

Jesse's Gift

An Organ Donation Story



written by Shea Lyn Short, CCLS
illustrated by Brittany M Collins

©2012, Shea Lyn Short

Before last year, I had a brother.



My brother was Jesse and
we played together a lot.



Jesse always had toys that I wanted to play with. Sometimes he would let me play cars with him, and sometimes he would let me use the red racecar, even though it was his favorite. Whenever he did that, Mom said he was being **'generous.'**

When Jesse grew taller, Mom would move his old clothes to my closet. Mom said that he couldn't use them anymore. But they were still good clothes, especially the shirt with the red racecar on it. That was my favorite shirt to wear, even though it used to be Jesse's.



Mom said that being 'generous' means that Jesse wanted to share his toys with me, even his favorite ones. And he didn't even mind me wearing his favorite shirt, once he'd outgrown it.

One day, something terrible happened.

Dad told me there had been an accident. But it wasn't the kind of accident where you scrape your knee or spill your juice. It was an accident that made Jesse's body stop working. He couldn't talk anymore, or walk or even breathe on his own. This accident made Jesse's brain stop working. And when your brain doesn't work, it can't tell your heart to beat, or your lungs to breathe, or your body to move. You can't think any thoughts, or feel any feelings anymore. Nobody plans for an accident to happen. Nobody knows that an accident will happen. That's what makes it an accident. This accident made Jesse's brain die.



I went to visit Jesse in the hospital. Jesse didn't open his eyes or squeeze my hand when I squeezed. There were machines that beeped and puffed. Everyone was quiet and sad.



The doctors and nurses moved around the room a lot and put medicines into the tubes that were attached to Jesse. I asked my mom, "Will the medicines make Jesse better?"

My mom cried. She told me, “The medicine will not make Jesse better. Jesse’s brain has stopped working. His brain was the part of him that thinks and feels and wants to play. The part of Jesse that we love and the part of him that loves us is not alive anymore.”



But I could see his heartbeat making a bumpy line on a screen in the hospital room. Jesse’s hands were warm when I touched them. “Doesn’t that mean that he’s still alive?” I asked.

“No,” my Dad said, “The hospital has machines that help some parts of Jesse’s body to keep working for a short time, even after he has died.”



“The part of Jesse that we love, the thinking part, the feeling part, has already died. We can still think about Jesse, and remember all of the fun things we did together. We can still talk to him in our minds or even out loud. We can write down the things we want to tell him, and think of how it felt to have him close to us. But the body part of Jesse cannot stay with us anymore.”

I felt so angry! I was mad! I wanted
Jesse to stay and play with me! I
don't like everyone feeling sad and
crying! It is not fair for your brother
to die!



I also felt sad. I wanted to cry a lot. My parents cried so much, and even the nurses were so serious. Nobody smiled, and I don't like places where nobody is smiling.



Then I thought about the accident. What if I made this happen because I got mad at Jesse if he didn't let me play with his red racecar?



Lori, the child life specialist at the hospital let me play in her playroom. She had racecars, too. When we drove them around the track, I smashed the red racecar into the table. “Crash!” I yelled. “I don’t want the red racecar anymore!”

“Wanting Jesse’s toys didn’t make this accident happen,” Lori told me. “In fact, nothing bad or good that you thought or did could have made this accident happen or not happen. No one wants an accident to happen. It’s not your fault that Jesse died.”



I asked, “Why do people keep saying ‘died’ if Jesse is still breathing?”

Then Lori told me, “Even though Jesse’s brain has died, other parts of his body can still work in other people’s bodies. The machines keep his heart beating and his lungs breathing so that someone else, whose heart or lungs aren’t working so well anymore, can get a **transplant.**”

“Every person’s body has special parts called **organs** that are made to do an important job. Your lungs are an organ that helps you to breathe. Your heart is an organ that helps move your blood around your body. You have other organs, too, like kidneys and a liver.”



“When someone’s brain dies, these organs can’t live in their body anymore. A transplant is when we move those organs into someone’s body who needs them, and whose brain can keep them working.”

“Jesse can’t play anymore, but his heart can work in another boy’s body to help that boy to play. His lungs can help a different boy or girl to breathe well enough to play ball again, even though their lungs have stopped working. Jesse’s body still has kidneys and a liver that could help another boy or girl to feel healthy and go to school and play.”



I wanted the parts of Jesse's body to help Jesse feel healthy. But his brain couldn't tell them to work and couldn't tell his body to play. I thought about Jesse's favorite shirt.

When he couldn't use it anymore, he wanted me to have it so I could use it. And I loved it more than any other shirt I wore.

Now, Jesse couldn't use his heart, or lungs, or kidneys. But some other boy or girl needed them. And I think Jesse would want them to have those parts. He couldn't use them anymore.



My Mom and Dad and I said “Goodbye” to Jesse and gave him hugs and kisses. The doctors and nurses were taking him to have an operation where they would move his organs to other children’s bodies. It wasn’t going to hurt Jesse at all. We cried a lot because we were going to miss Jesse so much.



When we came home, things were different.

For one thing, I could play with any color racecar I wanted.

I could pick the TV shows we were going to watch.

But I really missed Jesse.

Some days it seemed too quiet.

Some days it seemed too sad.



One day, a letter came.

The letter told us that a twelve-year-old boy had received Jesse's heart. It started to beat inside his body, and now he was feeling well enough to walk laps around his hospital unit. He hoped to be able to play soccer again soon.

The letter also told us that Jesse's lungs had been transplanted, or moved, into a ten-year-old girl's chest. I thought it was funny that Jesse's lungs belonged to a girl now, but she can use them to breathe better so she can go to school, and maybe she can play volleyball like she used to.

Another little boy got to have Jesse's kidneys.



I think my mom was right about my brother being generous. I think he would want other kids to have the organs he couldn't use anymore.

I still miss Jesse a lot. I feel sad that he died. But I can be glad that Jesse's organs are helping other kids have a chance to be alive.

I hope when that little boy who has Jesse's kidneys feels better he will want to play racecars.

And if I ever get to meet him, I will let him use the red racecar.



Generous: This word means someone wants to share and help other people when they can.

Organ: A part of the body that works to do a special job. Your heart, lungs and kidneys are a few of your organs.

Transplant: Moving an organ or part from one person's body to another person's body.