Writing a Thank You Letter to Donor Family

July 8, 2015 By Karen Hoyt

Karen Hoyt is a blogger who has a story about hepatitis C, cirrhosis, end-stage liver disease, liver cancer, and liver transplantation. This excerpt first appeared on Karen's I Help C blog, June 16, 2015.

The first few weeks after my transplant, I was thinking of my donor and his family constantly. Maybe it is because the life they were living was a sharp contrast to mine. **I was happy to be alive; they were dealing with loss**. I found myself writing a thank you letter to donor family within 2 weeks. As an English teacher, I thought it would be easy. Wrong. My inner critic found fault with every draft. I knew that if it was that difficult for me, it might be hard for others too. If you are looking at how to express your gratitude in a letter, I hope this is useful for you.

It may be easiest to just do what I call a "free writing" letter to get started. Just pour your heart out and don't edit anything. That is what I did. **No stumbling over spelling.** No punctuation pickiness. No writing worries at all. Just say what you need to say in the way only YOU can say it. You may want to hand write it or it may seem easier to type onto a computer. Either way, you can go back and clean it up later.

I like to start by introducing myself. Then I tell the purpose of the letter. Closing with words for them to think about is a way to sooth their hearts. In this one, I kind of apologized for my messy emotions and lack of words. This is a deeply personal topic and it is NOT easy to write about. Let your donor family know that if you want to. Even though you do not know them, you have a connection with them that will last for the rest of your lives. Just be who you are and they will see that in your words.

If you feel sadness for the family, let them know. They will appreciate the fact that although you are rejoicing that your life was saved, you are grieving with them. You can empathize with them while thanking them for what they have given you. Even though you no longer have liver disease, you have lived with it for a long time. You have had your grieving time as well.

In talking with friends who have not written a letter, I asked what held them back. Most said they didn't know what to say or did not want to say the wrong thing. Others said it was so emotional, that every time they started the letter, they got a heaviness. Some were ashamed of their penmanship or spelling. As a teacher, I have experience in helping students get over a writing hurdle.

I am going to give you a few example paragraphs to help you get started on your letter. You can change this up to fit your situation. Take parts of it and make it your own. Maybe this will just get your thoughts flowing and your letter will look totally different than this one. **I trust that you will not just copy it word for word.** Fill in the parenthesis with your own words as you weave your story.

Dear Family…

To read Karen's example and the rest of her blog "Writing a Thank You Letter to Donor Family," click here.

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