

THE CHILDREN WHO WANTED TO KNOW

By Lillian Caesar-Sutherland





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This is a very exciting opportunity to educate children and parents about organ donation. This book serves as a reminder that there are children of all ages who need organ transplants. It is important that we help children learn about organ donation because as you will read, a friend, playmate or classmate may have had an organ transplant or may need a transplant. More importantly, we must make sure that we take special care of our bodies and live a healthy life.

On behalf of National MOTTEP, I extend a special thanks to Lillian Sutherland for her vision to create a story that will educate both parents and children about organ donation. We hope you enjoy and will stay tuned to future books about organ donation.

Patrice V. Miles

Thanks

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By Lillian Caesar-Sutherland

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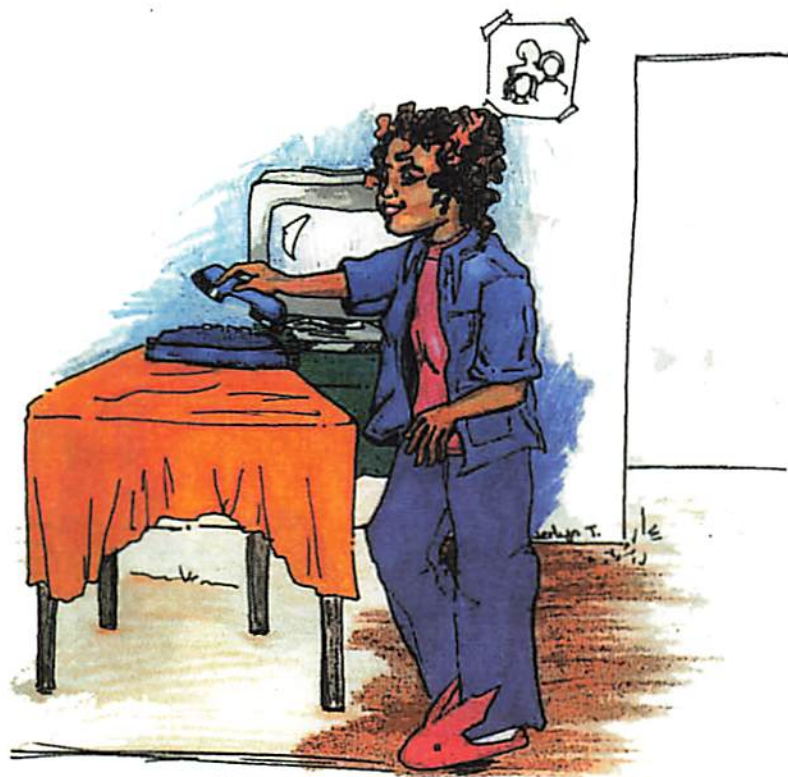
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ISBN 0-9723891-0-5

Jane does not like sleeping. Don't get me wrong; she loves bedtime because that is when she gets Mom or Dad, or if she is lucky both of them, all to herself. Sleeping, she says, makes her miss out on the fun.

One night, even after her mom made her get off the Internet, take off her headset and turn off the CD player, Jane still tried to sneak a telephone call to a friend. Hearing her dad's footsteps quickly changed her mind.



“Mom,” she said, “what did Mr. Brown mean when he said that giving organs saves lives?”

Jane’s mom was angry but she was shocked too. She did not think that an eight-year-old would be interested in talking about organs; besides, Jane had been nodding while Mr. Brown spoke ... as usual.

“You try everything not to go to sleep, but this time it will not work. We will talk in the morning,” her mother scolded as she put out the lights.

Jane squeezed her eyelids together so tightly they hurt. Still, she could hear Mr. Brown’s voice saying over and over, “Giving organs saves lives!” She knew she would not be counting sheep that night.

Io Jane's surprise, in the morning her mom said she was late for work and talking would have to wait. The little girl frowned, making lines in her forehead. She folded her arms and stomped her feet. "Oops!" said Jane to herself while peeping out of the corner of one eye, her hand over her mouth. She was glad her mom had not seen her performance ... or had she? Jane's mom let her act up sometimes but it was always wise to know when to quit.

Monday was the day the kids got to talk about what they had done over the weekend. Their stories were as different as their faces. After what seemed like forever, it was Jane's turn.

"Yesterday Mr. Brown said that giving organs saves lives. I hope they don't give away the organ in our church because, if they do, Dad might never go back there. He loves playing the organ, but he says that the preacher is boring."

Just the thought of it made Jane yawn. Strangely enough, the other kids yawned, too. Someone laughed and so did the others. The children did not notice that Miss Reed, their teacher, was laughing so loudly that tears were rolling off her round cheeks.



“**N**o Jane! That is not what Mr. Brown meant when he said that giving organs saves lives; but when you grow up you will understand.”

“Why do big people think that kids can’t understand stuff? If they would explain we could understand it. And why do grownups hate it when kids ask questions? That’s how we learn.”

To Miss Reed’s surprise the other children started to chant, “We want to know-o! We want to know-o!” They pounded their fists as they sang.

The teacher knew that Mr. Brown was talking about something called “organ donation” but she had not paid as much attention to it as she should have. She did not want the children asking questions she could not answer, so she had the class head for the school library.



The long line the children made looked like a colorful snake. In the library they searched and searched for a book on organ donation. The school's librarian peeped over her glasses at them. "Need help, Miss Reed?" she asked.

"We cannot find a book anywhere on organ donation."

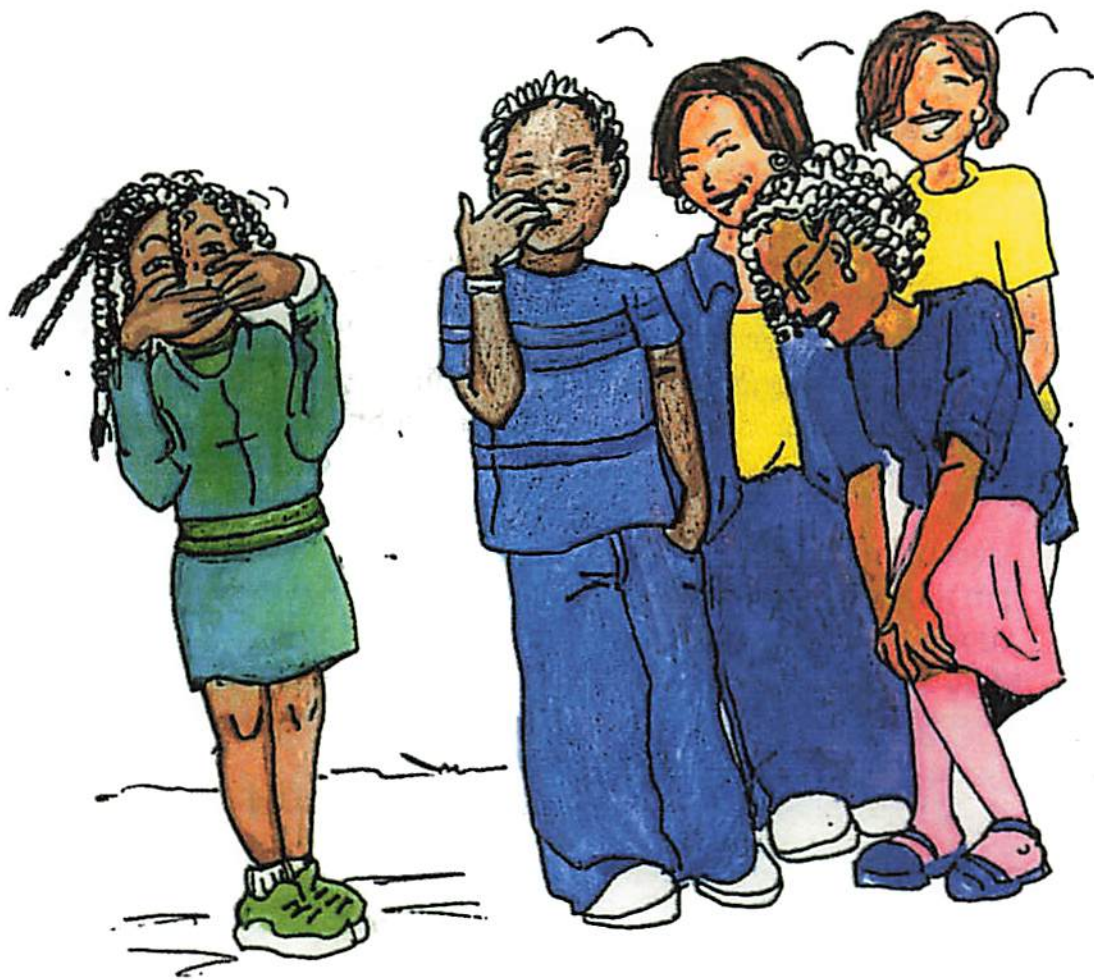
The librarian grinned. “Organ donation? My, how times have changed! When I was their age I was still reading nursery rhymes and fairy tales.”

Miss Reed felt a tug on her arm. It was Melanie. “Teacher,” she said, “I can tell them about organ donation.”

“You, Melanie?” she asked the new girl who seldom spoke unless questioned.

Shyly, Melanie bowed her head then nodded faster and faster. Her pretty beaded braids tickled her nose and made her jump. Melanie did not have a friend in the class; in fact, the kids nicknamed her, “Little Old Lady,” because she was always dressed in long sleeves.

Back in the classroom Melanie stood facing the children, her back propped against the teacher’s desk. Her knees were wobbly.



“I am nine years old. I am small for my age because ...
hmm,” she cleared her throat, “when I was like five my
kidneys stopped working. I was like sick all the time and
I missed school a lot. Its not like I am dumb or anything
but I spent a lot of my time in the hospital so they could
clean up my blood or I would die.”

“Die?” Juan blurted. All the children pressed against their
desks so they would not miss a thing. They had not thought
about kids dying. Grandmas and Grandpas are supposed
to die they thought, but kids? That was so not cool!

Melanie was enjoying being listened to. “We have two
kidneys; one on either side of our back. When our kid-
neys work well they like remove waste, yucky stuff from
our blood and pass it out in our urine; you know, our pee.
That is why we should drink eight glasses of water
everyday.”

“Eight glass goin’ burst me belly, de man! You tink water
taste like ice pop?” Jill complained.

Someone shouted, “What happens when your kidneys
don’t work?” The voice came from the back of the room.

Standing on tippy toes to see the person who had asked the question, Melanie spoke more loudly. “When your kidneys don’t work you can get bloated because of the extra fluids and poisons in your body.”

“Sometimes,” she lowered her voice putting her heels back on the floor, “the poisons in my body made my breath smell bad even after I brushed really hard.” Melanie flashed her teeth and made up and down strokes as if she were really brushing. Her eyes filling with tears, she said, “Kids teased me a lot and hurt my feelings.”

Miss Reed asked the child if she wished to stop. Before Melanie could think about it someone asked yet another question. “How did the hospital clean up your blood if it is inside your body?”

Melanie took a deep breath. It felt like there was a lump in her throat. She closed her eyes and tried to swallow, then slowly rolled up her left sleeve.

Her arm looked like a big wiggly worm lived under her skin. Everyone gasped, then you could hear a pin drop. Now they understood why she wore those clothes.

Melanie told them, “Three times a week they hooked me up to a machine.” She pointed as she said, “like, one needle pulled out the dirty blood and I could see it going around in tubes and stuff. Then, another needle brought back clean blood to my body. They call that hemodialysis. I had to lie there for three hours each time but I did not have a choice even when we were on vacation.”

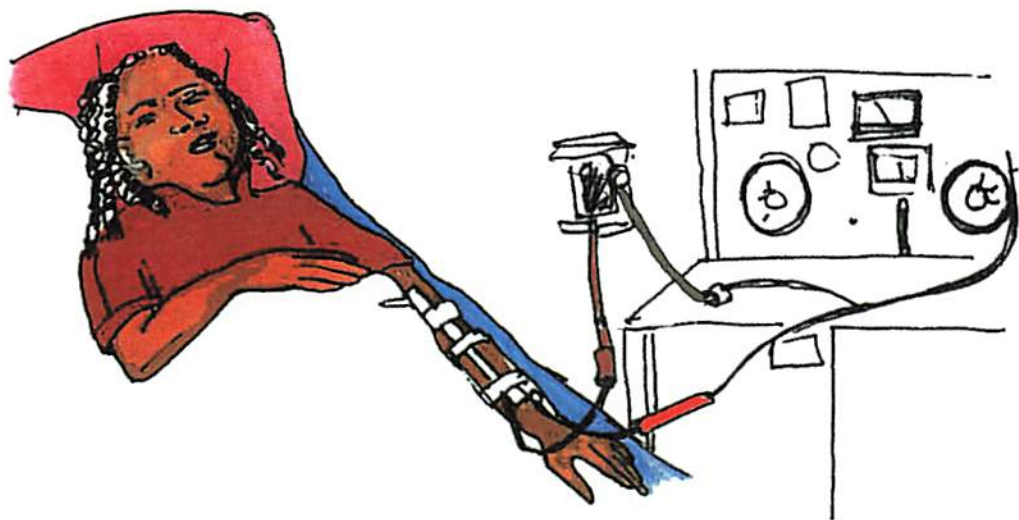
“Me son, I ’fraid of hospital! I would want my mother to do it home,” John confessed.

“At first my mom used to hook up a machine to my belly and it cleaned my blood while I slept. That’s peritoneal dialysis but I got lots of infections.”

Seeing the look on their faces Melanie told the children not to feel badly if they could not remember the big words she used.

“Awesome! Melanie, I think you are really cool.” The children clapped and clapped to show that they agreed. Melanie was very happy that they liked her but, although she felt like laughing, tears were streaming down her face.

Dialysis Unit



A needle draws the impure blood from the body and passes it through tubes to an artificial kidney. Another needle puts the clean blood back into the body.

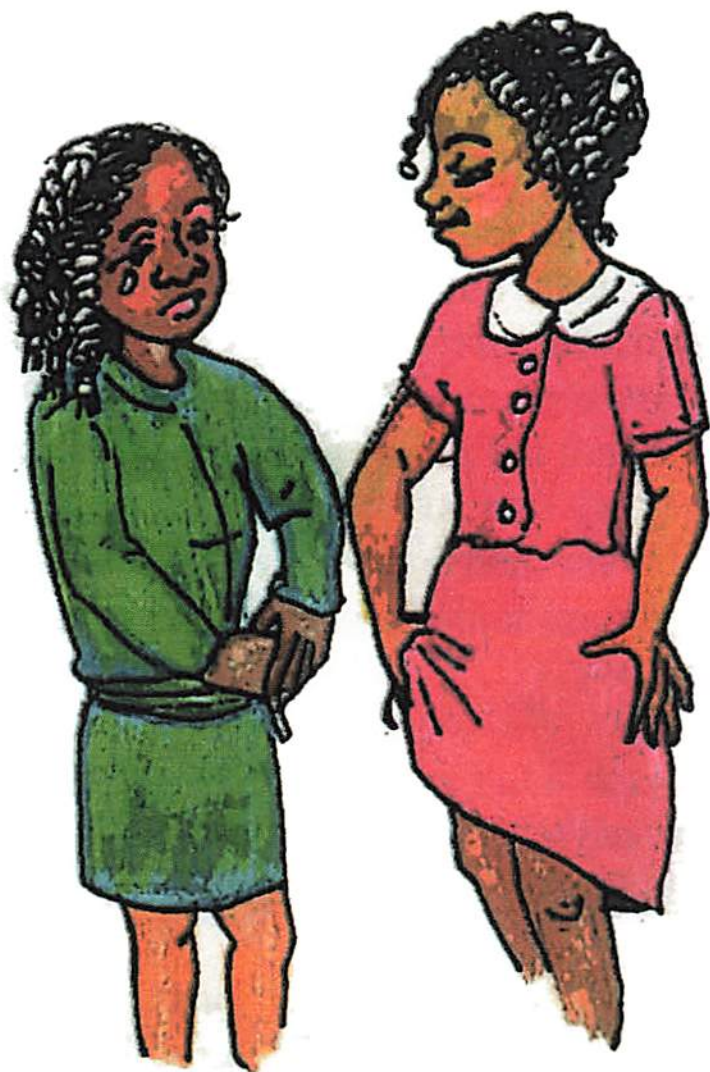
After a while, the blood passing through the needles can make the veins so large that they look like wiggly worms under the skin.

Carol walked up to Melanie and gave her a hug with one hand, pulling tissues from her pocket with the other. Her finger touched something crusty. At the tip of the tissue was a big, fat, ugly booger. Carol was embarrassed. She had planned to flick it on Carlos if he bothered her during recess but that did not seem important now. Carol threw the tissue into the waste paper basket where it belonged in the first place. Then, she pulled up the tip of her new dress and wiped her friend's face, knowing that her mom and dad would understand.

Jane was puzzled. She liked the story but it seemed that Melanie had forgotten the question. Jane asked, "What does this have to do with playing organs to save lives?"

"Not playing organs, Jane. Giving organs!" said Melanie. Kidneys are called organs. That's what that means. Someone gave me a kidney and saved my life. My new kidney is working inside me and I don't even need dialysis anymore."

"Say what? Gave what? Stop goofing off, Melanie," yelled Harold. The others were upset with him.



“Remember Melanie said that we are born with two kidneys?” The children shook their heads, feeling ashamed of their behavior. “Doctors can take one of those kidneys and give it to someone whose kidneys are not working. That’s called organ donation.”

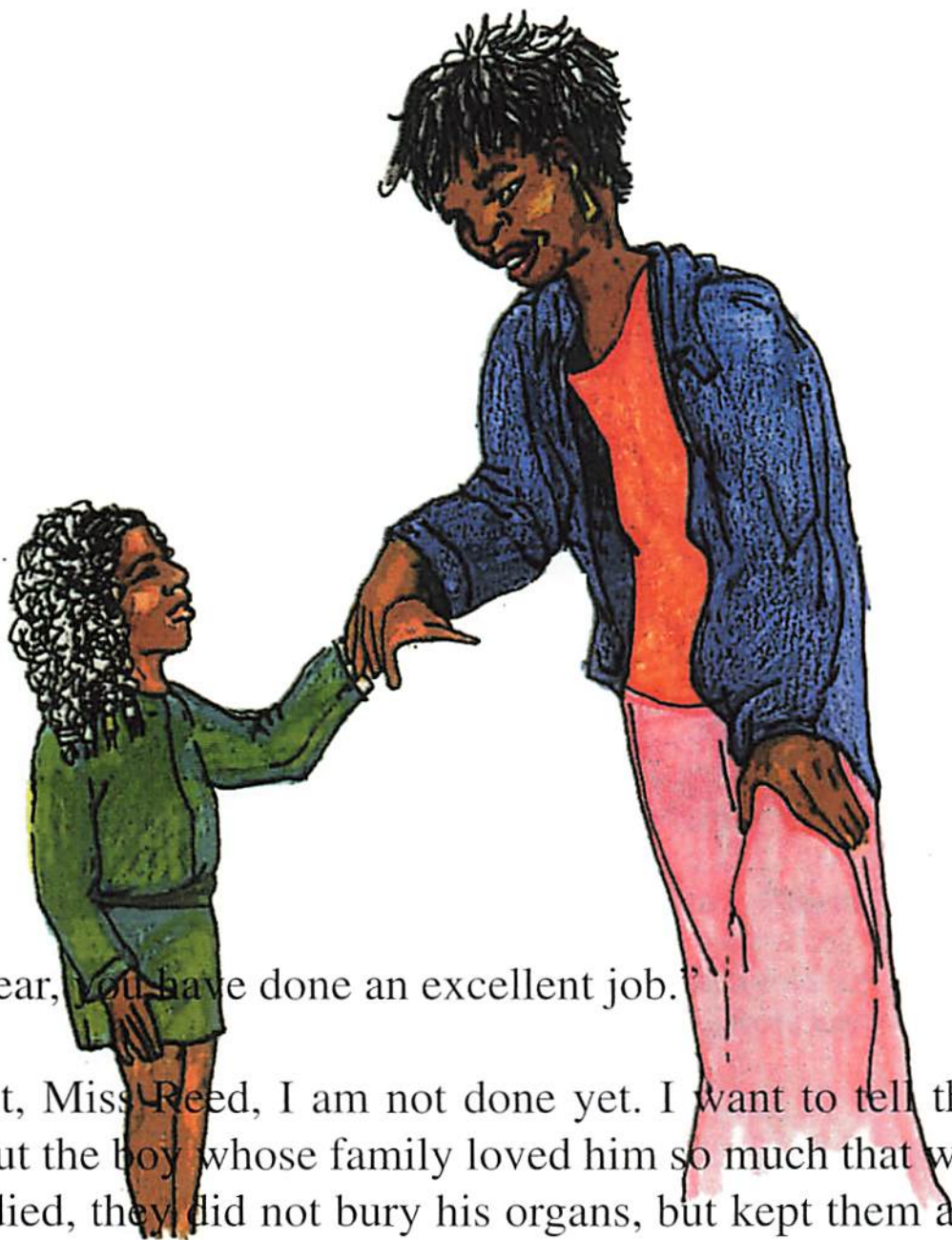
“Sometimes, doctors can even give kidneys and other organs if someone like gets in a car accident and dies,” Melanie said. Everyone wanted her to go on with her story because it is awesome to know stuff like this.

“Melanie,” said Carlos, “how did the doctors put the kidney inside you?”

“*Dios Mio!*” said Juan, not even realizing he sounded like his dad. “Did you get a kidney from someone who is alive? Or ... you know who?”

Melanie took another deep breath but this time it was because she felt important. “Okay, let me tell you the whole story.”

The classroom was totally quiet then, there it was. “Peling, peling, peling,” went the bell. For the first time none of the children was happy to hear it. Melanie tried to keep on talking over the noise but as curious as they all were Miss Reed knew that would be it for the day.



“Dear, you have done an excellent job.”

“But, Miss Reed, I am not done yet. I want to tell them about the boy whose family loved him so much that when he died, they did not bury his organs, but kept them alive instead.”

“Children,” said Miss Reed, “we must go to lunch now.”

“Miss Reed, I want to tell them how his organs are keeping people like me alive. I promise that’s a really good part ... pretty please, with sugar on top,” Melanie begged.

“Sorry kids! I will tell you what,” said the teacher, “if you behave yourselves, I promise that Melanie can tell the rest of her story tomorrow. In fact, I am going to invite a news reporter to the class so other people can learn about organ donation too.”

Miss Reed always knew how to make an offer the children could not refuse. A real news reporter in their classroom? That was going to be neat!

If you want to join the excitement in Jane’s classroom you can go do by reading my second book titled,

“JANE’S CLASS MAKES BIG NEWS!”

The End.

ACTIVITIES

You can do fun activities to teach people about organ/tissue donation.

1. Your class can hand out brochures and donor cards
2. You can plant a tree in honor of all those who gave the gift of life
3. Read this and other stories about organ donation, to others
4. Make and put up posters and billboards about organ donation
5. Have poetry, essay, chanting and poster contests and challenge others to do the same
6. Invite a doctor, nurse, MOTTEP, someone who has had a transplant or who needs one, to come to your class or church to talk about organ donation.
7. Try to eat the right foods such as vegetable and fruits, drink lots of water and remember to exercise. This may help prevent the need for transplantation.

Here are some more information you might like to know when planning activities.

- a. National Donor Day is observed in February, on the Saturday before Valentine's Day.
- b. National Organ/Tissue Donor Awareness Week is observed during the third full week in April.
- c. National Minority Donor Awareness Day is observed August 1.
- d. National Donor Sabbath is observed 2nd weekend in November (Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

About USVI MOTTEP

The United States Virgin Islands Minority Organ/Tissue Transplant Education Program, was started in 1998. Like National MOTTEP based in Washington D.C., and the other fifteen MOTTEP sites across the nation, the local group is trying to increase the number of organ donations made by minorities. This is the first national program especially designed to educate people of color, on facts about organ/tissue transplantation.

MOTTEP is a grass-roots program and finds culturally-creative ways to appeal to its target audience of not just African Americans, but also Hispanic/Latino, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander and Alaskan Native populations.

Call (340)719-7892 or email us at: usvimottep@viaccess.net or sutherland@vitelcom.net

About Organ Donation

Human organs for transplantation usually become available as a result of an accident, which leaves a person brain dead. After doctors have done all they can, the family of the victim is asked if it wishes to donate organs.

If the family agrees to donate, a recovery team takes the organs and a computer determines who receives them. The organs are then taken to different hospitals to be transplanted.

About the Author

Lillian Caesar-Sutherland became interested in organ donation when she met a young mother who was in need of a kidney transplant.



Since 1997, Ms. Caesar-Sutherland has volunteered time and effort to develop the USVI MOTTEP. As the territory's MOTTEP program coordinator, she and a group of other volunteers are partly responsible for the territory's organ donor designee driver's license and promotional signs.

Ms. Caesar-Sutherland is a poet, who was first published in 1972. Since then, she has been published in several anthologies to include the National Library of Poetry's, "Songs on the Wind," and "Best Poems of the Decade." Her book of poetry, "The Unrelenting Power of Words," was published in 1995.

The author is married to Leroy Sutherland and they are the parents of Candi and Theo.

About the Illustrator



Jerlyn Mervinia Thomas, daughter of Joseph and Jennifer Thomas, attends the St. Croix Educational Complex where she is currently a junior in the Science-Math Magnet Program. Aspiring to become a Graphic or Commercial Artist, Jerlyn's free time is spent developing websites and programming which she constructs on <http://www.jadersworld.com>.

To the Parents

What a beautiful story that touched my heart to the core. It is a story for children and for adults. A story of ignorance and intolerant behavior overcome by knowledge and information.

What a testimony to the story telling gift that God has given to Lillian Caesar-Sutherland. She paints the picture so clearly that I at 65, could still love it, and be moved to tears. It is remarkable for its simplicity, and yet it is a moving story of how the "Gift of Giving" can make so much of a difference for all mankind young and old!

As a transplant surgeon, a father of three and grandfather of one, I highly recommend it as a book which broadens the horizons of the mind.

Dr. Clive O. Callender, M.D., F.A.C.S.
LaSalle D. Leffall, Jr. Professor of Surgery
Chairman, Department of Surgery
Director, Transplant Center,
Howard University Hospital.
Founder and Principal Investigator, MOTTEP



Photograph by Jeffrey John Fearing

In 1991, Dr. Clive Callendar founded the National Minority Organ/Tissue Transplant Education Program to educate people of color about the need for organ/tissue donation.

There are now 16 MOTTEP sites; MOTTEP of Albuquerque, Anchorage, Atlanta, Birmingham, Brooklyn, Chicago, Cleveland, D.C., Detroit, Honolulu, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Nashville, Richmond, and USVI MOTTEP

Printing made possible by the National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities.
ISBN 0-9723891-0-5