severe. I will always cherish the days at the hospital forever and remember how she looked there forever. We also opened the doors of the hospital for her friends from all the various elements of her life that she was involved in. The hospital was over-flowing

with friends from camp, friends from school, friends from dance and just friends. They came, they loved, they talked to her and they gave us all comfort. And we were told so many times that by opening that hospital door we gave them so much comfort as well – that this was the best way to say good-bye to her – when she looked exactly like Kelly. There was nothing else wrong with her – no broken bones, no bruises, just perfection. My sisters and my niece were allowed to bathe her, we also treated her to a manicure and pedicure and Kyle picked out the perfect shade of pink for her. We were able to take handprints and locks of her hair. It was 2 ½ days that we would not have been given if it wasn't for those guys keeping her breathing. And if it wasn't for those guys we wouldn't have been able to donate all of her organs – all of them. We know that others received many gifts from her besides her liver, heart, kidneys, pancreas and cornea. She is a bone marrow donor, a skin graft donor, a tissue donor and the list goes on. She lives in so many people now.

We had a wake for her and then a memorial service. The memorial service was my family's Irish way of saying good bye. During the few days between her passing and the wake, my family and her friends created the most spectacular memorial I will ever remember. They put together a truly amazing slide show with music showing her at various stages of her life. We had a sign made for her "A Celebration of Her Life, A Tribute to Her Spirit" that is still part of our message for her. We had food donated that could have fed hundreds more. We had a bagpiper, a Fife and Drum band, pictures of her that were poster size as people came in the door. We had so many people tell us that their lives were changed because of both what we did for the memorial, the donation of the organs and our message that we owe it to others, in particular to your own family, to teach them to love and live their lives for themselves and for others. To reach out and touch as many people with love and kindness as you possibly can-now.

About a week after the Memorial Service, I was walking in the park with my sister and a friend. We were being followed by butterflies. Big, beautiful butterflies. Twin butterflies playing catch with each other. Monarch butterflies trying to make themselves known. We all

commented on it and said "This is Kelly! We know it is!". Later that day I was talking with two good friends, separately, and they both had butterfly experiences that same day. Then, I went to get the mail. In it was a letter and package from the Organ Donor Network and in the package were butterfly pins. I needed those signs. Ever since then and all during the summer, there were more butterflies in our lives than I've ever seen before. They were all over the place and in places far away with my family where they were needed as well. We have dozens of butterfly stories and now just as many butterfly plants are being planted in her honor. Even her athletic team believes in the butterflies because they see them before every game. We will continue to remain open to signs and to continue to build our legacy for Kelly. A foundation has been established in her name that will continue to give both in scholarships and contributions but also in the involvement of her friends in the building of this legacy. The next two years, while her friends are still at the high school, our objective is to involve them in the building of her foundation as much as possible and they are involved! And have committed to being involved as long as they can.

Mine and my son's life as well as her whole family's life is changed forever. Our network of relationships is changed forever. Only others that have gone through this and are living this forever truly understand where we are anymore. We are on a new journey that is taking us in directions I don't yet understand and am trying so hard to comprehend. I am always listening and looking for signs from Kelly that tell me that not only is she okay but that where I and my family is going on this journey is okay as well. I know she's out there poking and prodding all of us. I also know that some days I feel the pokes and some days I just can't. Kyle and I hope to meet all of you and find out what "pokes" you've had from Kelly and also how our lives are intertwined for eternity because of her.

Keep healthy and safe through the holidays and remember that I cherish the gift of life my daughter gave me for 16 years by being with us and I cherish the gifts she's given you for the rest of your lives.

Mary and Kyle