

# FamilytoFamily

Twice a month I have the opportunity to speak with new LifeNet Health employees on their first day of work. We discuss the unique way in which this organization is seen by the public and the distinctive way we do our jobs. We stress the importance of customer care, quality, innovation and our organizational culture.

The LifeNet Health culture is driven by our staff commitment to integrity, knowledge, passion, collaboration, urgency and creativity.

I like to think that our staff members who work with organ and tissue donor families represent the "front door" of our number one attribute – customer care. I often say to our new employees that we are privileged to interact with those who allow us to meet our mission of "saving lives and restoring health."

The more I think of it, we are privileged to provide "hospitality" to those in need. Most all of you have experienced a sudden, unexpected death of a loved one. Your entire world has suddenly changed. You needed hospitality. We strive to provide it.

The privilege of hospitality may be defined as the special honor of welcoming and generous treatment to strangers.

But, as a good donor family friend recently said, "We were not strangers, we just had not met yet."

We encourage you to complete the Donor Family Surveys you receive from us in our mailings. Just recently we heard from a LifeNet Health donor mother in Michigan.

She answered the question asking for additional suggestions to improve our support of grieving families by saying: "You never intrude. Your gentleness in your letters is marvelous, your wording is perfection. I have no criticism of your abilities or work. I recommend this service to everyone, should their time come."

*Friends, on behalf of LifeNet Health and all our staff,  
we thank you for sharing the "gift of life"  
and allowing us the privilege to work  
with you and your loved one.*

*We wish you a peaceful end to 2008, and a 2009  
which becomes more joy filled for you!*

*Most sincerely,*



*Robin L. Cowherd, Director, Donor Family Services*

# Donor Family Quarterly

A Newsletter for Organ and Tissue Donor Families

Fall 2008

## Paul's Gifts by Cindy Harris

"Mama, watch me do a 360!" My son rushed into the ocean, waves crashing, holding his body board tightly. He paddled out, waiting and watching for the perfect wave. Suddenly, it came, the wave for which he had been waiting. He jumped on his board, riding to shore, making that perfect 360. He jumped up wearing a look of triumph on his face. His big crooked grin said it all. You would think that this was an 8 year-old trying to impress his Mama. But in fact he was 16...always a bit of a little boy trying to show what he could do.

This was my son, Paul Charles Harris. Paul was the third of our children. He was born during a November snow storm...surely a sign that this was going to be a boy of great adventure. Paul simply loved life!

When Paul was little we went on our summer trip to Tennessee. We went to see an IMAX film about the African Serengeti. I remember feeling uncomfortable as we watched the wildebeests hunting for food and killing their prey. Thinking this might upset him I asked if he was alright. He looked at me with serious eyes and said, "Mama, this is life. This is what they do to survive." So my son lived with energy, spirit, and an appreciation of life.

On a September night, Paul was in a tragic accident on a windy road. It was rainy and slick. No one knows exactly what happened that evening as there were no witnesses. Somehow he slid off the road and turned over into a ditch. He was one of many people who had gone into that ditch in about 3 years. He survived

somehow with only a tiny scratch on his left hand. But he was badly shaken and sustained severe head trauma. It was truly a miracle that he lived through the accident itself. Paul was in strong physical condition and expected to recover. He lay in a coma in the hospital for a week. He fought the good fight, but 7 days after the accident a CT scan showed that his brain would never heal. There was nothing more that could be done, so we decided to take him off ventilator support.

My husband went to the nurses to ask about LifeNet Health and organ/tissue donation. We learned that Paul was already on "the list." He had made that decision when he received his drivers license. We were proud.

This decision has proven to be the ultimate gift from



**Paul Charles Harris delighted his family with his childlike exuberance and adventurous spirit.**

Paul. His kidneys have been given to two women in their 50's and a gentleman who was 70 received his liver. Two others received his corneas and three received his heart valves. Gifts have been given to people in 11 different states. The total number that we know of at this moment is 69...69 people of all ages who have been given a gift of life from our redheaded, freckled, fun loving, energetic young son.

The letters we have received from recipient families have touched our hearts and given us hope. We rejoice with the recipients and their families as they experience new life, a better quality of life because of organ/tissue donation. We pray that somewhere someone may be dancing, surfing, playing soccer, reading, or running because of Paul's gifts.

I am privileged to serve as a speaker for LifeNet Health from time to time. I am honored that the organization trusts me to share our family's story. We know that Paul would be proud that he has been able to bring life or a better quality of life to others.

Our family continues to grieve for Paul. We miss him every minute of every day. We struggle to figure out how to put the pieces of life back together. With God's mercy and grace and the help of family and friends, we are trying.

I love the quote by Charles Beard, "When it is dark enough, you can see the stars." Paul's stars are shining down on us: stars of memories, of the love of family and friends, and stars of the gift of life. We are thankful. ■

*"When it is dark enough, you can see the stars." – Charles Beard*



1864 Concert Drive  
Virginia Beach, VA 23453

1.800.847.7831 x4678  
www.healingthespirit.org

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# Healing Tears

By Dr. Lani Leary

Dr. Leary is a psychologist and certified grief therapist who consults with LifeNet Health. Her responses reflect her professional opinion to general questions. Individuals struggling with complicated grief are encouraged to see the care of a professional. Please submit your questions to Robin Cowherd, LifeNet Health, 1864 Concert Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23453, or visit Healing Tears at our website [www.healingthespirit.org](http://www.healingthespirit.org).

Dear Dr. Leary:

My 12-year old son was killed in a traffic accident three months ago. I am having a difficult time knowing how to respond to comments from friends that it is "time to get on with life" or that "it is God's will." How can I get beyond these hurtful comments? Anna

Dear Anna:

You have my heart-felt condolences for the many losses within the unexpected, sudden death of your beloved son. To have to adjust to a different life without him, and the many dreams you had for his future, is work that no parent ever expects or wants to do. And now you find yourself having to discover a way to live in a world without him and try to find meaning in these circumstances.

Your friends and others in our culture may not have had to confront such a devastating loss in their lives. They may not have the experience or the vocabulary or the skills to know what is helpful and what might be hurtful. Perhaps you, too, did not know how to respond to others before your son's death. Unfortunately, experience is often the best teacher.

I believe this will help: Decide that you are going to spend your energy remembering your loved one and learning to have a different relationship with him. Come to understand that you have the power of choice during a time when you may believe that you have had choices taken

away from you. You have the choice of responding with compassion and forgiveness. It is asking a great deal of you to forgive others' hurtful comments, until you step back and remember those times when you did not know what to say, but wanted to do something to respond to another's pain. What we learn through experience is that doing is not always as valuable as being. Giving advice or sharing their own stories of loss is never as helpful as the power of being present with you, but whether out of inexperience or discomfort or fear, many in our culture do not yet know how to respond to you in a helpful, nurturing way.

So when someone has approached me after a loved one's death with a "pat response" of "time will heal" or "he's in a better place" I tried to find the energy to say, "please just tell me that you will miss him, too". Or, if it were a very close friend, I would ask her to just hug me and not say anything. We, the mourners, teach others, as others and experience have taught us. These lessons and the compassion you pass on is a significant legacy your son leaves in the world. ■

## Triumph at the 2008 U.S. Transplant Games

by Connie Keyes

Before the Summer Olympics took the world's stage in Beijing, another magnificent sporting event was unfolding in Pennsylvania. The U.S. Transplant Games are an Olympic style event held every other year and hosted by the National Kidney Foundation. It is the only national athletic competition for recipients of life-saving organ transplants, and the largest gathering of transplant recipients, donor families, and living donors in the world.

The Games are more than just a sporting event. They recognize the spirit behind organ and tissue donation and celebrate the lives that have been saved by donation and transplantation. They provide an opportunity for transplant recipients to celebrate their renewed life and for donors and their families to be honored for their gifts.

My husband, Willis R. Keyes, was a tissue donor. Many lives were saved and restored through his gifts. My fourteen year-old son Jackson and I traveled to Pittsburgh this summer to watch the Games as guests of LifeNet Health. What a wonderful gift! It was so emotional for us. We would cry, hug, and laugh daily. Everyone wants to "love on you" and tell you "thank you" for your generous gift.

Watching these athletes was amazing. We were in the stands at Carnegie Mellon University for the women's track and field events. As the ladies crossed the finish line, I saw them mouth the words, "I did it!" I just sat there and cried. I remember Jackson asking, "Why are you

crying? You don't even know these women." I explained to him that it is so hard to believe that most of these athletes were facing death, and now we are watching miracles come to life.

Another highlight of our trip was Jackson presenting the athletes with their winning medals following the racquetball event. Bud Steckline was on Team Virginia, and Jackson was thrilled to place a medal around his neck. Shortly after, Bud pulled Jackson over to talk to him. As Bud was hugging Jackson, he took the medal out of his pocket and placed it around Jackson's neck. Everyone was so touched. We were told it's unheard of for an athlete to give up their medal.

Bud is a very special person in Jackson's life. I know he will treasure these memories forever. Thank you LifeNet Health for allowing us to experience the love and camaraderie of the U.S. Transplant Games! ■



Jackson Keyes and Bud Steckline representing Team Virginia at the U.S. Transplant Games in Pittsburgh.

## First Western Virginia Tribute Album Workshop a Success

With the support of the LifeNet Health Foundation, Donor Family Services hosted a Tribute Album Retreat at Smith Mountain Lake in Wirtz, VA the weekend of July 25 - 27, 2008. The lake provided a comfortable and relaxed setting for the gathering. Twenty-seven participants, ranging in age from 2 years up to 78 years, turned out. All had experienced a significant loss in their lives, whether the death of a parent, child, sibling, cousin, nephew, fiancée, or spouse.

By the end of the weekend, all had bonded by sharing pictures, stories and beautiful memories with each other. Making the Tribute Albums to commemorate the lives of their loved ones allowed everyone to share their pasts while creating something uniquely beautiful and tangible for the future.

For information on future tribute album workshops, contact **Tina Pierce at 1-800-847-7831 ext. 4903** or [christina\\_pierce@lifenet.org](mailto:christina_pierce@lifenet.org).



Fern & Fernicia Patrick construct a tribute album with Geraldine Harper at the Tribute Album workshop.

"I felt the workshop was very beneficial in that it brought back a lot of happy memories as we sorted through the pictures of Ben and Marcus. I know it helped my sisters, Fern & Geraldine, and my niece, Fernicia a lot, but I think it will really help my sister Christine once I get her book to her in Baltimore. Thanks for the opportunity to do something like this because with all the pictures I take, I hadn't thought of making scrapbooks." — workshop participant Claudette Brown

## What is a Memory Box?

A Memory Box is a shadow box in which you place special mementos that honor the memory of your loved one. A Memory Box may help to integrate the memory of your loved one into your life. In this workshop you will be provided with a shadow box and other materials to create a memory box from mementos you bring. You can then recreate one with family and friends.

### Sign up for a Memory Box Workshop:

**11/8 Saturday 1:00 - 5:00 pm**  
LifeNet Health Roanoke Office  
Contact Tina at 1-800-847-7831 ext. 4903 or 540-342-7133 ext. 4903 to reserve your space.

**11/13 Thursday 6:30 - 9:30 pm**  
LifeNet Health Virginia Beach Corporate Center, Concert Drive  
Contact Michael Reilly at 1-800-847-7831 ext. 4412 or 757-609-4412 to reserve your space.

**11/15 Saturday 1:00 - 5:00 pm**  
LifeNet Health Richmond Office  
Contact Richard Meadows at 1-800-847-7831 ext. 1916 or 804-521-1916 to reserve your space.

**11/22 Saturday 1:00 - 5:00 pm**  
Mary Washington Hospital, Fredericksburg, VA.  
Contact Richard Meadows (information above) to reserve your space.



Debbie Richardson proudly displays the memory boxes she constructed to commemorate the life of her husband, Stephen Richardson.

## Events Calendar

### Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremonies

Save-the-date for LifeNet Health donor family ceremonies throughout Virginia this holiday season. Join us to remember loved ones and honor donor families during a season which is often particularly difficult on families mourning the loss of a loved one. Invitations will be sent to donor families residing in each geographic region shortly before the event.

**11/21 Christmas Tree Lighting,**  
Mary Washington Hospital -  
Fredericksburg  
Friday 7:00 pm, 1st Floor Atrium,  
Fredericksburg, VA  
Contact Richard Meadows at  
1-800-847-7831, extension 1916  
or 804-521-1919 for information.

**12/4 Tree Lighting & Holiday  
Remembrance Ceremony, United  
Network for Organ Sharing -  
Richmond**  
Thursday 5:00 pm  
UNOS atrium, Richmond VA  
Contact Richard (information  
above) for information.

**11/23 Tree of Remembrance  
Ceremony - Roanoke**  
Sunday 4:00 - 6:00 pm  
Hotel Roanoke - bring an ornament  
to hang on the tree in honor of your  
loved one. Contact Tina Pierce at  
1-800-847-7831, extensions 4903  
or 540-342-7133, extension 4903  
for information.

**12/4 Tree of Remembrance  
Ceremony - Virginia Beach**  
Thursday 5:30 pm  
Concert Drive office - bring an  
ornament to hang on the tree in  
honor of your loved one. Contact  
Kris Laraway at 1-800-847-7831,  
extension 4351 for information.

## Introducing "Forever Memories"

Activities and ceremonies with complete online instructions for creating a tribute album, designing a memory box or decorating a quilt square for a loved one.

Visit [www.healingthespirit.org](http://www.healingthespirit.org) and click on Memorials to find the most recent addition to our authoritative web site on grief and loss.

