

Life and Legacy

*A collection of poems inspired by
organ, eye, and tissue donation.*

Donate Life Northwest



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2025

The Donate Life Northwest Poetry Contest was designed to showcase various perspectives on donation and transplantation, and to better understand what it means to our community members. Whether it is a tribute to a donor family member who has passed, or a reflection of joy at receiving a life-saving organ or tissue transplant, these beautiful works of poetry help capture part of the experience.

The Poetry Contest was launched in March 2025. The winning poem was selected by the Donate Life Northwest staff. A People's Choice Vote was also held to select a second winner, with both online and in-person voting. The following poems are all 22 submissions received, and the winning poems are noted on their respective pages.

a conversation

By Alysia Yamasaki

Alysia, a kidney recipient, describes her poem as “an interpersonal conversation a transplant recipient has with themselves, knowing the sacrifice that was made for them to be alive. Acknowledging that there is heartache on both sides and not wanting to disappoint themselves but their donor too. How can they honor this person who saved them? But to live.”

This poem won first place in our 2025 Poetry Contest.

a conversation

By Alysia Yamasaki

am i doing this right?
this thing called life?
i ask you secretly.
i'm scared.

me too.

i don't want to disappoint you.

don't worry, you won't.
i know you fought so hard to be
here too.

i'm sorry.

for what?

for the loss. your loss. theirs.
for not getting to say goodbye.
for the last i love yous.
they didn't know.

but neither did i.

what now?

remember me.

i will-
each and everyday.

To my organ donor and their family- thank you.

A Haiku

By Tammy Yorba

Tammy Yorba, a living kidney donor, wrote this haiku about organ donation.

A Haiku

By Tammy Yorba

Organ donation
Gift of life for another
Forever grateful

Addilou – I bought you a star

By Amanda Schroeder

Amanda Schroeder, the aunt of a donor, says this of her poem, "My Addilou left us on July 28 of 2024. Her eyes, heart, kidneys went to enrich the lives of others. Our very worst day, was someone's very best day. How I miss her."

Addilou – I bought you a star

By Amanda Schroeder

An unexpected burst of sunshine
during the afternoon of my life.
I have never seen such joy.
Always joy.
We watched Moana and
danced with Maui.
We sang the banana song
And when I gave you that squishmello banana
you laughed out loud,
Our private joke.
What an amazing thing to share.
We did puzzles on the floor and
kept having to take the giraffe Away from Pickles.
We listened to Taylor Swift and conspired.
When Auntie parked on the far side of the park,
and we walked like bears,
growling all the way to the swings.
And then after playing,
we did it again,
all the way to the car.
You picked the leaves from the cilantro stems when we made
dinner.
And as you did,
we laughed in the kitchen,
working together.
We talked about giraffes. Our favorite animal.
You wore giraffe slippers while I wore my giraffe sweater.
And we sang Barges and You're Welcome and Love Story.
Remember how Rocky was your Dire Wolf and you called him
"Baby?"
And when we were making animal sounds,
we wondered what do giraffes say?
So we gave it a google and discovered they moo.
We laughed because it was so funny.
We rode in the backseat behind Grandma and Grandpa
And laughed and laughed. And we talked about giraffes.
I wore my giraffe sweater, you laughed and clapped when you saw
that.
I'd never known that I could have such deep understanding
And private jokes with a two year old.
From sunburst to star.
Who is going to moo with me now?

Bittersweet Prayer

By Kim Oxender

Kim Oxender says, "I wrote this poem for a friend who desperately needed a kidney & pancreas transplant. It is such a hard prayer to pray knowing that someone has to pass away so you can live on."

Bittersweet Prayer

By Kim Oxender

Today I said A Bittersweet Prayer~
it's not at all because I don't care.
You see, I need an organ transplant or I will die~
as the words come out of my mouth, I can only cry.
For me to get well and continue to live~
A family will lose a loved one who choose to give.
Everyday I struggle as I say A Bittersweet Prayer~
asking God to provide someone who choose to share.
We all have the power to be the answer to
A Bittersweet prayer~
It's a selfless act, a chance to live on, an opportunity to share.
It is the greatest gift you can ever give~
be the answer to A Bittersweet Prayer so someone to live.
As I am on my knees saying words that seem so unfair~
I once again, said A Bittersweet Prayer.

Bringing Miracles

By Kari Engholm

Kari Engholm, the mother of a donor, writes that her poem “describes our son’s passing and his kidneys, corneas, and tissue donation to help others.”

Bringing Miracles

By Kari Engholm

Our son is lying in the hospital
His eyes are closed and we want him to wake
No hope for recovery from his fall
He can provide life for another's sake

His heart may be too damaged for someone
I lean over and give his head a kiss
We need to find a way to hope from none
We need to find meaning in all of this

But beyond the heart he has other gifts
Of life and sight to give second chances
Transplanted life to help others exist
Some ray of hope as we search for answers

His kidneys and eyes will bring miracles
Which makes his passing from earth barely bearable

Dono

By Samantha Albert

Samantha Albert says this of her poem, “My dear friend Becky and her husband Jody donated their fourteen-year-old son’s organs after a tragic ATV accident in 2020. I remain endlessly humbled by their strength and their selflessness. This poem is for them, and for Dono.”

Dono

By Samatha Albert

Fourteen years old
July 4, 2020
One accident
Two parents, one brother, one sister
Four days in the ICU
Countless tears
One selfless decision
Not enough time, an incomplete life
Holding his two hands
Endless beeping, on and off and on and off
But never really quiet, just like grief
Fourteen years old
One accident, one selfless decision
Two kidneys
One liver
A heart, his heart
A pancreas
A female in her fifties, a male in his forties
A male in his twenties, a female in her thirties
And a little baby boy
Fourteen years old
July 4, 2020
One accident, one selfless decision
Five lives changed from one
Five pieces of him walking the earth
In that sense, there was no loss
Only gain, only living, only life

Donor Family

By Kim Oxender

Kim says, "We became a donor family when my son, Kaleb, was killed in an auto accident in 2013. We needed to turn our heartache into something good. We take every opportunity to tell Kaleb's story to bring awareness to organ, eye, and tissue donation. Every July, we host a big event in our community to bring awareness to the importance of being a registered donor and remember loved ones."

Donor Family

By Kim Oxender

A Donor Family has much sorrow-
you see, we weren't given a tomorrow.
When the donor passed, a decision was made-
a gift was given to someone who prayed.
Being a Donor Family is so bittersweet-
hoping one day the recipients they can meet.
The greatest gift The Recipient can give-
is a letter of thanx because they can now live!
Love on your family & treat them with special care-
your tomorrow may be someone's answered prayer.
A Donor Family has much sorrow-
yet rejoices because someone received a new tomorrow!

Finding Peace

By Kari Engholm

Kari Engholm, the mother of a donor, writes, "Our son passed away and we were able to donate his kidneys, corneas, and tissue to help others."

Finding Peace

By Kari Engholm

A son's life erased
Chaos around won't cease
No peace in this space

A heart full of pain
Near explodes as it grieves
Can hope be in vain?

A chance to save others
A donation to save lives
Bringing peace to their mothers
Brings peace to his mother

Haiku for Byron

By Patrice Morris Ball

Patrice Morris Ball submitted this haiku “for Byron, honoring his cornea donation.”

Haiku for Byron

By Patrice Morris Ball

Rainbows of beauty
viewable through cornea
gifted at his death

Haiku for Roberta

By Patrice Morris Ball

Patrice Morris Ball, a living kidney donor, submitted this haiku “for Roberta, honoring her transplant.”

Haiku for Roberta

By Patrice Morris Ball

Her kidney failing
sister needed another
gave her mine with love

Health and Hope

By Kari Engholm

Kari Engholm, a donor mom, writes, "Our son died when he was 24, and his kidneys, corneas, and tissue were able to help hundreds."

Health and Hope

By Kari Engholm

Our son, so full of life, finding his way
Helping in the garden this warm July
The next Monday a fall takes him away

Twenty-four is too young to say goodbye
As life support monitors cease to beep
The silence screams as we pray and ask why

We seek hard to find anything in light
To ease these feelings that swell in the dark
There is nothing but grief and pain in sight

And yet a small ray of light pushes through
His donor card, signed when he was sixteen
Helping us find the peace we have pursued

His essence brings health and hope to hundreds
Kidneys, corneas, and tissue live on
Giving new beginnings, good and wonderous

Hope

By Maureen Zebley

Maureen Zebley says of her poem, "It's how you feel when something or someone that was yours didn't feel right and here comes a stranger who sees the potential and gives you hope and another chance at life."

Hope

By Maureen Zebley

My own never became mine, my heart cried for them
It felt better to walk away
My heart lightened when I turned away
You'll learn to live without me, even though you'll never know I felt
Being without you hurt, leaving hurt more
I cried every day, but now the tears are all dried up
I feel nothing the emptiness haunts me, But I feel less pain now
That feeling of worry I slowly leaving, I'm learning to be free
I'm smiling more now, I dance in happiness
My heart finally beats, not for your love, but for my smiles
I know I can do this; I'll pull through
Solitude has become my friend now
Alone, but happy, alone but satisfied
My eyes finally see potential, Potential in my worth, potential in
the person I am
I'm learning to be happy with who I am
I've come a long way, I'm happy
I'll love again, carefully, but I will
One day, someone will see the potential I see
Someone who dreams, someone who smiles, who feels
Makes it safe to be happy, giving me grace, frees my mind
I'm learning, growing, allowing myself to feel
I am no longer at war against myself. I am healed

Love and Living

By Tricia Kluge

Tricia Kluge, a heart transplant recipient, shares, "These are the first moments I recall after waking from my heart transplant at PSVMC in February 2024. My husband was on my right side, and I was so surprised I was alive, and he was so relieved! As time passed, we could finally begin to talk about what life would look like for us."

Love and Living

By Tricia Kluge

Awake in ICU
My sunshine at my right side
Life will begin again

Never Alone

By Kallie Caito

Kallie Caito writes, “My daughter is a liver recipient, and we discuss the wait, our donor, and life after transplant.”

Never Alone

By Kallie Caito

You were born and all was well
Perfect as can be, I felt my heart swell
In two short months, things quickly changed
Suddenly, medical visits arranged
Your eyes and skin grew increasingly yellow
Your temperament was much too mellow
They drew some blood and told us to wait
The anxiety unbearable - awaiting our fate
Results were in, they said it was your liver
The path discussed made me shiver
A biopsy, a surgery, and talks of poor nutrition
An endless cycle of admission after admission
Preparing for the worst while hoping for the best
Months went by - the ultimate test
I lacked control as you got sicker
We had you dual-listed in the hopes it went quicker
A week went by and then came "The Call"
This news would certainly change it all
On your uncle's birthday, a special gift came
A stranger saved your life, we don't know her name
An innocent baby, just 4 months old
She had stopped breathing, is what we were told
You went into surgery and we waited and waited
Your liver was much worse than anticipated
You were amazing, recovering fast
Making liver failure a thing of the past
If ever you find yourself feeling alone
Remember your donor and how much you've grown
Every birthday and milestone and holiday, too
You're never alone, and that will always be true

Now I can dream

By Alysia Yamasaki

Alysia Yamasaki, a kidney recipient, writes this poem in honor of her organ donor. She says, "To my organ donor- A thank you from those who love me and me too. You saved my life. I didn't realize how sick I looked until I had a part of you. People noticed an immediate difference in me, in every way. I am able to dream of a future because of you. My family too."

Now I can dream

By Alysia Yamasaki

Her eye sparkle now.
Her face is warm again.
Glowing, they say.

The frown lines lessen.
More smiles appear.
There's a lightness in the air.

Everyone is taking it in.
They comment & say, "what's different?"
On the outside, but inner too.

A new beginning.
A new me.
A new you.

A chance to dream again.
Of living in this world not without you-
But with you too.

Paddle On

By Ellie Irish-Jones

Ellie Irish-Jones explains, "My Husband, Andrew, died by suicide on April 11, 2025, leaving behind our two young girls, 2 and 5. Below is the impact he has had as an organ donor thus far:

Right Kidney- Went to a man in his forties with a family

Left Kidney- Went to a father of three in his sixties

Liver and Pancreas- Accepted for research

Heart- Given to a father in his sixties with grandchildren

Intestine, Trachea, and Lung Tissue- Donate for research

Eye Tissue- Ophthalmic study, research, and training"

Paddle On

By Ellie Irish-Jones

A man of many names, talents, hobbies, and adventures His final,
and most important, role was 'Daddy.'
You lived life to the max, never missing a beat. Skiing, rock
climbing, backpacking, hiking,
and ultimately finding your own version of church in your 20s:
surfing

A time to disconnect from the stresses of life A time to reconnect
with nature.
A time to slow your endlessly busy mind and just be.
A time to show patience for the perfect wave, paired with the
challenge of execution. Our dog, loyally waiting on the beach for
your return from the water.

Near the end, you were paddling through dark seas But that wasn't
always the case.

The majority of your life, a life gone too soon was filled with
friends- so many friends, worldwide travels, endless tacos, music at
all times, sunsets in Baja,
and a family that loved you deeply. The girls and I talk of you
often.

Together, we have landed on you being with us always in the sky
and in the ocean. We say goodnight to you each night.

I see the girls, look up at the sky on a warm, beautiful day and say,
"Thank you, Daddy, for the sunshine."

Our lives are forever changed,

But I am beyond grateful for the ten years we had together.

I promise to keep the adventure alive for our two young daughters.

We love you.

We miss you.

Paddle on.

The gift of life

By Tammy Yorba

Tammy Yorba, a living kidney donor, shares this poem about her experience.

The gift of life

By Tammy Yorba

Becoming a living donor was one of the best, and easiest decisions of my life.

My kidney donation extended the life of someone who didn't have a living donor available.

My friend got moved up the list because of the donation on his behalf.

I tell my story to encourage others to do the same.

A kidney is just a kidney, until it's given to another who can't continue living without it.

An eye is just an eye, until it's given to someone who can't see without it.

A lung is just a lung, until it's given to someone who can't take an easy breath.

A heart is just a heart, until it's given as a final gift in this life to extend someone else's.

The sky danced for me

By Alysia Yamasaki

Alysia Yamasaki shares, "This poem is about honoring a loved one's wishes of being an organ donor upon their death. It is a reflection and the feelings of the one left behind continuing on with grief, sadness, but also love."

The sky danced for me

By Alysia Yamasaki

I need a sign from you-
That it was the right thing to do.
I look up and see
Movement in the trees.

Night falls quickly, then-
It's soon ten PM.
The stars look different tonight.
They're bigger and bright.

They twinkle all around,
And I start to hear a sound-
A whisper in my ear,
A beat here and there.

You're telling me something, I fear,
But afraid, I am not
Not now, not then.
I honored your wishes.
I would do it again.

The sky goes dark,
Darker than the deep blue sea.
I know it's a sign, you're looking down on me.
Your love telling me you agree.

The stars come back.
I take that as my cue:
You are here with me, and me with you.
Knowing there are others now too-
Who every night say thank you.

I always knew you were great,
Wanting to help, to save, to donate.
I whisper, "I miss you," aloud,
Knowing you'd be so proud.

Goodnight to me and you.
I look up one more time-
There's the last sign:
A shooting star.

You'll always be here, and never too far.

The Tragedy and the Gift

By Elizabeth Cloud

Elizabeth Cloud writes, "I have the privilege to work with an amazing heart transplant team. I get to see the gift lived everyday by my patients. It is hard to put into words how many lives are touched and the way each person is able to live their life honoring their gift. This poem is my attempt to put the tragedy of losing a loved one while giving the gift of donation to others."

The Tragedy and the Gift

By Elizabeth Cloud

A loved one has reached the end of their life;
Out of darkness comes the light of hope;
Out of grief comes the chance for life;
Out of sorrow comes tears of joy.

A transplant candidate on the waitlist is facing the end of their life;
From a forever goodbye comes a chance for more tomorrows;
From fear of darkness comes a candle of hope;
From the fear of goodbye comes a candle of hope;
From end-of-life planning comes a chance to hold a newborn baby,
attend a graduation, or walk a loved one down the aisle on their
wedding day.

Organ donation

Does not change your end but it brings hope to up to 125 people;
Does not take away the grief of passing but it offers a chance for
your loved ones to hear your heartbeat again;
Does not change the sorrow we feel at the passing of a loved one
but it brings hope for a parent to watch a child grow, for a child to
reach adulthood, for a grandparent to hold a grandchild.
Organ donation leads to countless blessings each life touched will
bring to our world.

To Live means to Give

By Traci Neal

Traci Neal says, "This poem encourages readers to consider being a life giver because they have the gift of life."

To Live means to Give

By Traci Neal

words transfer to hearts|
heal the broken| bones
gain back mobility| what
teaches humans to value
a body| involvement is
the 'eye' in evidence| give
great energy into internal
members| fill a person's
systems with priceless
parts| wipe tears with
tissue that will never run
out| create hope as a
cover to coddle the world
in| be open to the empty|
share pieces of one's soul|
watch poetry stitch human
storms| helping hands are
what make us whole|

What Is a Care Giver?

By Danette Dickerman

Danette Dickerman shares, “My husband was diagnosed with kidney failure in early 2020. He started dialysis in the fall of 2020, amid COVID and wildfires in our area. In preparation for a transplant, he underwent an angiogram in early 2021. Things went horribly wrong, and he was hospitalized for six months. He fought like hell to get back to transplant health. In February of 2023, we got the call—a living donor kidney was available. At the 11th hour, he tested positive for COVID – no symptoms (vaccines do work!) We kept at it, and in September of 2024, another living donor became available. On 9/17/24 he received a kidney. During the journey, I agreed to be his care giver. This poem is what I felt as his care giver.”

What Is a Care Giver?

By Danette Dickerman

C = Cheerleader and Champion

A = Advocate

R = Resourceful

E = Empathetic

G = Grateful

I = Involved

V = Vocal

E = Encouraging

R = Ready!

You're Still Here

By Kristy Manuel

Kristy Manuel writes, "When our son died in a tragic accident, we decided to offer what we could to help others. It didn't surprise us that our son had also chosen to donate organs. This poem reminds me that through those donations, my son lives on and each donation honors his memory. Those who have chosen to learn about their donor, our son, have gotten to know him in a special way - like we do."

This poem won the People's Choice vote in our 2025 Poetry Contest.

You're Still Here

By Kristy Manuel

I think about that awful day
When the worst of my fears came true.
The shock and sadness, grief and
Trauma, all over losing you.

But you're not fully gone
Because of a choice so magical,
To give yourself away
If we ever got that tragic call.

You're still here...

In your beating heart in another's embrace.

Through your eyes that see from someone else's face.

Your tissue allowing a young runner to race.

You're still here.

In a miracle that God had started
you gave life when you departed,
to countless others you never knew...
Now they can know you like I do!

You're still here!



Donate Life Northwest is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit based out of Portland, Oregon, whose mission is to save lives and improve health through the promotion of organ, eye, and tissue donation.

To learn more about organ, eye, and tissue donation or to register to be a lifesaving donor, visit DonateLifeNW.org.

