

**O**n July 6, 1998, Barbara Buckalew's 31-year-old son, Christopher Boehm, collapsed while at work. A co-worker immediately began CPR.

He was transported to the hospital but they were not able to revive him. He had died instantly from a congenital brain aneurysm.

Barbara and her family immediately agreed that Chris' organs and tissue should be donated in order to save others. "He was so young and healthy, it would have been a terrible waste not to donate," said Barbara.

"I received a letter from the Organ Procurement Office in Philadelphia, where Chris lived, telling me that five adults received his organs and 50 to 100 people would be helped from his tissue." The Eye Bank also wrote to her, telling her that four people had regained their sight as a result of Chris' gifts. "That gave me a lot of comfort," she said.

To work through her grief, Barbara sent letters to the organ recipients, telling them about the young man who was their donor.

Two months later, the wife of Chris' heart recipient wrote that Mike, who was 48, had waited for many months, on a respirator, for this life-saving gift. "She said he would write when he was feeling better. I heard from two other recipients who were both feeling great. One commented, 'A second life is the most wonderful gift,'" Barbara said.

"Sixteen months after his transplant, I received a letter from Mike. He wrote that nine hearts had become available over many months but none could be used until Chris' heart – and it was a perfect match."

Eventually, she met Chris' heart recipient. "His daughter was getting married and I went to her wedding," she said. "I put my ear against Mike's chest and heard his heart beating." She was thrilled to be able to watch as Mike walked his daughter down the aisle.

Barbara said that her son Chris was a warm and caring person, noting that in his early twenties, he had been invited to enter a fundraising contest called "Bid for Bachelors."

In preparing his bio, he was asked many questions about himself, ending with, "What would you like to be remembered for?" Chris' response was: A good person with a kind heart.

"We knew that Chris had entered this event but didn't see anything about it until after he died, and we were looking through his belongings," Barbara said.

"We were so impressed by that mature statement, we had it engraved on his headstone, and I included it in the quilt square that I made in his memory, along with the words: "His Spirit Lives On In Those He Saved."

In the years since she lost Chris, Barbara has been an active volunteer at LifeChoice, serving at many family donor events and organ donor awareness activities, and sitting on the Donor Family Advisory Board. For her, it's a way of spreading the word about the importance of registering as a donor, connecting with other donor families and recipients, and honoring the memory of her beloved son.

She and a young female organ recipient often travel to speak to students at driving schools about their experiences. "Almost 100 percent of the kids have signed up," she said.