April Is Donate Life Month. To all the families that have donated loved ones organs, eyes and tissues I would like to thank you for your wonderful gift of life. Your gift has saved the lives of others.

My name is Terri Garner. I was diagnosed diabetic at age of 11, in 1971. I was what my doctor called a “good patient”. I followed all his rules and did what I was told. Unfortunately, in the 70s and early 80s care for diabetics wasn’t as advanced as it is today. I started having complications in the late 1980s. By the mid 1990s I was told I would need a kidney transplant.

Because of medical advances I was eligible for a kidney and pancreas transplant. Still a bit new and twice the risk of just a kidney transplant. However if successful, no more diabetes, no more shots, no more finger pokes to find out my sugar levels. On June 18, 1998 thanks to Carol Zappala’s saying yes to donate her daughter Debbie’s organs I received a kidney and pancreas transplant. I can’t tell you how great it is to still be alive after being told by doctors that I would never see the age of 40.

Something I wanted to do but knew I might never get the chance was to meet my donor’s family, hug and personally thank the person that gave me my gift of life. Meeting Carol and her family for the first time was emotional. It turned out to be the beginning of a new friendship, not only for me, but also for my family. Carol has shared stories about Debbie and pictures of Debbie. One of which I made into an 8 X 10 and keep on my desk at work.

I am alive today because of Carol’s YES to organ donation. If you ask Carol, she will tell you that it was “just the right thing to do”. She didn’t want other families to go through what she did by loosing her daughter.

Carol and I have teamed up to educate high school kids about Organ, Eye and Tissue donation, giving the students both sides of the story. I am always so proud to introduce Carol after sharing my story not only as a friend, but also as Debbie’s mom. What an impression that makes on the teachers for the first time and the students.

Today, in the United States over 97,000 people of all ages, colors shapes and sizes are waiting for the gift of life. Unfortunately, not everyone is as lucky as I was. Because not enough people say YES to organ donation about 19 people die every day waiting for that life saving gift. You can check the current statistics by visiting www.UNOS.org

Please consider registering to be an Organ, Eye and Tissue donor. You can go to www.donatelife.net to find out how to be an Organ Eye and Tissue Donor in your state.

You have the power to donate life.