

# EVERYDAY HEROES

## THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON LIVING

**Tiffany Culy urges teens to become organ donors.**

When she started feeling sick to her stomach in March 1997, Tiffany Culy figured it was the flu. But a few days later, the Saline, Mich., teen woke up with yellow eyes and yellow skin and an “unbelievable pain” in her belly. Rushed to a hospital, she began slipping into a coma.

Tiffany had Wilson’s disease, which was destroying her liver. Doctors said she would die without an immediate liver transplant.

After reviewing four possible organ donations, surgeons were able to find a liver that would work for her. Tiffany spent three months in the hospital. Now 19 and a freshman at Hope College in Holland, Mich., Tiffany is so healthy that she competed in two swimming events at the 1998 Transplant Games. She also has become a crusader for organ donations.

“Over 61,000 Americans are waiting for a lifesaving organ transplant,” Tiffany says. And an average of 12 Americans die each day waiting for a new liver, heart, kidney or other organ, according to the nonprofit Coalition for Donation.

Tiffany gives talks at schools and for youth groups, telling kids that needing an organ can happen to anyone. “It took me totally by surprise,” she says.

Tiffany tries to dispel myths about organ donation. For example, she says celebrities are not put at the top of the list for donations. “And there is no black market for stolen organs.”

Tiffany says she got a liver because “I was basically healthy and my chances for survival were good.” When deciding who gets an organ, the coalition says it does not take into account race, gender, age, income or celebrity.

Becoming a donor is simple, Tiffany says. “All you really have to do is tell your next of kin, because that’s who will be asked at the time of death. You can also sign up when you get your driver’s license.”

And you shouldn’t wait. “Even though you’re a teen, you’re not invincible,” she says. “Talk to your family. Tell them you want to save someone’s life.”

**—Nancy Vittorini**

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