One woman's ultimate gift

The story of Lisa Landry Childress (1958–1995) and the foundation that bears her name, honors her memory, and is dedicated to the promotion of solid organ and tissue donor awareness

MARY MOORE FREE, PHD, KITTY LANDRY PHILLIPS, BA, AND CAROLYN BROWN, BBA, MHA

Corresponding author: Mary Moore Free, PhD, house anthropologist, Baylor University Medical Center, 3500 Gaston Avenue, Dallas, Texas 75246.

I give that you may give.

—From the Latin formula do ut des, dating to classical times

For it is in the giving that we receive.

—St. Francis of Assisi, ca. 1181–1226

LISA LANDRY CHILDRESS

Lisa Landry Childress (Figure 1) was the wife of Gary Childress, the mother of Christina, the youngest child of Coach and Mrs. Tom Landry, and the sibling of Tom, Jr., and one of us (Kitty Landry Phillips). In the spring of 1991, Lisa and Gary were joyfully anticipating the birth of their baby, due in the late summer. A short time later, however, routine sonography showed several small tumors in Lisa's liver. Lisa's doctors at Baylor University Medical Center diagnosed her with a rare form of liver cancer. Their recommendation was chemotherapy and termination of her pregnancy. Notwithstanding, Lisa wanted to give Gary and her family the ultimate gift—the gift of life to her yet unborn child. Thus, having determined her goal, she set about trying to attain it. And she did.

(Figure 1) - Lucy Landry Childress
That August, Lisa gave birth to their healthy baby girl. She was named Christina. Immediately following the delivery, Lisa was told that her only option was to undergo liver transplantation. To ensure her baby's health, she had delayed her own treatment. Now, she was ready to do whatever was necessary to save her life for Gary and Christina and for the rest of her family.

Fortunately for Lisa, at that time the waiting period for transplantable organs for patients with liver cancer was short. Hence, when Christina was only 10 days old, Lisa received a liver transplant at Baylor. The Baylor liver team surgeon, Dr. Robert Goldstein, performed her transplantation. Her new liver was the gift to the organ bank of a donor-aware person who was rendered brain dead in an accidental and untimely fashion (see Definition).

**Definition**

In 1981, the President's Commission for Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research defined brain death as (1) "the irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions" and (2) "irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem" (in Maddrey MC. Transplantation of the Liver. New York: Elseview, 1988).

Lisa remained free of cancer for >3 years following the restoration of her health by her liver transplantation. During that time, she took care of her own young family and delivered her powerful message on behalf of solid organ and tissue donation. Then a recurrence of the cancer was found on routine follow-up. Throughout her struggle with recurrent cancer, Lisa lost neither her faith nor her mission of organ donor awareness.

In 1995, Lisa died from complications of her cancer.

**BACKGROUND**

Immediately after Lisa's death, her family and friends established The Lisa Landry Childress Foundation in her honor. Her courage and determination were the inspirations that provided their strength to carry on her mission and dedication to organ and tissue donor awareness. The purpose of the foundation is to make possible the opportunity for restored health and happiness for others who are in need of solid organ or tissue transplantation.

The foundation is under the executive direction of Kitty Landry Phillips and is managed within the Baylor Health Care System Foundation. It is dedicated to furthering public awareness of the need for donating all transplantable solid organs (i.e., heart, lung, liver, kidney, pancreas, and small bowel) and tissue (e.g., skin, bone, and blood).

Increases occur every day in the number of patients who are referred to transplant centers for possible candidacy for transplantation because they have solid organ or tissue diseases that are resulting in an end-stage process. This long list includes patients of both sexes and of all ages, ethnic origins, religions, and socioeconomic statuses. These referred patients become transplant candidates if, after extensive clinical and committee evaluations by the members of each transplant team, they meet all requirements for undergoing transplantation. This procedure is their last hope for restored quality and quantity of life.
Transplantation candidates and donors are often spoken of as “the number of people who are waiting” and “the number of people who become donors.” These people, however, are not just numbers or statistics. They are babies, children, and adults who have been medically approved for transplantation, and they are babies, children, and adults who become solid organ or tissue donors. These are people who have personal lives, and these are people who grow and mature and participate in the world around them. They are people who are preschoolers or are in school, and they are people who are involved in business, industry, and professions. They are people who have families, friends, and/or colleagues. In other words, they are we.

It is a given that all of the body's tissue are composed of a collection of similar cells and the intra- and intercellular substances that together perform a particular physiological function. These collections are generally referred to as solid organs or tissue, many of which can be successfully transplanted.

The majority of all solid organ donors are people who have met with certain kinds of accidental death (the aorta must be left intact) \((\text{Table 1})\). They have previously declared personal donorship or have been declared donors by their family members or designated spokespersons when their lives have ended. This benevolence is their last gift. It remains, however, that most patients with failed solid organs who have successfully completed the extensive transplant evaluation and have been “listed” as transplant candidates with the United Network of Organ Sharing will have very long waiting times to become the beneficiaries of perfectly matched donor organ(s) \((\text{Table 2})\).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Absolute requirements for potential donorship</th>
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<td>1. Absence of disease or infection (hepatitis, tuberculosis, AIDS)</td>
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<td>2. Absence of cancer</td>
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<td>3. Absence of history of intravenous drug abuse</td>
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<th>Table 2. Organ donation statistics</th>
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<td>1. 10,000 to 15,000 people have died of brain death.</td>
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<td>2. 5000 actually become donors.</td>
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<td>3. Some 50,000 are waiting. (Albeit, a waiting list is not kept for tissue transplantation, the numbers are the same.)</td>
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<td>4. In 1996, there were 5411 cadaveric donors, with 40,000 waiting.</td>
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Bone marrow transplantation, in which healthy bone marrow is used to replace malignant or defective marrow, is an example of tissue transplantation. Bone marrow is responsible for hematopoiesis. Thus, when hormonal stimulation of stem cells fails and the marrow does not produce the normal amount of blood cells, life is limited. The therapeutic intervention is bone marrow transplantation. As in solid organ candidacy, a patient with bone marrow disease must undergo and successfully complete an evaluation in order to become a candidate for this procedure. Bone marrow transplantation is carried out by infusing the patient with donated autologous tissue or allogeneic perfectly matched, related or unrelated tissue—all from living donors.

THE FOUNDATION

Much research was conducted to determine the principal focus of The Lisa Landry Childress Foundation. Results of the studies showed that the primary way currently available to reduce, and thus help solve, this nation's solid organ and tissue shortage is to encourage family discussions dealing with issues of donor awareness.

To this end and in order to stimulate conversation within families, The Lisa Landry Childress Foundation supports a unique program of solid organ and tissue donor awareness by presenting a
curriculum especially designed for children in elementary school. With the program entitled “Pass it On,” children in this age group study organ and tissue donation and transplantation in their health and science classes. The inquiring minds typical of children of this age allow them to grasp and discuss difficult subjects with unfettered equanimity. Moreover, by couching the subject in the excitement of sports, “Pass It On” is made both meaningful and appealing to them.

“Pass It On” presents a detailed curriculum that is composed of personal presentations by transplant professionals, a videocassette profiling the experience of Lisa Landry Childress and her family, and a teaching manual. It can be separated into 3 individual curricula for short presentations.

FINALLY

As one of its broadly based community outreaches, the Baylor Health Care System Foundation supports The Lisa Landry Childress Foundation and its “Pass It On” program. In this way, these 2 foundations have joined forces to promote organ donation, ergo, to help reduce the preponderance of people waiting—often for very long times—to be transplanted.

Developing various approaches to encouraging communication about donor awareness, as is done at The Lisa Landry Childress Foundation, is the only way of imparting to families and individuals the knowledge of the opportunity to offer the ultimate gift. Lisa Landry Childress both gave and received the ultimate gift.

The ultimate gift is, of course, the gift of life.