

Heart and Soul

By Annie Getsinger

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Some nights as I lay awake in bed, I become aware of the sound of my own heart beating. In the moments before sleep, I listen to the gentle “lub-dub” sounds and wonder.

My heart is very much a part of me — an essential component. But hearing its beat almost makes it seem something separate at times — like isolating the bass line of your favorite song. Its gentle thumping is al-ways there to lend a beat, a meaning.

I think of it, an organ the size of my fist, its intricate plumbing and mechanical pumping sustaining my life. Without it, I know I would die, but in my daily life, I’m barely conscious of its ceaseless functioning.

Several weeks ago, I had the chance to meet Kaleb Snyder, a 10-year-old Maroa boy who had a heart transplant in January after a bout with a virus. Getting to know Kaleb and his family made me much more aware of the muscular organ beating inside my chest — of the power of my own heart.

The family waited for news of Kaleb’s new heart as doctors intervened, surgically connecting Kaleb to the Berlin Heart, a German device that would keep him alive by doing the job of his heart until a transplant became available. They waited for another family’s tragedy to save the life of their son. Their hope and another family’s grief were intertwined in an unthinkable way.

But the Snyders found solace in their faith. Kaleb’s father, Mark Snyder, remembered a priest’s kind words in St. Louis, where Kaleb was in the hospital. His wisdom helped the worried parents reconcile their feelings. He said that their prayers were not for another child to die, but for a family out there to make a good choice — organ donation.

Within a matter of days, that lifesaving choice was made. A healthy heart was on its way to St. Louis. And the same child’s lungs would save the life of another youngster at the children’s hospital. Without the family’s decision to share that child’s organs and all the other individuals who give of themselves after they are gone, Kaleb and others like him would not receive the gift of a second chance.

The Donate Life Illinois campaign is an 18-month effort to encourage Illinois residents to join the state or-gan/tissue donor registry. Kaleb’s mother, Kathy

Snyder, mentioned it to me while I was reporting on Kaleb's story. She wanted to encourage people to visit the campaign Web site at <https://www.iamareyou.org/>.

There, it takes just a few minutes to register with your license, address and contact information. The site also provides information about organ donation and the impact it can have on others' lives. But nothing about that impact, that ultimate gift, hit home for me as much as when I looked at Kaleb just sitting on his couch and petting his dachshund, Deuce. His life was just beginning.

I urge you to check out the Donate Life Illinois Web site. Investigate organ donation, and decide if it's something that might be something you'd want to do. In a family's time of loss, someone could have everything to gain.