

NEW YORK POST

# Organ donation can save lives — but donors are scarce

By [Andrea Peyser](#)

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As my beloved friend Barbara Bahny lay mortally ill, those closest to her waited for a miracle.

“It’s a very strange feeling, praying for someone to die so a loved one can live,” our dear pal, Richard Zimmerman, told me.

Barbara had recently moved back to New York City after living in Washington, DC, for her dream job in public relations, before falling gravely sick. The many who adored her gathered at her hospital bedside, hoping, amid overwhelming pangs of guilt, that another person’s devastating break would spell lasting life for her.

It didn’t happen.

My friend, whom I’d met in junior high school in Queens, who shared my love of this country and of Israel, of foreign travel, pop culture and nights on the town, died in December 2015 of complications related to sarcoidosis while at the top of the list for a lung transplant that never came. She was 56 years old.

Yet despite unfathomable grief, I have hope that Barbara’s story might help save lives. It demonstrates that organ donors are desperately needed, particularly in New York state, where the rate of donorship is at rock bottom.

And I’m inspired by the heartbreaking story of a mother in Oklahoma, Keri Young, who made the decision to carry her unborn baby to term — a tiny girl who is destined to die shortly after birth — so her organs and tissues might be donated. This courageous gesture is a boon to medical research and it stands

to save the lives of children who otherwise might not survive. For one couple, it stands to give meaning to their daughter's life, however brief.

The mom and her husband, ESPN.com writer Royce Young, have named the little girl they'll likely be able to hold in their arms for a few days, at most, Eva.

"Somehow through full body ugly crying, Keri looked up and asked, 'If I carry her full term, can we donate her organs?'" [Royce Young posted to Facebook Feb. 17](#) about his wife of eight years. The couple, who also have a son named Harrison, learned at the mom's 19-week ultrasound that their daughter, expected to be born May 7, is afflicted with anencephaly — parts of her brain and skull are missing.

Keri Young [posted to Facebook in December](#) that she talked with her doctor and her pastor and came to the conclusion that organ donation was best for her and her family. With Eva's help, up to 50 little ones' lives could be saved in as little as 24 hours.

The good news is that organ donorship has been on the upswing in the United States since 2010. There were 9,079 deceased donors that year compared to 9,971 in 2016, for a record number of transplants totaling more than 33,600, as each donor can provide multiple organs, according to Joel Newman, assistant director of communications for United Network for Organ Sharing. In addition, live donors can provide a kidney or part of a liver to those in need.

But the picture is bleaker in New York. Because of religious or cultural objections — or the ludicrous, Monty Python-esque fear that someone could snatch an organ before one is done using it — New York is last or near last of the states in donorship rates among the adult population, with New York City-dwellers especially pulling the number down, according to Dr. Errol Gordon, a neurologist and co-chairman of The Mount Sinai Hospital Donor Council in Manhattan.

"Some people just want to be buried whole," he told me. "Some are paranoid."

Last year, transplants were performed from 11 deceased donors at Mount Sinai. The need is exponentially greater.

Donating a relative's organs "makes a tragedy a little bit better," said Dr. Gordon. "Part of your loved one is living on. It provides some sort of closure and meaning to the family. A lot of people's lives will improve dramatically because of it. Organ donors are heroes."

Zimmerman, 58, became an organ donor after his mother died in 2003. "She was gone," he said. "I loved what was inside of her. That will never leave me. When I'm gone, I hope my physical self will do some good."

He registered as an organ donor when he renewed his California driver license. (I confess I have yet to sign up.)

He can't save Barbara. But in her honor, he might one day give any number of people the gift of life. That's worth everything.